

THE TIMELESS NATION

Zoltán Bodolai

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THE HISTORY, LITERATURE, MUSIC, ART AND
FOLKLORE OF
THE HUNGARIAN NATION

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FOREWORD
TO THE THIRD EDITION

In writing this book I wished to offer a comprehensive but readable guide to the average English-speaking reader (whether of Hungarian descent or not), to rectify the worst misconceptions concerning the Hungarians and to provide basic information not generally found in popular textbooks.

The limitations of space and time made it necessary to select only the most relevant and illustrative facets of Hungarian culture, to simplify the historical summary and to generalise conclusions to a considerable degree. It has also been impracticable to discuss the events and cultural developments of the last three decades, as such a study would have required historical perspective, free access to information and unemotional objectivity — facilities not yet at the command of today's historians.

The thirty descriptive chapters are arranged, for easier readability, in groups corresponding to certain definable historical periods with the history, literature and art of the period discussed in successive chapters, interspersed with further chapters describing the main regions of the Carpathian Basin, the folklore, folk art and character of the people and the achievements of the Hungarians abroad. Reference numbers direct the reader to notes, documentation or English translations in the Appendix at the end of the book.

I owe the magic gifts of childhood and learning to Hungary which I left at the commencement of my working life. This imperfect work represents my modest tribute to the country of my birth and my thanks to my "Timeless Nation" — the Hungarian people.

Zoltán Bodolai
Sydney, Australia.

FOREWORD TO THE FIFTH EDITION

Twelve years after the first edition I was requested by the Transylvanian Association of Canberra to contribute, with a new edition of this book, to the dissemination of accurate information about the peoples of historic Hungary, which includes Transylvania, in view of the cultural genocide which has been carried out there by the successive Rumanian governments against the autochthonous Hungarian minority.

I gladly agreed to this request. I also wish to attract the reader's attention to one of the fundamental traits of the Hungarian character: their humanism. The reader will not fail to note, by studying closely chapter 2 and the chapters on history, (especially 22 and 26) this humanistic tradition, the Hungarians' welcoming hospitality toward foreign refugees and immigrants. These chapters offer proof and documentation to show that during the thousand years of Christian Hungary millions of refugees and immigrants were welcomed (often invited) to the Hungarian kingdom and that their national, religious and ethnic identity remained preserved and protected under Hungarian rule.

This "Magyar humanism", little known beyond Hungary, (Hungarians are the world's worst propagandists) brings out in strong relief the brutal oppression of the Hungarians in Transylvania—for over a thousand years part of the Hungarian state, now under Rumanian rule.

The reader will find it interesting to peruse in this book the references to Transylvania and the adjoining regions, similarly under Rumanian rule at present, especially in chapter 14 ("The Other Hungary", i.e. Transylvania).

There is no better response to the hate-campaign of the oppressors than the immortal words of Saint Stephen, Hungary's first Christian king who wrote in his "Admonitions" to his son and heir, Saint Imre (Emery): "Remember, that all men are of equal state..." (this was written in the 11th, not 18th century!) "Welcome and honour immigrants" ("advenae" in Latin) "to your country, for the kingdom which only possesses one language and custom is weak and fragile...I therefore instruct you, my son that you should provide for them" (i.e. guests and immigrants) "nourishing them benevolently and granting them maintenance..."

These kind, wise words have been incorporated in Hungary's national legal Code (Corpus Iuris Hungarici). They embody the ideal of Hungarian humanism, in modern parlance "multiculturalism".

Zoltán Bodolai
Sydney, Australia

THE UNSUNG SAGA

The Great Pyramid had already been ruling the desert for a thousand years and Tammuz, the lover of Inanna, had already become a legend among the Sumerian god-kings of Kish, but the treacherous beauty of Helen had not yet launched a thousand angry ships when somewhere in the immense steppes on the borderland of Europe and Asia an unknown, unsung people set out in search of a warmer, richer, freer homeland.

Their millenia-long search brought them into contact with many races: some related, some strange, some aggressive, some peaceful. The wanderers seemed to possess a strange magic affecting friend and foe alike. Neither their conquerors, nor their subjects or allies could resist this mysterious attraction: one after the other they joined them. After centuries of this expanding progress the united tribes created a large, multi-racial but viable and dynamic nation which, eventually, found the long-sought haven in the Carpathian basin. There they settled and have fought, dreamt and lived for over thirteen centuries.

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“ . . . The enchanted stag lured Nimrod's two sons, Hunor and Magor, and their two hundred companions for seven days and seven nights, through treacherous swamps and bottomless marshes, until, at the end of the seventh day, they reached a land of exceeding beauty, a land of rich, velvety meadows, sparkling brooks and beautiful forests, abundant in fish and teeming with game . . . Here the white stag leaped into a pond and disappeared forever . . . ”

"The two brothers and their men pitched camp near the pond and fell asleep. In the middle of the night they were awakened suddenly by the sound of heavenly music. The full moon shone in the sky. Cautiously following the sounds through a small grove of willow trees, the two brothers suddenly beheld a scene so beautiful that, for a moment or two, their very hearts stopped beating. On the shore of the little pond, on the exact spot where the white stag had disappeared, clad only in the silvery moonlight, the two beautiful daughters of King Dul were dancing, surrounded by two hundred maidens."

"In one second the two brothers fell in love with the two lovely princesses and took them for their wives. The two hundred warriors married the two hundred maidens and they all settled on the new land."

"Thus the descendants of Hunor and his men became known as the Huns in years to come, while the descendants of Magor and his men were destined to be called Magyars."¹

So ends the popular legend explaining the origins of the Hungarians or Magyars. There is, of course, no historic truth in it but it gives a poetic reason for their millenia-long quest for a new homeland. It also tells us a few things about the ancestors of the Hungarians: that they were strictly monogamous, that they were good mathematicians, (just observe the equation: 202 warriors = 202 maidens), that they were interested in music, dancing and spectator sports, that hunting was one of their favourite sports and that they have probably invented the "stag party" . . . Apart from this, it is a truly incredible story.

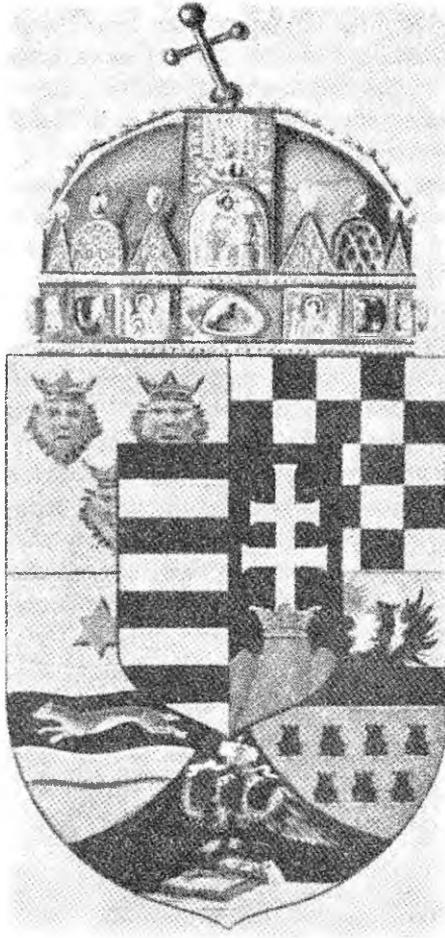
The reader of this book will soon find, however, that Hungarian history — documented, true history — is full of incredible happenings. He will learn of archbishops leading cavalry charges, of a Palatine (Prime Minister) dressing in his king's armour to attract the enemy's charge, thus saving the king at the cost of his own life. He will read about a Catholic Prime Minister committing suicide in order to call the world's attention to his country's tragedy. And he will read of a Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, the richest man in Hungary, who once led a rag-tag army of peasants fighting for his country's independence from the same Empire.

The reader will also notice an incredible medley of conservative thought and progressive ideas, of astuteness and naivety.

Witches were declared "non-existent" 700 years before Salem and the Hungarians had democratic Parliaments "before they had chairs to sit on" (the members attended on horseback), 1000 years before the French Revolution. On the other hand, Latin was still the official language of legislation in the middle of the XIXth century. Hungary had book-printing three years before England and a university twenty years before Germany — and yet some of the great national leaders could scarcely speak Hungarian because they had been educated abroad. One of the greatest military disasters of Hungarian history was prompted, to a great extent, by the Hungarians' decision not to attack the Turks (who outnumbered them ten to one) as they laboriously dragged their cannons through swampy terrain. Only when Suleiman the Magnificent had properly deployed his immense army did the Hungarians attack. They were destroyed — mainly by the Turkish cannon-fire. On another, more peaceful occasion, the Hungarian nobles offered their "life and blood" to an attractive Habsburg queen who addressed their Parliament with tears in her eyes, a baby on her arms, equipped with wily feminine psychology and considerable acting talent. Though she represented the dynasty which, only a generation before, had tried its worst to destroy the Hungarians, on that occasion she did look like the Holy Virgin with Jesus — right out of the national flag of Hungary. Needless to say, the resemblance was entirely intentional . . .

The reader may well ask, how the Hungarians endured as a people during their long centuries of struggle. This book suggests one answer: they are mankind's most durable artists of survival.





The Hungarian Coat of Arms

I. THE MILLENIAL QUEST

The origins and migrations of the Hungarians

The mystery of the origins of the Hungarians has been a question debated since the first appearance of the warlike nation in Central Europe. Hungarian linguists have indicated the cold, northern regions of what is Russia today as their possible birth-place. Hostile opinion of the IXth-century Europe suggested a much hotter place of origin (and wished them back there). Other Hungarians have proposed more imaginative theories, claiming descent from such widely different races as the Etruscans, Romans, Atlanteans, Mayas, Incas and dwellers of Mu (wherever that was).

During the study of this question, we shall refer to the ancestors of modern Hungarians as "Proto-Hungarians", that is the Hungarian or Magyar people before their settlement in the Carpathian basin. The following summary represents the consensus of most serious historians concerning the origins and prehistory of these Proto-Hungarians. The opinions of various researchers differ in certain details, but for our purposes, it should be sufficient to present the general picture without the debatable details, which would seem irrelevant to the non-Hungarian reader anyhow.

1. The language

The Proto-Hungarians were at least bi-lingual. Some of them spoke a Finno-Ugrian type of language, others a West-Turkic (Turanian or Onogur) tongue and some others probably an Iranian-Mesopotamian type of language. Gradually a new, composite language evolved, based on the grammatical structure of

the Finno-Ugrian component, a logical, simple, agglutinating tongue. It retained the simplest basic words of that language, with the Turkic-Onogur and the Mesopotamian-Iranian elements enriching its vocabulary.

The name the Hungarians apply to themselves, "Magyar", derives from the Ugrian "Mansi- or "Magy-" with the addition of the Turkic "-eri", forming "Megyeri" – "Magyeri" – "Magyar", which became the name of the largest tribe. Both particles mean "men". The name given to them by the western historians, "Hungarian" (Latin: "Hungarus"), is a variation of the name "Hun-Ogur" – "Onogur" – "Hungur" used since the fifth century by foreign chroniclers, a reminder of their association with Turkic-Onogur-Hun peoples.

2. Racial composition

Anthropometric measurements carried out on skeletons from the settlement period indicate a racially composite people. The main components were the Turanoid (Turkic-Onogur), the East-Baltic (Finno-Ugrian), the Uralian or Ugrian (the eastern branch of the Finno-Ugrian) with substantial components of Caucasian. Anatolian, Nordoid, Dinarian, Mediterranean and Alpine racial types.

3. Ethnogenesis

This linguistically and racially composite nation has obviously evolved from the successive amalgamations of clans, tribes and groups of various racial and geographical origins. The Proto-Hungarian people were made up of some *nordic* tribes of Ugrian origin who came from the Volga-Kama-Ural region and of a (probably larger) *eastern* component of Turkic-Onogur (Turanian) people who came from the Caspian region. These Turkic elements included Scythian, Hunnic and Avar types as well, and later some Khazars. To these came the third, *southern* segment, the Caucasian (Sabir, Alanian) and Iranian-Mesopotamian elements.

It has been proven that all these races, cultures and languages contributed to the formation of the Magyar or Hungarian people and from their amalgamations arose during the first centuries of the Christian era a remarkably colourful, complex and viable nation, not unlike today's evolving nations, the Australians or the Americans. The latent dynamism of this young

people urged them to move on in search of a safer, more suitable homeland. These migrations lasted many centuries.

4. **The chronology of the migrations** constitutes the most debated field of Hungarian prehistory. The general consensus is the following:

(a) *IIIrd and IIrd millenia B.C.* The Ugrians leave the Finno-Ugrian conglomeration in the north of (modern) Russia. The largest group of the Ugrians, later to be called "Magyars", detaches itself from the other tribes and begins to move to the south.



Ornaments used by the Avar-Magyars.
(IXth century).

(b) *Ist millenium B.C.* In the border area of Asia and Europe the Ugrians (Magyars) contact Turkic-Turanian peoples and form unions with them. A large group of Magyars remains however at the confluence of the Volga-Kama rivers (today: Central Russia) where they form a well settled nation which exists until the XIIIth century (the time of the Mongol invasion).

(c) *At the beginning of the Christian era* the Proto-Hungarians' southward movement brings them into contact with the Kharezm-Iranian empire. More Turkic-Hunnic-Scythian elements join them in the Caspian region.

(d) During the *Vth-IXth centuries A.D.* the Proto-Hungarians move westward. In the Black Sea-Caucasus area they maintain trade and cultural links with Caucasian cultures and are joined by Alans and Sabirs. They also meet the Avars in this area, called "Levedia" by foreign chroniclers. Here the evolving nation remains, for a while, in close contact with the Khazar "empire". It is probably from this area, during the VIIth century that a large contingent of Magyars (of the more peaceful, Ugrian race) move ahead and settle in the Carpathian basin: these were the "Late-Avars" or "Early Magyars". The more aggressive Turkic type Onogur-Hungarians remain in the area and participate in the campaigns of the Khazars as their allies or vassals, until the collapse of that empire, at the beginning of the IXth century.

(e) A dissident *Khazar tribe*, the "Khabar", joins the Proto-Hungarians and together they move further west to the area called "*Etelköz*", the "Region between the Rivers" (Dniestr, Dniepr). During this last stage of their westward movement, at the end of the IXth century A.D., they organise themselves into a nation of eight tribes, elect a hereditary ruling dynasty and prepare themselves for the occupation of the Carpathian basin.

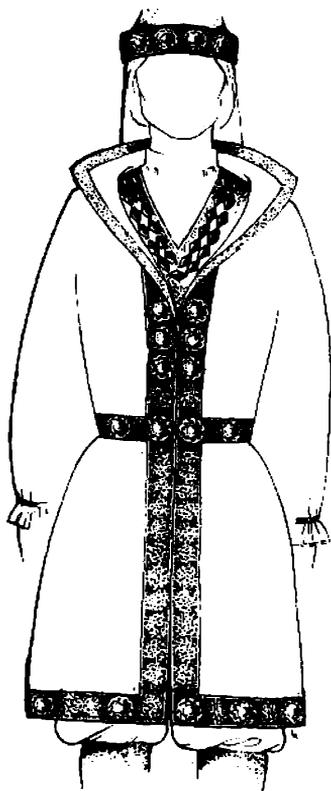
5. The Carpathian basin

During the first centuries of the Christian era, the future homeland of the Hungarians was a power-vacuum, with no cohesive or durable state structure. The semi-independent, autochthonous tribes of Sarmatan, Yazygian, Gothic, Alanian and Germanic races lived under the erratic and loosely organised rule of the Romans (in certain areas) or of the Celts. In the IVth century the Huns moved in and united the area into a powerful but short-lived empire which collapsed after the death of Attila (453).

The evidence of anthropometry and foreign chronicles indicates that the first groups of Proto-Hungarians arrived in the basin during the Vth century. After the collapse of the Hun empire some Huns and groups related to them remained in the area. The best-known of these remnants are the Székelys, who lived in Transdanubia and Transylvania.

The VIth century marks the arrival of the Avars (also known as "Proto-Avars", "Uar-Huns" and "Varchonites") from the

Caucasus area, where they had been in contact with the Proto-Hungarians. At the same time the first Slavonic immigrants arrived in the basin.



The dress of a IXth century Magyar woman.

The VIIth century brings the arrival of the people who, until now, had been called "Late-Avars", but who are now known to have been Proto-Hungarians ("Early Magyars")¹. They were peaceful agriculturalists, probably of the northern (Ugrian) type. It is reasonable to assume that they had detached themselves from their more warlike brothers in the "Levedia" area and chose the sanctuary of the Carpathian region. This was probably not the first, and certainly not the last dissension among Hungarians.

6. The "Sumerian connection"

At this stage we should say a few words about the question of Sumerian-Proto-Magyar connections.

Sumerian ceased to be a spoken language around 2000 B.C. (the time of the Akkadian conquest), but lived as a written language until the beginning of the Christian era. From their original homeland, in the south of Mesopotamia, the highly civilised, but not very numerous Sumerians exerted a disproportionately large cultural influence over vast regions, from Greece to Iran-Turkestan. Sumerian writings have been found as far west as Transylvania (Hungary).

The following facts form the basis of the "Sumerian origin" theories: Sumerian, the oldest written language of mankind, used a cuneiform notation, reminiscent of the writing of the Proto-Hungarians and Hun descendants (Székelys etc.), but also of many other cultures. The Sumerian language belonged probably to the Ural-Altai language family (to which Ugrian-Magyar and Turkic also belong). Its agglutinating grammar shows many similarities to certain structures of the similarly agglutinating Hungarian language, such as the lack of genders, transitive and intransitive verb endings and the use of prefixes and suffixes. Some Hungarian researchers claim to have collected from 300 to 1,000 words in Hungarian which are supposed to derive from Sumerian words, but some of these derivations are hotly contested. At any rate, the linguistic similarity cannot be proven without thorough examination and evaluation of the Sumerian scripts.

There is however a real possibility of the influence of post-Sumerian culture upon the Proto-Hungarians at some stage of their migrations in the Caucasus area, through the Alans, Sabirs or through Iranian contacts.

Recent researches indicate the probability of even closer links by suggesting that the Sabirs (Subarians) of the Caucasus-Caspian region were either Sumerians or related to them. Their association with the Proto-Hungarians (cf. p. 10 and 12) would account for the Sumerian linguistic and cultural influences mentioned in various chapters of this book.

2. "A WAY OF LIFE... "

The Hungarian character

We shall find it easier to understand the history and civilisation of the Hungarians, if we look at first at some interesting traits of their national character.

The Hungarians who settled in the Carpathian basin represented a composite, multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-lingual nation. This complexity was the result of prolonged contacts of varying intensity with many European and Asian races and cultures during the centuries of their migrations. The Proto-Hungarians had also come under the influence of several ephemeral nomadic "empires" and had remained for periods of various length "submerged" in these empires. During these periods they were usually referred to by foreigners by the name of the leading, most aggressive segments of the "empire" in question: Turks, Khazars etc. The amazing fact is, however, that after each such period of national anonymity they always emerged again, stronger in numbers, enriched in culture and language, their national identity seemingly strengthened by the experience of "submersion."

It is logical, therefore, to assume that the Proto-Hungarians developed a durable and strong national identity at the earliest stage of their migrations. The original tribal group, which had set out on these migrations during the last millenium B.C., must have formed a viable nucleus for the future nation.

This heterogeneous racial and cultural structure, superimposed on a millenia-old national identity, had provided the Hungarians with certain recognisable national characteristics, some of which may seem to be of a contrasting nature. These vastly different features have, during the last thirteen centuries of their Central-

European existence, mellowed into a surprisingly rich, colourful but harmonious national character.

Though elusive and hard to define, this *national character* exists without visible physical racial characteristics. Magyars do not belong to any particular race, they do not present any noticeable religious, political or social conformity — in fact, the very diversity in these fields seems to be one of the typical characteristics of this people. The definition of their national “ethos” is therefore a very complex task. For one thing, Hungarians are usually too emotional to be able to form impartial judgments of themselves while foreigners are rarely familiar enough with their culture and history to form valid conclusions.

The answer to this question requires a compromise solution, similar to the answer to their origins. The nation’s multi-ethnic origin suggests a synthesis of many deep-rooted qualities. No single epithet will adequately describe a Hungarian and those who only see one particular aspect of the many faces of their character will be just as wrong as those who insist that they are descendants of one single (“pure”) race. Thus the basic traits of the national character can be traced back to the original “donors”, the racial components, from which those qualities may have originated.

The Hungarians inherited from their *Turkic-Turanian-Onogur* components their organising talent in military and political matters. This talent enabled them to resettle and reorganise their previously nomadic tribes in Central Europe, to create a western, Christian state and to maintain it for thirteen centuries among hostile nations. Akin to this military talent are their emotional heroism and mercurial instability.

These aggressive qualities are tempered by the legacy of their nordic *Balto-Finno-Ugrian* ancestors. These peaceful, fishing-hunting-pastoral (later agricultural) tribes bequeathed to the present-day Hungarians the basic structure of their language along with their taste for a placid, agricultural existence and pastoral occupations. The love of the native soil is so deep-rooted that even the best “assimilated” Hungarian migrants treasure a handful of soil of their native country among their cherished souvenirs. Magyar folksongs present an endless display of nostalgic expressions of the love of the soil and native environment.

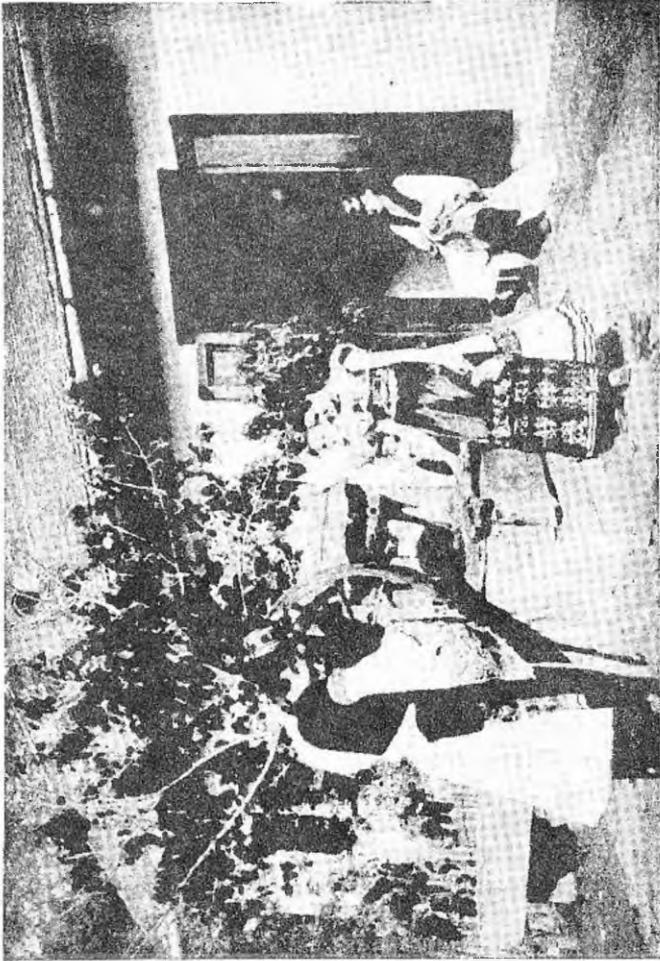
These two, seemingly contrasting features combine to present an interesting attitude of the Hungarian soldiers on the battlefield. They can fight well when they are defending the frontiers of their own country, protecting, as it were, their own homes and families. Aggressive campaigns beyond the country's frontiers have, however, rarely inspired Hungarian soldiers to heroic deeds. The greatest Hungarian general, John Hunyadi suffered his only two defeats during campaigns far from the frontiers of the country.

The well-known artistic talent of the people is the synthetic product of Central-Asian (Turkic-Avar-Scythian) influence in folklore and folkmusic, Finno-Ugrian heritage in folk poetry and *Mesopotamian-Iranian-Caucasian (Sumerian?)* contacts (e.g. interest in mathematics, science, decorative folk-art, certain types of folk music, etc.). Their Caucasian heritage manifests itself also in their preference for intellectual interests, such as literature, art, music, chess and discussion.

Their conservative *moral philosophy*, respect for women, elders and ancestors, is a legacy of their gentle Ugrian ancestors. The pre-Christian religion of the Magyars also reflects the mentality of their northern forebears: it was a monotheistic, monogamous, family-centered, ancestor-worshipping creed.

Another typical quality of the Hungarians is their ability to assimilate foreigners and integrate themselves into other nations. This two-way flexibility is an attribute acquired during the migrations. The hard core of the nation formed a magnetic nucleus attracting and assimilating smaller foreign groups, thus increasing the nation during its progress. During the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries the numbers of the Magyars increased ninefold, mainly through assimilation. On the other hand, it is a well-known fact that Hungarians make excellent settlers in any country. Though they are proud of their ethnic heritage and share it prodigally with anyone interested, they form no cultural ghettos and inter-marry freely with any ethnic group.

Honour — personal and national — is a cardinal virtue in their moral spectrum. Keeping one's given word is an obligation over-riding all other considerations, including political expediency. This is why the Hungarians never changed sides during international conflicts, however advantageous it may have been to do so.



In the courtyard of a "Matyó" house. (Cf. Chapter 27).



O. Glatz: Mother and child (Cf. p. 209)

*"For alien nations do not understand
His guileless heart, his good and stainless hand,
His unoffending love, his ploughman's life
So blest with leisured song, so free from strife . . ."*
(E. Szép)

There are, of course, many *negative aspects* of the Hungarian character. The proverbial Magyar dissension and their lack of perseverance are probably the legacy of those Turkic tribes which frequently formed short-lived nomadic empires bent on the conquest of the world and soon in collapse for no apparent reason. The dreamy, unrealistic optimism, the expectation of miracles is, perhaps, a tradition handed over by the star-gazing poets of Mesopotamia. The Hungarians' volatile temper — easily aroused, easily pacified — their periodical complacency and smug conservatism also point to Mesopotamian sources.

Their proverbial love of *freedom and independence* often hardens into rugged individualism which rejects guidance or discipline, military or political. Only leaders with great personal appeal can unite them for any considerable length of time. When formal rejection of an authoritarian rule is not possible — though given half a chance they would rise against it — their resistance finds verbal expression in the form of political satirical humour — probably a Hungarian invention.

Another national vice, their excessive *pride* — a Turkic legacy — causes them to look down upon those they consider "inferior", whether other Magyars or foreigners, such as national minorities.

All these qualities have a common denominator, a basic attitude toward life and mankind. When searching for such a quality, the Hungarians like calling themselves the "*Defenders of Christian Europe*" for having fought the eastern and southern pagan aggressors for a thousand years. Such religious altruism is hardly an immanent characteristic of these formerly pagan nomads. Nor did they choose this role out of proselytic fervour in order to "expiate" their former pagan aggressiveness. This task was rather imposed upon them by their unfortunate geographical situation. It is true that they did fight with stubborn gallantry for centuries in the gateway of Christian Europe. It is also a fact that on many occasions these powerful aggressors offered to the Hungarians an alliance against the West, which had treated them with selfish cynicism anyhow. The Hungarians, as a nation always rejected these approaches, not because of their mythical mission as the "bastion of Christianity", but because the moral and social ideology of the Mongols and Turks was alien to their conservative morality and freedom-loving individualism.

Thus their “militant Christianity” must have deeper roots in the national character. When searching for this fundamental quality, one is struck by a symbolic coincidence. The little tribe which, during the long centuries of migrations, formed the nucleus of the future nation, called itself “Megy-eri” – “Magyar”. Both particles of this word mean “MAN” — in Ugrian and Turkic respectively. This word seems to point, in a symbolic way, to their basic quality: *humanism*.

Humanism, under its definition expressed by the philosophers of the Renaissance (the Hungarians’ favourite period), is a reaction against religious or secular doctrines which tend to subordinate men to abstract concepts of a philosophical, political or social nature. Humanism attaches primary importance to man, to his faculties and well-being. It is a social attitude as well: respect for one’s fellow-human is compatible with the concern for one’s well-being.

The Hungarians’ humanism is based on the racial, cultural, moral and social concepts inherited from their ancestors in Asia and Europe. Therefore we may justly call their particular philosophy *Euro-Asian humanism*.

How does this basic attitude reveal itself in Hungarian history and civilisation?

Hungarians have always been known for their thirst for knowledge: an important humanistic attribute. Their attitude towards foreign cultures has always been that of sympathetic curiosity: they accepted their inspiration and adapted them to their own tastes. The proverbial Hungarian *hospitality* is akin to this cultural curiosity. They are probably the only western nation which truly loves foreigners and treats them with the old-fashioned respect only found among more primitive Asian tribes. This respect for foreigners was codified by the founder of Christian Hungary, King St. Stephen, who admonished his son to welcome foreigners “. . . because the nation of one language is weak . . .” He and his successors welcomed immigrants of all nationalities, including pagan refugees fleeing from the Mongol invasion, Jews fleeing from German pogroms (medieval and modern), Slavs and Vlachs escaping from Turkish domination, Poles escaping from Russian and German invaders etc.

Hungarian statesmen frequently fell prey to the intrigues and machinations of international diplomacy. Though efficient organ-

isers in military and political matters, their naive faith in human goodness and *credulous innocence* left them defenceless against the wily methods of their Machiavellian opponents. Their vitality, optimism and flexibility assured their survival, but their guileless diplomacy always prevented them from playing an important role in Europe. The outspoken Magyar writer, Dezső Szabó once said: "We Hungarians have been the greatest suckers in the world . . ."

Their soft-hearted humanism is well illustrated by their behaviour in wars. They are incapable of using guerilla tactics, kill unsuspecting or trapped enemies. (Hungary is probably the only country in Europe which produced no effective armed "Resistance" during World War II). They cannot use terror methods, retaliations against civilians and other inhuman methods of warfare. The lower half of the Hungarian Crown was given to the Hungarian King by a Greek emperor, because the Magyar troops had treated their Greek prisoners humanely.

The *social structure* of the nation has also been based on humanitarian principles. Being human, it was, of course, characterised by fragmentation into classes, though not "feudal" in the western sense of the term. but it possessed a great degree of vertical mobility. Promotion from the lower class to the higher was denied to no one. Peasants of Magyar or other nationality often rose to the highest offices.

Folk music, art and folklore present remarkably humanistic characteristics. The Magyar folk poet is a down-to-earth realist: his imagination is tinged with earthly colours. Flowers, trees, domestic animals, the sky, the rivers and his crops interpret his basic emotions. His beloved is a "turtle dove" and when he is separated from her, he envies the birds that are free to fly to their mates. When he leaves his village, nature itself weeps with him, the dust of the road spins his protective cloak and the stars pity his sorrow. His religion is anthropomorphic: the Child Jesus is the little prince of the shepherds, the Holy Virgin is the mother of all Magyars. The Saviour ("— if only He had been born in Hungary . . .—") and Saint Peter visit the Great Plain and talk to the outlaws there. Death holds no terror for him, it is nature's destiny: the crop dies when ripe. He believes in immortality and resurrection — but he would prefer to be awakened by his girl's kisses instead of the archangel's trumpet. He is no mystic: secrets of the after-life do not interest



Peasant girl dressed for a "Bethlehem" play.

"An aristocracy of virtue and talent . . ." (Jefferson).

him. At any rate, Heaven cannot be as beautiful as Hungary, so there is no hurry to get there . . .

Even *religion* seems to offer many examples of Hungarian humanism. Among the 40 Hungarians canonised by the Catholic Church (and one canonised by the Buddhist faith) there are no mystics: they were all practical men and women, martyrs,

3. ANCIENT ECHO

The origins and development of Hungarian folk music

Like their ancient language, the folk music of the Hungarians has maintained its basic structure through centuries of migrations and more than a thousand years of statehood in Central Europe. The structure of their folk music underwent certain superficial changes during these centuries. Ornamentations, modern, richer tonalities, western scales and rhythm patterns have been added to the original pentatonic scale and simple structure, without obliterating the distinct, ancient characteristics of this unique form of artistic expression.

The movement of these melodic elements can be traced from China to the Danube, from the Arctic Sea to Mesopotamia, mirroring the influences and contacts which shaped the racial, cultural and artistic character of the Hungarian people during their long migrations before their final settlement in the Carpathian basin. Thus the evolution of the Hungarian folk music began in the prehistoric mist of antiquity somewhere on the immense Euro-Asian plain, where a multi-racial group of tribes amalgamated into a more or less united people of heterogeneous racial and cultural composition. This composite ethnic structure accounts for the various sources of inspiration in their folk art in general and folk music in particular.

The systematic study of Hungarian folk melodies, carried out by Kodály, Bartók and their associates during the last seventy years, revealed two distinct types of folk tunes: the "ancient strata" or old style and the "new style" which evolved from this during the last two centuries.

The main characteristics of the "*ancient strata*" are:

(a) The pentatonic scale: only five tones are used instead of the seven known in western music. The second and sixth tones ("a" and "e") are missing, though they may appear in the form of unaccented, passing notes in ornamentation.

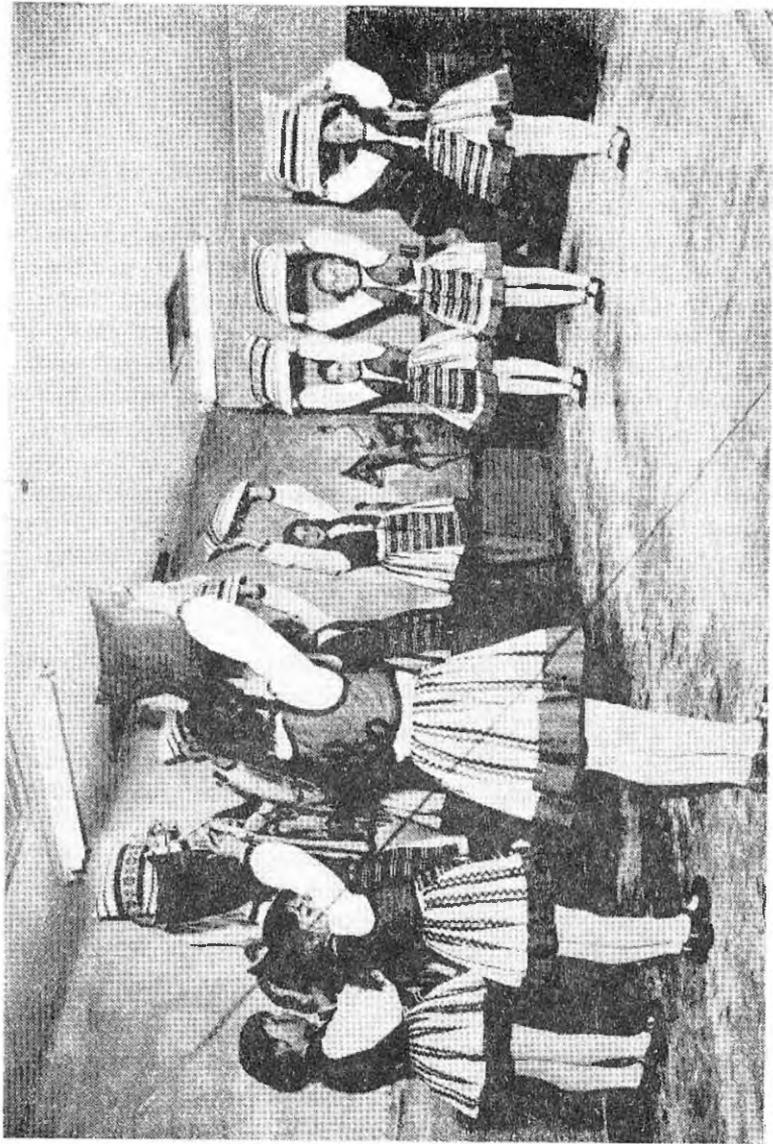
(b) The melody is repeated a fifth lower later in the song. This is called the "fifth construction" and it usually occurs in a "descending structure."

(c) The rhythm is "parlando" (recitativo) or "rubato" (free) to suit the singers' mood and the occasion. Quicker ("giusto") tempo is used with dance melodies and group singing. The slower rhythms accept all forms of ornamentation, as well as decorative, individual variations.

(d) The song-structure usually consists of four lines of equal length, the second of which may carry the repeated melody five tones lower.

The pentatonic scale, probably the oldest melodic structure used by mankind, is found in the folk music of peoples who could not possibly have had cultural contacts with each other, such as the Celts, the Chinese, the Incas etc. However, a comparison of Hungarian and Central Asian, Northern European (Ugrian) and Caucasian folk music reveals other similarities of melodic structure and rhythm as well as other components which exclude the possibility of sheer coincidence or natural development along the same lines. It is obvious from these investigations that the basic Magyar folk music represents the westernmost area of a great Euro-Asian musical heritage. Furthermore, this specific musical form, with its harmonious and distinct structure, shows no similarity to the folk music of any of the Central European neighbouring peoples (Slovaks, Serbs, Rumanians) and no influence from their melodic types. If anything, the Hungarian music has influenced these neighbours, especially Rumanians, in areas where there was close contact between these nations.

Closer study of the old-type tunes reveals interesting facts about their possible origins. Thus the song "Fuj, süvölt . . .", an old pentatonic melody recorded by Kodály in 1905 in Northern Hungary, can be traced to similar melodies among the Mari (Cheremis) and Chuvash peoples (Upper Volga, Eastern Russia).



"The Pillow Dance" (children's song and game).

the Kalmuk in Western Siberia, the Tartars in Central Asia and to some Chinese folk melodies.

Hundreds of other melodies show remarkable similarities to the folk music of people as far apart as the Western Siberian Ostyaks and Voguls, the Central Asian Nogai Tartars, the Eastern European Bashkirs and the Anatolian Turks, indicating contacts with Ugrian, Turkic and Central Asian cultures.

The extent of the Transcaucasian or Mesopotamian influence is less clear. Folklore research in these regions has made little progress, consequently there is insufficient material for comparison. As the influence of these cultures is clearly detectable in decorative folk art and other aspects of Hungarian culture, it is reasonable to expect a similar effect on the development of folk music. Zoltán Kodály, when studying the Gregorian influence on certain Transylvanian melodies, suggested the possibility of melodic influences of "pre-Gregorian" nature on the music of the Magyars' ancestors (Proto-Hungarians) before the occupation of the Carpathian basin. The cultures which had created the antecedents of Gregorian music were those of the Mesopotamian region: Sumerian, Babylonian and Semitic cultures. The folk ballad "Istenem, Istenem . . ." seems to point to pre-Gregorian (Mesopotamian) inspiration.

During the last two centuries the Magyar people have developed a *new style* of folk music while preserving the basic features of the old style. The new style has maintained the pentatonic scale in many melodies and short, pentatonic sequences in others, along with Doric, Mixolydian, Acolian and modern minor and major scales. The "fifth construction" is usual and the rhythm is as free as in the old style songs. This new style is a purely Hungarian creation; nothing similar in style or character has been found in the Central European region.

This more modern form of the folksong, together with the soldiers' dance-song type, called "toborzó" (recruiting dance), and certain western elements helped to create, at the beginning of the XIXth century, the artistic popular song, usually performed by gypsy musicians and known all over the world as the "*Magyar song*" or (erroneously) the "*Magyar folk song*". This pleasant, but rather hybrid style has since been mistakenly identified with genuine Hungarian folk music by such eminent

composers as Liszt, Schubert, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Ravel. In Hungary this urban "folkish" song became the favourite musical style of the middle classes, mainly through the production of countless stereotyped "Magyar songs" by urban composers and operetta composers, such as Lchár, Kálmán and Kacsóh.

The *gypsy orchestras* have been the best known interpreters of this song and music type. The gypsies — a people of east-Indian origin — came to Europe during the Middle Ages. They have found in each country certain volatile occupations as tinkers, showmen, dancers or musicians. In Hungary they almost entirely replaced the folk musicians whom we only find in remote areas playing mostly woodwind and string-percussion instruments. The gypsies have formed orchestras made up of a large number of string instruments, woodwind instruments and the "cimbalom" (dulcimer) a string percussion instrument. The band, led by the "primás" (prime violinist, conductor) performs according to the tastes of the audience, playing the tunes with an excess of ornamentation and variations with typical "gypsy" style in variable "rubato" tempo. They do not compose the music they play. Instead, they perform — sometimes rearrange — popular urban songs, operetta arias, internationally known light compositions and, of course, genuine folksongs. It is wrong, therefore, to speak of "gypsy music" which (like feminine logic) is quite delightful but does not exist.

The researchers of folk songs have also classified the melodies according to their social role and use. Thus, in addition to the songs of general, lyric nature, there are many tunes used in connection with special occasions: marriage, death, harvest, vintage and other festivals (some of pagan origin), children's songs, games and ditties, religious songs and minstrels' songs ("regös"). The melodies of folk ballads usually belong to the old strata. These occasional tunes have conserved their original melodic forms, being associated with certain ancient customs, or — in the case of the children's songs — with pantomimes, games and dances. Some children's songs preserve very old melodic forms: the three-tone, pre-pentatonic scale. Their ancient, classic simplicity makes them eminently suitable for the purpose of elementary musical education by the well-known "Kodály method."

As the various themes and topics of lyric, epic, festival and children's songs are expressed in their texts as well as melodies,

we shall divide the various areas of folk poetry in later chapters and examine the contents as well as the poetic and melodic forms in each thematic group.

On the initiative of Kodály, Bartók and their fellow researchers a rich treasure of about 100,000 folk melodies has been collected in Hungary. Many Hungarian and foreign composers have used the inspiration of the Magyar folk song in their compositions or the artistic orchestral or choral arrangements of these tunes. As it is, Bartók and Kodály saved the treasures of the Hungarian folk music in the eleventh hour. In a few decades, urbanisation and industrial progress would have destroyed all traces of this magnificent treasure.



4. THE SETTLEMENT

(The occupation of the Carpathian basin.
The IXth-Xth centuries)

In the "Etelköz" settlement area (modern Bessarabia), the seven Onogur-Magyar tribes (Nyék, Megyer, Kürtgyarmat, Tarján, Jenő, Kér, Keszi) and the Khabar tribe established a firm federation under a hereditary ruler. In a covenant called the "Blood Treaty" the tribal chiefs, representing the nation, codified their national constitution. They elected Árpád, the chief of the largest tribe (Megyer), and his descendants as their hereditary rulers. They also agreed that the land obtained by common effort should be shared justly by all members of the nation. Thus, shortly before their exodus from the Etelköz area (895-896 A.D.), the Hungarians laid the foundation of a progressive, liberal constitution. The elected sovereign was to rule by the will of the nation (not by the "Grace of God"), and land was to be held by the individuals as their rightful property, not in fief from their lord: thus they rejected the medieval principle of feudalism.¹

The leaders of the nation became interested in the power-struggles of the Byzantine and Western (German) Empires and allied themselves with one and the other on various occasions. As allies of the German emperor, Arnulf they were instrumental in the destruction of the shortlived "Moravian Empire" of Svato-pluk (892-894). During these campaigns they had ample opportunity to reconnoitre the Carpathian Basin, which their legends had already indicated as their inheritance from Attila. The constant harassment of their eastern neighbours, the Pechenegs (Besenyő²), made them realise how unprotected their Etelköz homeland was. So they decided to settle behind the Carpathians.

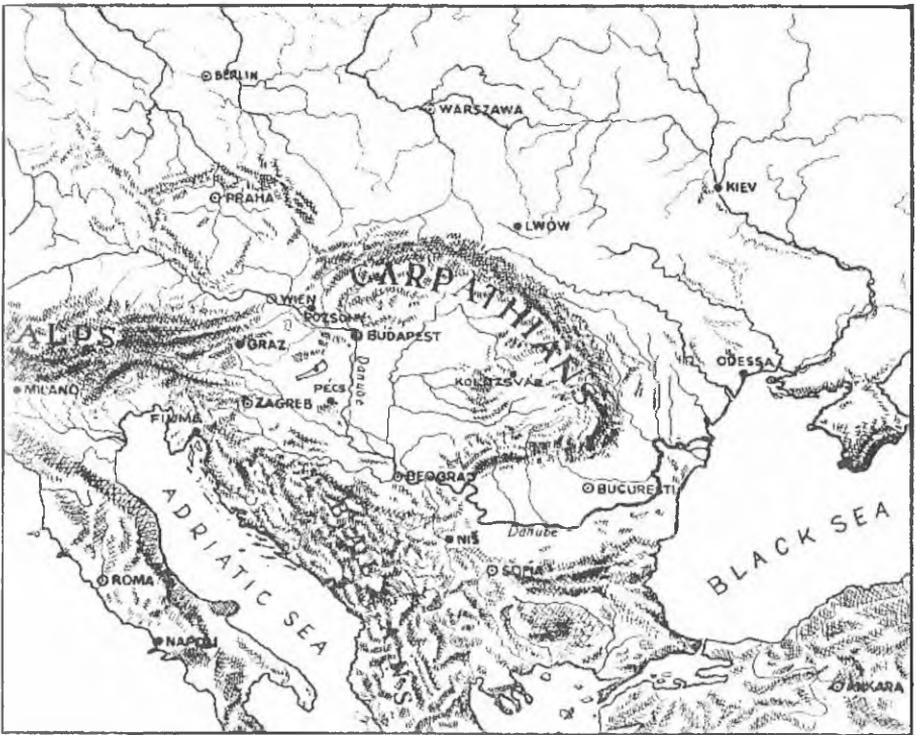
The movement of the entire nation was planned and directed by Prince Árpád and took place in 895-896 in the form of a gigantic pincer movement: the bulk passed through the North-Eastern Carpathians and a smaller contingent entered Transylvania from the south.

Hungarian historians call this operation "Honfoglalás" ("Occupation of the Homeland), or simply "Bejövétel" (Entry). This was truly no "conquest". Even imaginative medieval chroniclers fail to make much of the occasional skirmishes that took place during this rather peaceful resettlement operation. One cannot help admiring Árpád's sense of timing: the area was, at this period, truly a "power vacuum" without an effective central state structure.

Most of the population of the central area consisted of Avar-Magyars and other closely related races which greeted the Hungarians as their brothers. The southern areas were still nominally part of the Bulgarian empire, already crumbling under Byzantine attacks. The northern mountains were settled by Slavonic tribes, e.g. Slovaks. After the collapse of Svatopluk's empire, these scattered settlers (themselves rather recent arrivals: see Chapter I), were left to fend for themselves. They surrendered to the Hungarians, or rather accepted the status of allies and vassals. They were allowed to keep their own feudal social structure, national and cultural identity and religious freedom — and the Slovaks did survive eleven centuries of Hungarian "domination".

During the tenth century, Árpád and his successors reorganised their heterogeneous nation. The latest arrivals provided the nation's leaders, while their tribal members represented the pastoral occupations and animal husbandry. The "old settlers", such as the Avar-Magyars and related groups, retained their role as agriculturalists. The non-Magyar elements found their role and position in the nation's social structure according to their skills, feudal status and property. The land was divided among the tribes and each free member of the nation was given land to own, not in fief.

With the task of reorganisation completed, the power of the paramount ruler (Prince) declined, though Árpád (895-907) and his successors, Solt (907-?) and Taksony (?-972), were recognised as the supreme authority, but the semi-independent tribal chiefs became practically absolute rulers of their



Hungary, encircled by the Carpathians, lies in the heart of Europe.

segment of the nation. They carried on independent internal, religious, external and military policies and concluded alliances with their neighbours or fought them independently. Thus the chief of the “Keszi” tribe (settled in Transylvania), who held the second highest hereditary office of the “Gyula”, maintained independent relations with Byzantium and accepted Christianity long before the conversion of the western tribes.

This leads us to the examination of the so-called *raids*. The Hungarians, though not exactly new arrivals, were still considered outsiders, even intruders, by their powerful neighbours, the Germans and the Byzantians. The fact that the Hungarians retained their pagan religion was considered a further offence by their neighbours. So the Hungarians decided to assert their rights in the settlement area they had chosen. For more than 70 years they fought deterrent, preventive campaigns against

both empires. By these campaigns they aimed to obtain a "position of strength" from which to negotiate with their hostile neighbours on equal terms. They were "battles to prevent wars" — and as such they compare rather favourably with the so-called "wars to end all wars" of the XXth century. They secured, of course, tributes and taxes from the defeated princes, the proceeds of which went to communal property, but the principal aim could not possibly have been plunder and looting, for then they would not have attacked their most powerful neighbours.

The outcome of these campaigns was, of course, not always favourable to the Hungarians. Great victories turned into disastrous defeats, especially when diplomatic intrigues (the Hungarians' main weakness) changed alliances unexpectedly. The details of the campaigns are too numerous to mention here. Some leaders achieved remarkable feats of generalship. The best known of them, "horka" (general) Bulcsu, led a seven months' campaign in 954 through Germany, Holland, France and Italy (3,000 miles), defeating every western army he met. In the following year, the same Bulcsu, with another chieftain, Lehel, was defeated in Bavaria, at the Lech river by the emperor Otto who had, in the meantime, managed to turn the Hungarians' former allies against them.

Toward the end of the century, Prince *GÉZA* (*GEYSA*) (972-997) began to strengthen his authority as the hereditary leader of the nation. He married the daughter of the Gyula, the second most powerful chief, then proceeded to assert his authority over the other tribal chiefs by putting an end to the campaigns and concluding a peace treaty with the Emperor, Otto I, the victor of Lech, on equal terms. With deep understanding of the process of power consolidation in Europe, he decided to claim his nation's place as a member of the western Christian civilisation. As he had already noticed the signs of decline in the Byzantine empire, he asked for western missionaries, had his entire family baptised and encouraged the Hungarians to convert to Christianity. His only son and heir, Vajk (baptised Stephen or "István"), married the sister of the future emperor of Germany, Gisela (the granddaughter of the conqueror of Lechfeld).

The "show of strength" of the preventive campaigns had paid off. No longer despised "outsiders", the Hungarians were ready to join the European community as equal partners.

5. THE CROSS AND THE SWORD

(Christian Hungary under the Árpád kings: 1000-1301)

The task of Christianisation, unification and consolidation was left to Géza's heir, **ISTVÁN I (SAINT STEPHEN)** (997-1038), who inherited his father's political wisdom and his mother's (Sarolta, daughter of Gyula) deep Christianity. During his reign Hungary became a strong, independent Christian Kingdom, maintaining friendly relations with the German empire without becoming its vassal.

Stephen turned to Pope Sylvester II, asking for his recognition as an independent Christian king and implying that he did not wish to become the vassal of the emperor. The Pope sent him a crown and bestowed upon him the title of "King by the Grace of God", thus acknowledging his independence from the German empire. He also sent Stephen an apostolic cross, the symbol of authority over the state as a religious unit, and granted him the permission to establish a national church (hence the title of "Apostolic King"). The crown (the upper part of the present Holy Crown) was placed on Stephen's head on Christmas Day, 1,000 A.D. Since that day the Holy Crown remained the symbol of supreme authority in Hungary.

Stephen now proceeded to consolidate his authority in the nation against protests by some malcontent chieftains. Among these were his uncle, Koppany (Kupa) and Ajtony, the Gyula of the Transylvanian Hungarian tribe. At times he resorted to measures which seem harsh by today's standards but were usual in his time. The result was the decline of the tribal system and the creation of a strong, united, prosperous nation.

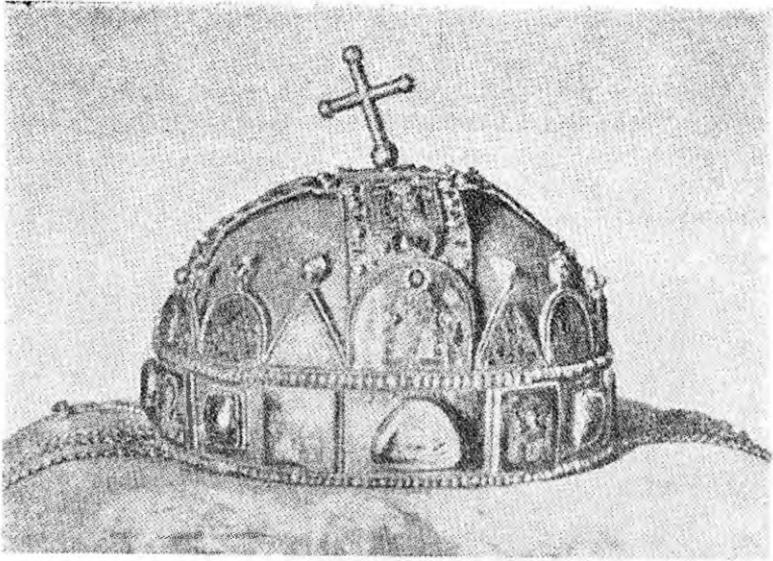
He established a Catholic hierarchy by founding two arch-dioceses, eight dioceses, abbeys, monasteries and parishes. Among



King Saint Stephen (997-1038).

*"Preserve everything that is Hungarian.
Without a past a nation has no future."*

(From his "Admonitiones" to his son)



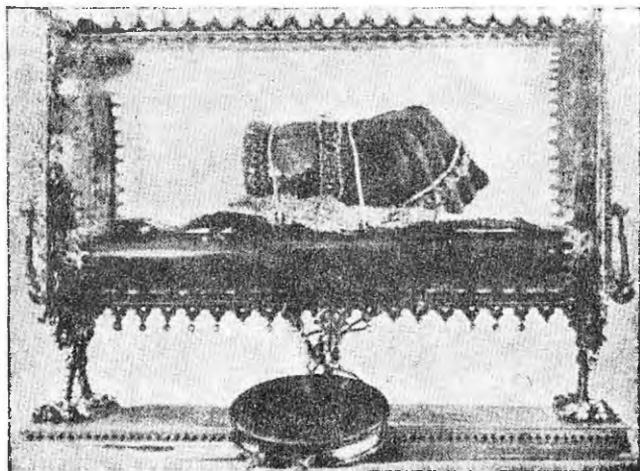
The Holy Crown

the heads of the dioceses, the archbishop of Esztergom has remained the head of the Catholic Church in Hungary ever since. The state organisation was based on the establishment of the "counties" ("comitatus": "megye" in Hungarian), which consisted, at first, of the domains of the crown (the properties of the king, enlarged by the properties confiscated from the rebel chiefs). They also included the uninhabited frontier areas, mostly wooded land. Each county was administered by a "count" ("comes"), appointed by the king. The number of these counties rose to 45 in Stephen's time and to 73 by the twelfth century, covering eventually the entire area of the country, not only the crown estates.

Stephen invited knights, priests, scholars and artisans from the western nations and provided them with privileges and estates for their services. Most of these "guests" stayed in the country and founded historic Hungarian families. The king's power was unlimited, similar to that of other medieval kings, but he listened to the advice of the leaders of the church and people. He maintained friendly political and family ties with many European rulers. One of his daughters, Agatha, married Edmund the Iron-

side's son, Edward, and became the mother of Queen Saint Margaret, wife of Malcolm III of Scotland.

There were few foreign wars during Stephen's reign. He dealt swiftly with an unprovoked German attack in 1030. Unfortunately, his only son to reach adulthood, (Saint) Imre (Emery) died in a hunting accident and Stephen's death (August, 1038) was followed by a period of internal strife.



The preserved Holy Right Hand of St. Stephen.

While Stephen's successors (Peter, Aba Samuel, Endre I, Béla I, Solomon and Géza I) were busy quarelling about the succession, the ambitious German emperor, Henry III, seized his opportunity to make Hungary the empire's vassal. After many attempts, he eventually succeeded in making young king Peter swear loyalty to him in 1044. This cowardly act had, however, hastened Peter's downfall and his successor, Endre I, defeated the Germans and reasserted Hungary's sovereignty, which remained unchallenged until the XVIth century.

King **LADISLAS (LÁSZLÓ) THE SAINT** (1077-1095), son of the able but short-lived Béla I, a heroic and popular figure, represented the finest virtues of the medieval knight during his many battles against the eastern pagan invaders (Cumanians, Pechenegs, etc.), whom he subsequently Christianised and resettled in the frontier areas. To counter this eastern danger, he



King Saint Ladislas (1077-1095).

(Silver herma by the Kolozsvári Brothers, cf, ch. 10)

encouraged the total Hungarian settlement of the unpopulated, wooded portion of the eastern region of the country (Transylvania) by founding two bishoprics there and granting privileges to the frontier settlers, the Székelys. He re-established internal order and by his clever family politics incorporated Slavonia and Croatia as autonomous provinces. At a Hungarian Church Council (in 1083) he decreed the canonisation of Saint Stephen and Saint Imre. The Pope immediately approved of this decision.

His nephew and successor, **COLOMAN (KALMAN)**, called **THE WISE** ("BOOKLOVER") (1095-1116), extended the power of the Hungarian state to the ports of the Adriatic. Kálmán was an enlightened man who modernised the country's laws. He forbade, among other things, the persecution of the "strigae" (a type of witch) who, he stated "did not exist"

("quae non sunt . . ."). He died after a long illness, during which he became easy prey to the intrigues of his court and his family. The blinding of his brother Álmos, and of his nephew, Béla (for alleged conspiracy), was obviously not approved by this lenient and pious king. His wife's disgraceful behaviour may have given Kálmán second thoughts about the "witches that did not exist . . ."

After his death there was another period of internal struggle for the crown. The "Blood Treaty" — the basis of the Hungarian Constitution — had only stipulated that the sovereign should be a descendant of Árpád, but did not specify whether he should be the deceased king's brother or son. The renewed ambitions of the last great Byzantian emperor, Manuel (a grandson of Saint Ladislav by his daughter, Piroska or Saint Irene), added external problems to the internal ones.

The Byzantian pressure suggested closer contacts with the West, especially with France. Géza II (1141-1162), an ally of Louis VII of France, invited French monks (Cistercians) to settle in Hungary and encouraged Hungarians to attend French universities. During his reign many German, French, Italian and Flemish tradesmen, merchants and artisans settled in Hungary.

Under the reign of **BÉLA III** (1172-1192) Hungary became the leading power in Central Europe, extending its frontiers beyond the Carpathians and well into the Balkan peninsula and the Adriatic coast. He maintained close family, cultural and political ties with France and ruled wisely over a nation which presented the best characteristics of a universal European culture, having assimilated the best of Italian, French, German and Byzantian contributions.

During the first two centuries of the Árpád kings, the central power of the king, firmly established under Saint Stephen, had gradually been reduced, with the diminution of the royal estates as a result of land grants to deserving subjects.

Thus, by 1222, the nobles, supported by the heir to the throne, Prince Béla, were strong enough to force king **ENDRE II** (1205-1235) to issue a charter of rights, called the **GOLDEN BULL**, which guaranteed personal freedom and other basic rights to all free members of the nation. This narrowed the gap between

the rich barons and the poorer nobles and free men. The nobles — i.e. the nation — were also granted the right to resist illegal royal acts. This charter brought forth a rapid improvement of the position of the lower classes. Endre's other memorable achievement was his Crusade, for which he received the title of "King of Jerusalem". During one of his absences the Queen Gertrude was killed under obscure circumstances, possibly during a rising of the Hungarian nobles against the Queen's hated German courtiers.

When Endre died, Hungary had a population of over three million. This nation was a composite one: even the original settlers came from different races at different times as we have explained in chapters 1 and 3. The non-Magyar autochthonous population of the Carpathian basin joined the nation, but the largest group, the Slovaks, retained their national identity.

King Saint Stephen and his successors welcomed foreigners: they invited certain groups of western settlers and allowed the gradual immigration of others (eastern pagans, Slavs, Vlachs). Though originally all non-Magyars were serfs, their descendants could gain nobility or high offices in Church, military or royal service and many did. Many non-Magyars who lived in larger settlements, kept their national identity in matters of culture, language and religion but did not form separate political units.

Thus the Hungarian nation of the XIIIth century, blissfully ignorant of the legal and political complexities of national "minority" problems, lived in multi-lingual communities, the members of which considered themselves Hungarians, whether they spoke Magyar or Slovak or German or — as most educated people did — Latin. They all owed loyalty to one king and all had equal prospects of prosperity and advancement in their chosen country.

BÉLA IV (1235-1270) began his reign by attempting to restore a healthy balance of the rights of the various classes of the nation: he reasserted the power of the king and the right of the poorer freemen against the abuses of the rich barons. His honest efforts, however, alienated the barons — at a time when the nation faced the greatest danger in its European existence: the Mongol invasion.

The *Mongols* (erroneously called "Tartars" or "Tatars"), a Central Asian people related to the Turks, were members of a small, but crafty and violent tribe. Their chieftain, Chingis

(Jingis) Khan (1162-1227), conquered the neighbouring (Tartar) tribes and extended his empire over most of Central and Northern Asia. His successor Ogotai (Ogdai) sent his nephew, Batu Khan, into Europe to fulfil the great Khan's dream of conquering the world. Batu crushed the Russian princes and by 1240 his huge army was ready to attack Poland and Hungary, the two great bulwarks of Christian Europe.

The studious and enlightened Béla knew more than most European princes about the Mongols and their intentions. He sent four monks to search for the Hungarians who had remained in the upper Volga-Kama area centuries before (see Chapter 1). Brother Julian did actually reach this "Magna Hungaria" and found that the population there had preserved their Hungarian language in spite of several hundred years of separation from their western brothers. Béla sent Julian back with missionaries — but it was too late. The Mongols had destroyed the Volga-Hungarian nation. The southern Cumanians were luckier: their king and some 40,000 families were able to escape the Mongols and, joined by other refugees, managed to reach Hungary. Here they were given refuge by the king.

Having gathered sufficient information about the Mongols, Béla began to prepare the country for the onslaught. He sent envoys to the Pope and the western kings, urging them to organise a crusade against these enemies of civilised mankind, but received only offers of prayers and good wishes in reply. The king's warnings were similarly ignored by most of Hungary's magnates: the sulking lords refused to mobilise their private banderia. So the king only had his royal army and the banderia of his office-bearers and prelates.

The Mongols regrouped their army outside the Carpathians. The bulk, under the leadership of Batu himself, was to attack Hungary from the east, the left wing, under Bedjak khan, to attack the Hungarians from the south (Transylvania) and the right wing (Orda khan) was to destroy the Germans and Poles (which they eventually did at Liegnitz), then to turn against Hungary, the main enemy. In March, 1241, Batu destroyed Palatin (Chief Minister) Dénes' troops defending the passes and crossed the Carpathians. On seeing the wounded Palatin — practically the only survivor of the battle — the lords began to mobilise their banderia. Duke Frederick of Austria, who had come with a small escort to "assist" Béla, captured a Mongol

soldier during a skirmish. The soldier turned out to be a Cumanian (obviously one of the many auxiliaries the Mongols forced to march with them). Frederick, however, argued that the Cumans were on the Mongol side and managed to incense the Hungarian nobles so much that they killed the Cumanian king. The Cumans, furious at this treachery, rose against the Hungarians, then collected their families and left the country. Thus the Hungarians lost a potential ally, one familiar with the Mongol fighting methods.

Béla and his lords turned against the Mongols, who had reached the Danube north of Buda and had taken and completely destroyed the episcopal city of Vác, massacring the entire population. When attacked by the main Hungarian army of about 50,000, the raiders retreated swiftly — their usual strategy — enticing the Hungarian army toward Batu's main army.

Batu chose the area between two small rivers (Sajó and Hernád) near the village of *Mohi*, manoeuvring the Hungarians on to the swampy plain while the Mongol troops occupied the surrounding forested hills. The Hungarians who had not fought a major battle in centuries, failed to realise the trap and set up a hastily reinforced camp in the plain. Batu's seasoned troops moved according to the master plan and managed to surround the Hungarian camp unnoticed during the night. When the day of the battle dawned — April 12, 1241 — the Mongols attacked and Béla's heavily armoured knights were completely overwhelmed by the strange, oriental tactics of the enemy. The Mongols' fast-riding units moved in complete silence directed by mysterious signals only and supported by rockets and other puzzling devices, such as horsemen disguised as terrifying giants. They were aided by batteries of precision-shooting archers and they all fought like machines, with death-ignoring bravery. The Hungarians' medieval fighting methods and heavy armour were an added hindrance in the swampy terrain.

On that day, the arrogant lords, selfish prelates, quarrelling nobles and disgruntled knights of a divided nation found unity, loyalty and Christian humility during the magnificent hours of Mohi. They died bravely for a nation they had served so poorly during their lives. As they died, one after the other, the battle raged on. It was no easy victory for the Mongol. In fact, at one stage, Batu wanted to retreat and only the timely arrival of an encircling column kept him from giving the order.

mounted Mongols crossed it at several points. Unable to resist further, Béla fled to the Dalmatian coast. There, after a furious chase, he took refuge in an island fortress which the Mongols could not capture. Batu overran Transdanubia, but several fortresses managed to resist and survive.

Then blind fate — or Providence — came to the rescue of the lonely nation. Suddenly, in the spring of 1242, the Mongols turned around and began to leave the country. They moved as swiftly as they came, burning, looting and killing on their way; they drove with them herds of slaves, most of whom they killed when they left Hungary. Duke Frederick soon followed them in Transdanubia, completing the destruction of the western counties of Hungary.

Several reasons have been suggested for the Mongols' unexpected withdrawal. They may have found that they could not feed their army and horses, having wantonly destroyed their hinterland. They may have wanted to regroup and refresh their elite Mongol troops which had been decimated during their Hungarian campaign. We know that the great Khan, Ogatai, had died in 1241 and that Batu was one of his likely successors. This explains why he hastened back to Karakorum, their Asian capital, but it does not explain why he had to evacuate the country he had just conquered at such horrendous loss. In fact, most of the Mongols remained in southern Russia for many decades. They even made several attempts to return to Hungary during the following years.

Béla returned to find a devastated Hungary, populated by the pathetic survivors of the once great nation: they had taken refuge in swamps, inaccessible mountains or the few fortified towns the Mongols could not take, or in the loyal southern provinces of Hungary, such as Dalmatia, where the king had also found safe refuge.

Béla is rightly called the second founder of Hungary. The task of *reconstruction* was incredibly difficult. Knowing that the Mongols intended to return, he had fortresses and fortified towns built, encouraging the magnates to do the same and to equip their banderia. He granted municipal self-government to the larger towns with fortifications. Later he repeatedly rejected the Mongols' offers of an alliance against the West, knowing quite well that in the case of a renewed attack Hungary would be left to fight alone again.

His youngest daughter, Margaret (born during the Mongol siege), spent her life in a convent in voluntary sacrifice for the liberation of Hungary. She is known in the Catholic Church as Saint Margaret of the Árpáds.

Béla welcomed foreign settlers as migrants to the devastated areas, among them the Cumanians, Jazighs and Pechenegs, refugees from Mongol devastated regions in the east.

* * *

After Béla's death in 1270 three weak kings allowed the magnates to recover their privileged status. Among these kings, *Ladislav IV* (1272-1290), called the "Cumanian" (his mother was a Cumanian princess), achieved a feat of great international significance but of doubtful benefit to Hungary. He defeated the Czech king, Ottokar, in 1278 in alliance with Rudolf Habsburg, thus helping to establish Habsburg hegemony in Central Europe.

By the death of *Endre III* (1301), the last of the Árpád kings, the barons were in the process of consolidating their feudal rule over their own lands. This development, though normal in medieval Europe, had harmful effects in Hungary which, being situated at the frontiers of the Christian world, did not enjoy the peaceful safety of sheltered Germany, France or England and needed therefore a strong central government.

The *dynasty of Árpád* ruled Hungary for 400 years. The five princes and 24 kings of the dynasty gave to the nation a new land, a new religion and a new civilisation and to the Church some twenty saints. During their reign Hungary remained a national state with its own independent policy and with a civilisation which was truly European and Christian but still characteristically Hungarian.

6. "I HIDE IN SONGS . . ."

(The ancient roots of Hungarian folk poetry)

Saint Stephen, in establishing western Christianity in Hungary, realised the dangers of the pagan poetic inheritance, the interpreter of the ancient religion. He countered it with western, Latin literacy and religious Latin-based education. His harsh action doubtless spared the nation the long, weakening agony of hesitation between the old and new cultures. A strong nation was needed to hold its own among the new nations of Europe, and it could not be fettered by lingering memories of eastern pagan traditions alien to the Hungarians' new environment.

Stephen had succeeded in creating a strong and vigorous nation, but in the process he and his Christian successors were instrumental in destroying a valuable poetic treasure which was the heritage of 2000 years of migrations. Fortunately, the destruction was not complete: there still remained some indestructible elements of the creations of the rich soul of this ancient people. Fragments of ancient songs, legends, chants, fairy tales and ballads continued to live by word of mouth only, often still containing words and phrases which have remained unintelligible.

Many of these fragments are found among the so-called *minstrel-songs*. Minstrelsy ("regölés" in Hungarian) is an old heathen custom, known to many ancient cultures in Europe, but Hungarian minstrelsy contains practices unknown elsewhere. One interesting fact is that it is still being practised in some villages (in Transdanubia and Transylvania).

Mysterious in itself is the Magyar word "regös", the name of the performer or singer. This obsolete word is a derivation of the verb "rejteti" (:to hide): thus: "regös" is the person who hides something, an interpreter of hidden things. He was once

a singer endowed with talent akin to wizardry who could fall into a trance and foretell the future; he could communicate with the spirits of the dead and interpret their wishes. (Ancestor-worship was part of the ancient Magyar religion).

A “regös” song as sung today in Transdanubia presents an interesting text, full of half-forgotten pagan allusions and mentioning a “miraculous stag”. It ends with the “regös” identification: “I hide in songs . . .”¹ The Transylvanian variation from the Székely region mentions the winter snowfall as “regös” singing is usually connected with the Christmas-New Year period. This, too, is mainly a good-wish song and the mention of the “ancient ones” and the “old law” clearly refers to the “ancient religion.”² Christian elements are often mixed with allusions to pagan rituals. The Transdanubian song, for instance, refers to a “thousand mass-candles.”

There are similarly mixed Christian and pagan elements in the Transdanubian “Whitsun-Queen” chant. At Whitsuntide (Spring in Europe) the girls elect a little girl “Queen”, crown her with a flower-patterned head-dress and accompany her in a procession from house to house, chanting a well-wishing song similar to the “regös” song. Among references to the Christian significance of the day, they also sing about the Queen who “was not born of a mother . . . and grew up with the Whitsun dewes of the rose-tree . . .”

The “shaman” — the wizard priest-doctor of the ancient Magyar religion — used to heal with chant and music. This ritual is remembered in the common children’s ditty “Stork . . .”, known everywhere in Hungary.³ The Summer Solstice festival (June 22, St. Ivan’s Day) has preserved the mating song about the “rutafa”, a plant credited with magic qualities. This plant (whose botanic name is “Artemisia”) is of a sub-tropical nature and does not grow in Hungary. This indicates a southern source of inspiration for some Magyar traditions, possibly Mesopotamia.⁴

The so-called “flower-songs” contain elements of more recent inspiration (XVIth century) but some of their allusions stem from a more ancient, pagan ideology. In one song, the flowers connected with Christian ceremonies are compared — unfavourably — with the pansy, the pagan symbol of love.

* * *

The above examples display some amazing qualities of the most ancient elements in Magyar folk poetry. These songs (fully quoted in the Appendix), were recorded in various regions of the country (often quite distant). They show a remarkable similarity of wording and content, conserved, apparently, for more than a thousand years. This durability of the text suggests a closer examination of the methods of the *propagation and preservation* of folk poetry.

The poet is anonymous. His environment is the real creator of the poem. Thus the poet does not reserve his rights, does not forbid the changing of the words (which is rarer) or the application of different melodies (which is more frequent). Many folksongs have “interchangeable” texts and melodies: as long as the rhythm is identical, the same texts may be carried by different melodies, and the same melody may carry different texts. The folk poem is preserved by verbal tradition only: it is either sung or recited, not written down. The recurring rhythm and rhyme patterns aid memorization of the text, even when it is in prose, such as the folk tales or stories which still present recurring rhythm patterns as a solid frame carrying the content.

The propagation is the task of the self-appointed and anonymous bards: story tellers, poetry tellers and singers, rustic Homers who, at village gatherings or festivals, in the spinneries and inns, would often recite or sing the folk songs and stories. The bard passes his art to someone else, usually a very young child who has the necessary talent and interest. So a young child often hears these stories and songs from his grandparents, conserves this treasure throughout his life and then passes it on to his grandchildren. A talented bard (“versmondó” or “énekes”) may span five generations — 120 to 150 years — with his poetic heritage. Thus the poetic tradition of a thousand years may be preserved through the talents of only a few generations of story-tellers.

The regional propagation of folk poetry is facilitated by exchanges and meetings between isolated communities: market-days, pilgrimages, seasonal workers’ movements, military service, domestic employment, trade apprenticeships and other movements.

The live presentation (singing or reciting often accompanied by mime or dance) adds beauty to the content. Rhythm and rhyme fulfil their original Homeric role: they are the framework and the musical accompaniment of the poem.

Due to their tragic historic circumstances, the epic poetry of the Hungarian people could never be gathered into a continuous epic collection as happened with Finland's Kalevala saga. The Mongol, Turkish and independence wars and the long Austrian-German oppression destroyed what might have been the Hungarian Kalevala, the epic legend with a history much more exciting than that of the Finns. Only broken fragments have remained, songs, legends, tales, chants and ditties, found in the remote areas of Transylvania and Transdanubia.



7. THE UNKNOWN BARDS

(Hungarian literature before the XVIth century)

Hungarians take pride in many artistic and historical achievements. While some of these claims may be somewhat exaggerated, the unbiased observer cannot help finding at least two fields in which the genius of this unique people has created values equal to the greatest human achievements. These are the fields of music and poetry. But while Liszt, Kodály and Bartók are known universally, as their art does not require translation, the creation of the Hungarian poets appeals only to the speakers of Hungarian and to the few foreigners who have learnt the language. Heine, the great German lyric poet of the XIXth century, learnt the language with the sole aim of reading Hungarian poetry. Very few foreigners feel such a strong motivation nowadays. For the others translations offer the only access to Hungarian literature.

When translated, however, Hungarian poetry loses much of its characteristic flavour: its rich imagery, the impact of its figures of speech, the easy flow of its flexible vocabulary, the musicality of its alliterations and assonances and the wide spectrum of decorative adjectives. The harmonious sequence of the clear vowels and melodious consonants together with the unusual rhythm caused by the accentuation of the first syllable in each word produce the impression of a cool, pure, harshly beautiful musical language, somewhat reminiscent of the untamed freshness of the folksong.

The same applies, to some extent, to prose. Historic novels, the most popular genre in Magyar prose, are just as difficult to translate as poetry. Jókai, Gulácsy, Makkai and Fűry wrote epic poetry in prose form. The enjoyment of their art not only

requires a knowledge of the imagery and semantics of the language, but also a deep understanding of the emotional patriotism of the Hungarians and, by the same token, some knowledge of their history: the bitter pride and sorrow of their romantic Christianity and their constant struggle in the defence of an ungrateful Europe.

The understanding of the Hungarian character, art and history will, therefore, make it easier for the reader of this book, to enjoy even translated Magyar literature, such as the extracts quoted in the Appendix.

It is a remarkable fact that, while Hungarian literature is hardly known outside its country of origin, foreign authors have always been translated into Hungarian with an amazing degree of understanding. Shakespeare has always commanded the Hungarians' admiration and the greatest poets made it their task of pride to translate some of his works. More Shakespeare plays are produced in Budapest than anywhere else in the world. French, Italian, Spanish and classical Greek and Latin poets are also popular and available in excellent Hungarian translations. The mysticism of the Germans and Russians does not seem to appeal to the same extent. The Magyar language is a particularly suitable vehicle for poetry translations. It can render both modern metres based on accent and ancient metres based on syllabic quantity and rhyme because of its flexibility of vocabulary and its clever use of prefixes and suffixes.

Another barrier between Hungarian and non-Hungarian readers is that of evaluation and emphasis. To the Hungarian, poetry is the bread and butter (bread and wine?) of the arts. No festival is complete without a recital of poetry. Editions of poetry run to the hundreds of thousands in a nation of 14 million and even so there seems to be a constant shortage of classics. There is not always a clear dividing line between prose and poetry. Many passages of novels, short stories and essays read like poetry and descriptive, narrative poetry — a very popular genre — often resembles, in its contents if not in its form, passages in novels or short stories.

Hungarian writing — poetry or prose — is the most cherished heirloom of Magyars everywhere in the world: it represents for them that mystic, unidentifiable notion which is Hungary.

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Three poems, chosen from poets of various periods and differing themes, are given in the Appendix in Hungarian and English in order to give the reader a foretaste of the great wealth of Hungarian poetry.

The first, "*THE END OF SEPTEMBER*",¹ is a love-elegy by the fiery poet of the Hungarian struggle for freedom, *Sándor Petőfi* (1823-1849). He wrote it to his young bride on their honeymoon, one of the few poets who wrote love poems to his own wife. His melancholic prophecy in the poem came true: he died in battle not two years afterwards and his wife did "abandon his name" — she remarried a few months after the poet's death.

The second poem is from *Endre Ady* (1877-1919), the mercurial genius of modern Hungarian literature. He was a lusty, melancholic, scolding poet of fiery images and the possessor of a vast vocabulary (some of it of his own making). In the vivid poem entitled "*THE OUTCAST STONE*", he expresses his feelings about his impulsive fellow-countrymen.²

In the third poem, "*FOR MY BIRTHDAY*",³ *Attila József* (1905-1937), the tragic modern poet of the city, pours his heart into a defiant satire of his own hopes and frustrations on his birthday — a few weeks before his self-inflicted death.

The beginnings of Hungarian literature

Folk songs, legends, ballads and references in contemporary chronicles bear witness to the fact that poetry and descriptive literature were the constant companions of the Hungarians even before their arrival in the Carpathian basin.

There exist, however, few written texts of Magyar literature before the XVth century. There are two reasons:

(a) With the introduction of Christianity, the King and the Church made Latin the official written language. Chronicles, official documents and laws were recorded in Latin. The art of the Hungarian-speaking minstrels (the "regös" or "igric") was not in favour, as the Church feared that their pagan-inspired songs and legends might endanger the recently, and rather reluctantly, accepted Christian faith. All we find in Latin chronicles of these times are some scornful references to the "silly songs and legends" of the minstrels.

(b) The second reason — a more tragic one — is that Hungary was twice devastated during her history, in the XIIIth,

then in the XVIth - XVIIth centuries. No one knows what literary treasures were destroyed during these periods.

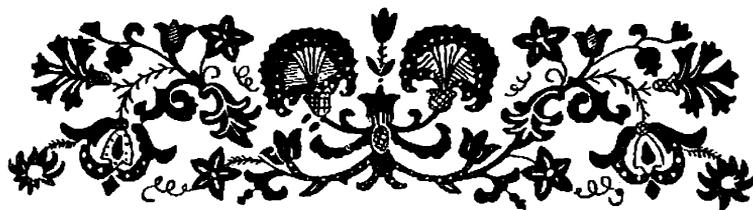
It is beyond the scope of our examination to study the Latin literature extant in the chronicles of the first five centuries of Christian Hungary, though they present the picture of a very rich medieval and Renaissance civilisation. The Latin poems of the humanist bishop, Janus Pannonius (Csezmicei) (XVth century) were well-known in the humanist world.

The earliest surviving text in Hungarian dates from the end of the XIIth century. It is the "Funeral Oration", written by an unknown monk. It displays remarkable qualities of style, proving that Magyar language literary activity must have reached a fairly advanced degree at that period.

The earliest written example of Hungarian *poetry* is the "Lamentations of the Blessed Virgin" ("Ómagyar Mária Siralom") from about 1270. It is an inspired hymn, characteristically in honour of the Virgin Mary, "Our Lady of Hungary". Legends of Saint Margaret (daughter of King Béla IV) and of other Hungarian saints were also written in Hungarian at the end of the XVth century.

Book printing began in Buda in 1473 (three years earlier than in England), while the first university was founded in 1367 (20 years before Heidelberg, Germany's oldest university). The first Hungarian translation of the Bible dates from 1430. A verse legend of Saint Catherine and hymns about Saint Ladislas are among the texts extant from this period . . . The impressive Hungarian re-creation of the popular "Dance of Death" poem in a codex (copied and possibly translated by a nun called Lea Ráskai) illustrates in its rhythmic prose the poetic potential of the medieval Magyar language.

Secular topics are treated in a few remaining examples of court poetry of the XVth century. The satire of Ferenc Apáti (around 1520) directs its witty criticism against prelates, aristocrats and peasant alike, unwittingly heralding the imminent great tragedy of Hungarian history, the defeat at Mohács (1526).



8. THE MAGNIFICENT TWILIGHT

(The era of the Anjou and Luxemburg Kings)

After the death of the last Árpád King (Endre III) lengthy disputes followed in Hungary, but eventually the majority of the nation accepted Charles Robert of Anjou, Prince of Naples, as its ruler.

This was a fortunate choice, for *CHARLES ROBERT* (1307-1342), a descendant of Árpád on his mother's side and of the French Capetians on his father's side, became a good king and the founder of a short-lived but truly Hungarian dynasty. At the beginning, many rich magnates opposed his election and Charles had to enforce his rule with arms in several cases. In this task he received the enthusiastic support of the lesser nobles and freemen, who had been suffering from the tyranny of the semi-independent feudal barons during the preceding decades. Charles rewarded his loyal followers with the highest offices, giving the nation an entirely new, honest government of poor nobles.

In the characteristic Hungarian variant of the medieval State structure, the free members of the nation owed services to the King not through feudal tenure of their estates (for it was their freehold) but by virtue of the King's power, conferred on him by a nation which had freely elected him. A "feudal" relationship in the western sense existed only between the free members of the nation and their serfs, who worked as tenant (share-) farmers, paid one tenth of their produce to the landlord (share-) farmers, paid one tenth of their produce to the landlord and one tenth to the Church. (They were better off than today's taxpayers). Otherwise they were free to change their landlords or enter ecclesiastical or military careers (as many did).

Charles Robert reorganised the nation's finances. By the economical use of the country's mineral wealth — almost all of it crown property — he made the Hungarian florin the most stable currency in Europe. Related by birth to the French and Spanish dynasties and by marriage to the Polish and Czech royal families, he used his family connections to extend Hungary's authority well beyond the frontiers. Under his rule Hungary became the most respected power in Central Europe, a leader of economic and political alliances such as the Czech-Polish-Hungarian bloc, a medieval "common market" created to counter German economic domination. The Polish-Hungarian alliance proved itself also during the common campaigns against Poland's pagan enemies and the quarrels with the Teutonic Knights.

His sumptuous court at Visegrád (north of Buda) represented the best of the western and Hungarian ideals of Christian chivalry and became a centre of late-gothic culture and knighthood.

* * *

Charles Robert's son, *LOUIS I (THE GREAT)* (1342-1382), inherited the crown of a prosperous, strong country. He was called the last of the knight-kings, a truly Christian monarch, like his ideal, Saint Ladislas. He saw the danger of the Osmanli Turks' advance in the Balkans against the declining Byzantine empire. So he improved on his father's somewhat hesitant foreign policy and created in the south and north-east of Hungary a protective belt of vassal states under various degrees of Hungarian supremacy. After King Casimir's death, the Poles invited him to their throne (1370). During this successful (albeit short) personal union, the dual empire represented a giant zone of peace and prosperity between the east and west of Europe.

Ironically the Anjou kings of Neapolitan origin had little success in their dealings with their own home-state, Naples. Louis' brother, Andrew, had inherited the Neapolitan throne but he fell victim to the intrigues of the court (and of his own Neapolitan wife) and was eventually assassinated. Louis reluctantly led two campaigns into Italy to punish the criminals but achieved only partial success.

Louis was also a patron of arts and sciences, founder of the first Hungarian university at Pécs (1367).

Appointed by the Pope "Captain of Christendom" to head a crusade against the Turks, he led several victorious campaigns against them in Bulgaria with his Hungarian troops. He could



A knight of Louis I's court (mid-XIVth century)
(From the gothic statues found in Buda castle, cf Chapter 10).

not fully exploit these victories as the other Christian nations gave him no aid in the "crusade". Venice, the great sea-power actually supported the Turks.

Louis died in 1382 after a long illness, probably leprosy, which he had contracted during his campaigns. He had no male heir: only two daughters.

In the century which saw the twilight of the Middle Ages, the beginning of the Hundred Years' War at Crécy (1346), the internal wars in Italy, France and England, the struggle between the Pope and The Holy Roman Emperor, the "Black Death" (1347-1350) and the Turkish landing at Gallipoli, a prosperous and strong Hungary was the bulwark of stability, strength and peace in Europe.

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As a mark of particular respect for Louis, the nation accepted, with some reluctance, the succession of twelve-year old *Mary* to the throne of her father. Her younger sister, Hedwig (Saint Jadwiga), inherited Louis' Polish throne. While the barons were looking for a suitable King-Consort for Mary, the temperamental dowager queen, Elizabeth, ruled in her daughter's name. This impetuous woman and her friend, the Palatin Gara, caused a series of tragic incidents. A pretender to the throne, the Neapolitan prince Charles of Durazzo, who was the favourite of the Croatian barons, was killed in Queen Elizabeth's court under obscure circumstances. In revenge, the Croats abducted the two queens and eventually killed Elizabeth. On being freed from her captors, Mary married Prince Sigismund of Luxemburg, the son of the German emperor, who was thus accepted as King-Consort and, after Mary's death, as the ruling king.

SIGISMUND (1387-1437) was an energetic young man. Some Hungarian nobles refused to accept him for a long time, such as the legendary Kont of Hédervár and his 30 fellow nobles, who were executed for treason.

Soon after his ascension, Sigismund organised a crusade against the Turks with the participation (for the first and last time) of the great western powers: the French, the English and the Poles. However, the battle of Nicopolis (1396) was lost for the crusaders for lack of co-operation among the various Christian contingents.

After the defeat, Sigismund turned his attention to Germany. After the crown of Bohemia, he soon gained the crown of Germany and in 1410 was elected Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Upon his election he presided at the famous Council of Constance, trying to heal the ravages of the schisms, quarrels and internal wars of Christianity. He had the Czech reformer, John Hus, executed. This roused the Czechs and caused a long, bloody civil war in Bohemia, Sigismund's home-country.

Sigismund used Hungary's considerable economic, military and political resources in obtaining his goals in Germany, but cared very little for the country which gave him his strength. He gave up his plans to chase the Turks out of Europe. It was a tragic omission, as it was during this period that the Mongol ruler, Timur Lenk (Tamerlan) inflicted several crushing defeats upon the Turks in Asia and it would have been relatively easy to chase them out of Europe.

During his last years Sigismund tried to make up for his "absenteeism" and to befriend the Hungarians, but the resentful Magyars never quite accepted him as a truly Hungarian king.

* * *



János Hunyadi († 1456)

"We were enemies, but nevertheless, his death grieves me for the world has never seen a greater man".

(Sultan Mohammed II)

After Sigismund's death the Hungarians turned to their traditional friends, the Poles, and invited the brave Prince *Wladislas* (1440-1444) to the throne. Wladislas accepted the invitation and immediately undertook the struggle against the Osmanli empire with the assistance of the greatest Hungarian general, *JOHN HUNYADI*. This great soldier of the Turkish wars was a professional officer of humble origins. By 1441 he became the commander of the southern forces of Hungary and the richest landlord in the country. He used his immense fortune

to finance his campaigns against the Turks. His victories contained the Turkish advance for decades. Hunyadi was the typical representative of the militant Christian Hungarian who united religious fervour with ardent patriotism.

By 1443 he had pushed the Turks back to Bulgaria and restored the rule of the friendly Serbian king, an ally of Hungary. Wladislas, following the Pope's call for yet another crusade, attacked the Sultan's army at Varna, in Bulgaria (1444). Though the Turks outnumbered the Hungarians and their allies four to one, Hunyadi's strategy seemed to win the day. Then the impetuous King charged the Turks at the head of his Polish and Hungarian cavalry — and lost his life as well as the battle. Hunyadi himself escaped with difficulty.

The infant Ladislas V (1445-1457) was elected king and during his infancy Hunyadi was elected Regent.

Sultan Mohammed conquered Byzantium (Constantinople, today Istanbul) in 1453. The Pope again urged the western nations to raise a crusade but this time no one came: the Hungarians were alone as Hunyadi wrote to the Pope: “. . . we only, left alone, have endured the fury of the war . . .” The Sultan led his huge army, reinforced with heavy artillery (a new feature on the battlefields of Europe) against Hungary.

Hunyadi and his friend, (Saint) John Capistrano, a Franciscan monk, hastily organised the Hungarians while the Pope ordered prayers all over Europe. Hunyadi's strategy, the blood of the Magyar soldiers and the prayers triumphed once more: the Turks were utterly defeated at *Nándorfehérvár* (today Belgrade) in 1456 and Europe could again breathe a sigh of relief. The Pope ordered that the bells should toll every day at noon in memory of Hunyadi's great victory.

There was rejoicing in Europe — but mourning in Hungary. On the morrow of the victory Hunyadi and his friend, the survivors of countless battles died, victims of the plague . . .

9. DARKNESS AFTER NOON

(Hungary's history from 1456 to 1540)

Matthias' "flamboyant" Empire

After Hunyadi's death in 1456, the king, Ladislas V, succumbed to the intrigues of his courtiers and perfidiously arrested and executed the great general's elder son, László. This understandably angered the nation so much that the king had to flee to Prague, the capital of his other kingdom, Bohemia. He took with him Hunyadi's second son, Matthias, as a hostage. A few months later king Ladislas died — ironically of the same plague that had killed John Hunyadi.

The nation, tired of the misrule of foreign kings and foreign courtiers, decided to elect the son of the country's greatest soldier as sovereign.

MATTHIAS I (or MÁTYÁS HUNYADI) (1458-1490) was only eighteen when he returned to Buda to become the country's greatest king. The brilliant and energetic young man began his reign by breaking up the cliques of some magnates opposing his election. He did this by using a judicious mixture of charm, strength and cunning: he simply moved his enemies to higher offices — away from the court, the seat of power. Thus he made his family's arch-enemy, Ujlaki, the king of Bosnia, Hungary's southernmost province. He had more trouble with his friends, especially with his domineering uncle, Mihály Szilágyi, who had been appointed regent during Matthias' minority. Matthias, made it abundantly clear that he was mature enough to rule alone and disposed of his impetuous uncle by making him Captain-General of the Turk-harassed southern frontier.

Then he dealt with the marauding Hussite Czech raiders in the north, recruiting the useful elements among the defeated raiders into his future mercenary army. From these adventurers he eventually formed the greatest mercenary troop of his era, called the "Black Army".

He stabilised the nation's *finances* by imposing upon the entire nation a fair and equitable system of taxation, based on each person's income, and complemented the royal revenue with the yield from the mines and crown-estates. In addition to these regular revenues, he also imposed special levies when the need arose. He was thus able to finance the "Black Army" and conduct his many campaigns without undue loss of Hungarian blood. The treasury, not the poor, bore the burden of his immense social and cultural expenditure, which raised the nation's economic and cultural standard above that of the rest of contemporary Europe.

Matthias understood the importance of urban development. By strengthening the status of the towns he added a powerful "third estate", the town burgesses to the other two estates (clergy and nobility). Promotion into this new "middle class" was made free to any serf who had the will and talent to improve his status. Had peaceful times followed Matthias' reign, Hungary would have built the most equitable and progressive social system in Europe. His legal reforms protected the lower classes, allowing them the right to appeal against the sentences of the baronial courts to the royal courts ("Tabula", "Curia"), which were headed by professional jurists (often of lower-class birth) or by himself.

Matthias' *foreign policy* disappointed those who expected him to continue his father's crusades against the Turks. He realised that the Magyar nation was not strong enough to chase the Turks out of Europe without bleeding to death in the process. He was also realistic enough not to count on the "help" of the West. So he prepared a long-range plan, aiming ultimately at possession of the crown of the Holy Roman Empire so that he could use the empire's military might to deal with the Turkish menace. As Hungary had never been a member state of the Empire, he tried to gain the crown of Bohemia which was one of the member states with the right to vote in the election of the Emperor. Thus he fought a long war against the king of Bohemia and his allies and also against



King Matthias (Mátyás) I (1458-1490)

Emperor Frederick, allying himself first with the one, then with the other. Eventually he managed to obtain the Bohemian crown — without the right to vote — and then he also conquered Austria from the Emperor — without decisively defeating him.

He also led short, mainly defensive campaigns *against the Turks* and managed to build up a defensive belt in the south

with the inclusion of such vassal states as Bosnia, Serbia, Wallachia and others governed by his troublesome friends or placated enemies. He refused, however, to commit his beloved Magyars or expensive mercenaries to adventurous campaigns deep in Turkish territory.

Matthias, a son of the *Renaissance*, was a true and intelligent patron of art and literature. He had the castle of Buda rebuilt in French "flamboyant" style and gathered his humanist friends to court. His third wife, Beatrice, brought from Italy many artists and scientists who helped Buda to become one of the great centres of humanism. Matthias' library of illuminated codices, the "Corvina", was one of the largest in Europe. As part of his cultural programme, he founded a university in Pozsony (the third Hungarian university). Book printing began in Buda in 1473.

Matthias' apparent passivity in regard to the Turkish question, his obscure western policy and the increasing financial burdens resulting from his policies led to unrest among the magnates. Though Matthias managed to deal with these dissensions in his autocratic way, he soon found himself friendless among the barons.

Increasing loneliness cursed his *family life, too*. His first wife died while they were both still children. His second wife, Catherine, the daughter of the Bohemian king, died in childbirth together with the new-born child, a son. His third wife, Beatrice d'Este, Princess of Naples-Aragonia, bore him no children. Between his marriages he met Barbara Krebs, the daughter of the mayor of Breslau, who bore him a son. Matthias took his illegitimate son to his court, giving him a fine education and the title of a duke (John Corvinus). Not having any legitimate children, it was his wish to make the intelligent, courageous boy his heir and successor — an arrangement not unusual in those times.

By 1490 Hungary was a powerful state with a population of 4 million (the same as England) and Matthias, now fifty, was the most influential ruler of Central Europe. His far-reaching plans seemed to be approaching their realisation: he was king of Bohemia, Austria was a Hungarian province, the Turks had been chastised and he had powerful friends supporting his imperial ambitions . . . Then, one day, while visiting

Hungarian-occupied Vienna, he fell ill and died under somewhat suspicious circumstances.

The dowager queen and the barons disavowed their previous promises and rejected John Corvinus, who would have made a better king than any of Matthias' successors — just as his mother would have made a better queen than any of Matthias' wives.

National self-destruction

The magnates wanted a weak king and the queen wanted a husband. Wladislas Jagello obliged in both respects and so he was elected king under the name *Wladislas II* (1490-1516). He married Beatrice in a sham ceremony, which was later annulled, disbanded the "Black Army" and promptly lost Austria. Otherwise he obligingly left the government of Hungary to the barons. The magnates, possessed by a madness of self-destruction, swept away the fine state structure of social justice and equal taxation, stripped the country of practically all revenues and defence ability. Instead they concentrated on endless and barren parliamentary debates with the representatives of the lower nobility over decisions which were rarely formulated and never respected. They then attempted to impose further tax burdens on the lower classes and the burgesses who refused to pay.

Then, in the face of the increasing Turkish menace, the Primate-archbishop, Cardinal Bakócz, received, in 1514, the Pope's authority to raise a crusader army. The poor nobles, over-taxed citizens of the towns and the serfs flocked to the army, which was placed under the command of an able officer, the Székely nobleman, *György Dózsa*. The barons became suspicious, besides they did not want to lose their serfs at the time of the harvest. They tried to restrict the recruiting and to penalise those who had already signed up. Soon clashes began and the crusaders (who called themselves "kuruc", a distortion of the Latin "cruz": "cross") turned against the barons and prelates. Soon a full scale civil war broke out in the south between the barons of this region and the "kuruc". The Primate hastily withdrew the crusaders' commission but Dózsa still considered himself the king's commander and continued fighting the magnates who obstructed the army's movements with their own private troops. Battles of increasing

vehemence were followed by retaliations of increasing cruelty on both sides. A few weeks later, the inexperienced kuruc army was crushed by the regular army of the governor of Transylvania, John Zápolya. The victor — who was destined to become one of the most fateful figures of Hungarian history — punished the captured leaders with the savage cruelty usual in the rest of Europe in those times, but which the humane Hungarians have found monstrous.

Subsequently the revengeful Diet — for once unified — inflicted various *restrictions upon the serfs*, whom they held responsible for the uprising (which, however, had been led by noblemen, burgesses and lower clergy). The worst of these measures was the abolition of the serfs' right to change their domicile. They were not condemned to "eternal servitude", as some prejudiced historians have mistranslated the words "perpetua rusticitas" (: "eternal farmwork"). The true meaning is that of their exclusion from other occupations, especially higher ecclesiastical careers. This was a censure of Cardinal Bakócz who was the son of a serf (as were many high dignitaries in Hungary). We also have to remember that at that time no European serf had a free choice of landlords; and they were all restricted to "farmwork", having much less chance than their Hungarian counterparts to gain higher offices. All these vengeful articles of law did was to deprive the Hungarian serfs of certain privileges they, and they alone, had enjoyed before the uprising.

The jurist Werbőczy codified these and preceding laws in a remarkable legal work called "*Tripartitum*", a three-volume compendium of the *Hungarian constitution*. The work defines the "free nation" (i.e. the nobility), as one body, the "members of the Holy Crown", the symbolic source of all law and power. The nobles elect the King and invest him with sovereign powers through the coronation. Legislation is exercised in the Parliament (Diet) by the King and the nobles.

The less theoretical — and more unfortunate — part of the *Tripartitum* summed up the privileges of the nobility. Apart from repeating the legal safeguards already codified in the Golden Bull of 1222, the compendium emphasises that the noble does not pay taxes and has no obligation to render military service, except in a defensive war. The right to resist "unconstitutional" royal acts was also reaffirmed.

The flexible interpretation of “defensive military service” and the exemption from taxes were soon to bring catastrophic results to the nation, which was by then facing the greatest trial of its existence: the onslaught of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. The Tripartitum and the nobles’ vengeful attitudes, were stripping the nation of its ability to levy taxes, to raise an army and, especially, to rely on the patriotism of the oppressed peasant in war and peace.

Mohács

LOUIS II (1516-1526) was only ten when he succeeded his father. During the years of his minority, his relatives and courtiers ruled the country in his name.

In 1521 Nándorfehérvár (then a Hungarian frontier town, today Belgrade), the scene of Hunyadi’s great victory fell to the Turks. Even this key defeat failed to arouse the nation, which was in the grip of constant power struggles. The treasury was empty (the nobles did not have to pay taxes, the others could not). The barons refused to believe in the seriousness of the Turkish danger and refused to mobilise their own troops. Pál Tomory, a former professional soldier and Franciscan monk, now archbishop of Kalocsa, had been appointed Captain-General of the southern frontier. He had only his own finances and the help of the papal nuncio, Burgio, Hungary’s true friend.

The destructive power-struggle was in no way an isolated phenomenon in Hungary. All over Europe class and religious wars, peasant wars and ferocious retributions of apocalyptic magnitude heralded the downfall of the gothic order of the Middle Ages. These senseless wars surpassed Hungary’s mercifully short peasant war of 1514 both in cruelty and in duration. Any European country would have collapsed if the Turks had been able to turn their armies against them. It was Hungary’s geographical tragedy to be situated in the path of the Ottoman aggression.

Convinced by Tomory of the magnitude of the danger, the intelligent young king began to send desperate messages to the Christian rulers of the West, asking for help against the Moslems. “His Most Catholic Majesty”, Charles V, who ruled the largest empire the world had yet seen, the Holy Roman Empire, promised to pray for him, but he was too busy fighting France’s Francis I (“His Most Christian Majesty”). Francis had already

made a secret pact with the Turks, urging them to attack Charles' empire through Hungary. Henry VIII ("The Defender of the Faith") replied that he was having "domestic trouble" — the understatement of the century. The important "Christian" sea-power, Venice, had long been in open alliance with the Turks.

Hungary stood alone, divided, paralysed, condemned. In the spring of 1526, Sulciman the Magnificent set out from Istanbul with an army of 300,000 to conquer the world. The Ottoman army crossed into Transdanubia practically unopposed. King Louis left Buda at the head of his guard — a pathetic 4,000. Some prelates and barons, on learning this, mobilised their own troops and joined the king. John Zápolya, the richest baron of the country, had 40,000 troops but showed no haste to join the royal army.

The Hungarians, totalling about 26,000 with late reinforcements and armed with 50 old cannon, decided to wait for the Turks on the plain of *Mohács*, near the Danube, in Transdanubia. Having decided that it would be "unchivalrous" to attack the Turks while they were struggling to cross the marshy terrain, they watched with detached interest the deployment of the huge army and 300 heavy cannon, on the advantageous hilly part of the plain. They also decided not to wait for Zápolya's army but to attack the Turks immediately. Whatever other faults the Hungarians have, timidity has never been one of them.

It was the *29th of August, 1526*, the Feast of Saint John the Martyr. When the Hungarians decided to attack, the young bishop Perényi remarked: "Let us rename this day the Feast of 20,000 Magyar Martyrs."

Tomory's impetuous cavalry (the "hajdus") attacked and broke through the first Turkish lines. In that moment, the young King, (he was 20), exuberant with the strength of his newly found confidence, took command of his guard and led them against the Turks, who remembered the lesson of Varna, where Louis' predecessor lost the battle for the Hungarians by his suicidal charge. The Turks concentrated on Louis' bodyguard, which was wiped out, and the wounded King escaped with great difficulty. The attacking Hungarian cavalry was then cleverly lured into the murderous fire of the Turkish cannons and the musket fire of the elite Janissaries. Tomory and the other leaders died fighting. In little more than two hours the

battle was over. About 16,000 Hungarians died and two thousand taken prisoner were killed after the battle. The rest escaped under the cover of a sudden rainstorm. Two archbishops, five bishops (including the young prophet, Perényi), and most of the high dignitaries were among the dead.

The wounded king was on the run, escorted by two of his bodyguards. As he crossed a flooded creek, he fell off his horse and his heavy armour dragged him down. He drowned and his body was only found days later. The last Jagiello king of Hungary has joined the “twenty thousand Magyar Martyrs.”

Two kings

The loss of life at Mohács was not irreparable. Hungary still had larger, undefeated armies. However, the fact that the King and most of the nation’s leaders were lost had such a paralysing effect that Hungary never recovered from the effects of this disaster.

Many of the rich magnates and nobles, who had so criminally mismanaged the country’s affairs, had atoned for their mistakes in full. They did not know how to live for their nation — but they certainly knew how to die for it magnificently. Unfortunately, while many brave young men died, some of the evil old men managed to survive to continue their destructive intrigues, such as the Palatin, Báthori and the enigmatic Zápolya. The lesser nobility of the counties had sulkily stayed away from the battle — as did the peasants. They were all to pay later: the burden of the coming 160 years was to be borne by the poor nobleman and the peasant.

The battle of Mohács was a strictly aristocratic parade, the last, splendid, foolhardy charge of medieval knights led by a brave, young King. There was hardly an aristocratic family left without at least one fallen hero at Mohács. Some great families were completely wiped out at Mohács and in the years following it.

Suleiman could not believe that this small, suicidal army was all that powerful Hungary could muster against him, so he waited at Mohács for a few days before moving cautiously against *Buda*. The young queen had already fled with her German courtiers to her brother, Ferdinand of Austria (without even waiting to find out whether the king was dead or alive).

Buda was undefended; only the French and Venetian ambassadors waited for the Sultan to congratulate him on his great victory. The Turks ransacked Buda and returned to the south with 200,000 slaves — the first of the millions who were to pay for the sins of their ancestors. Zápolya and his army — almost twice the size of the King's — stood at Szeged, practically watching the Turks move home with their booty.

Zápolya had always wanted to be King. Now with Louis II dead, he had no difficulty in convincing the few remaining magnates that he was the right choice for a King. He was crowned by one of the surviving bishops as *JOHN I* (1526-1540). He was the last of the Hungarian-born Kings — and probably the least. That foolhardy Polish boy at Mohács was much more of a Hungarian than the cruel, cunning, cowardly John could ever hope to be.

Queen Mary's brother, Ferdinand of Habsburg, promptly claimed the Hungarian throne by virtue of his double relationship to the deceased King. His sister, Mary, was Louis' queen and Louis' sister, Anne had married Ferdinand. Thus Anne was the only "Hungarian-born" queen in the nation's history. The fact that she had lived in Vienna since her childhood, that she could not speak a word of Hungarian and that she hated Hungarians made the irony even deeper: the daughter of a "Hungarian" king (Wladislas II), she was the pretext for the Habsburgs to gain their 400 years' rule over Hungary.

Ferdinand managed to gain the support of a large segment of the aristocracy (many of whom had promptly deserted the cowardly John) and soon he, too, was crowned as *FERDINAND I* (1526-1564).

Thus the country had two kings — a divided and confused leadership. The barons continued their self-destructive policy of squabbles and quarrels while the Turks stood in the south, probably wondering what could have happened to Matthias' great nation. This tragic division, more fatally than Mohács, ended five centuries of Hungarian independence. The entire Carpathian basin became a power-vacuum, the open freeway of external aggressions.

Thus Mohács, the "tomb of our national greatness" (as the Hungarian poet put it), also marked the end of a peaceful, independent Central Europe.

10. THE SPLENDOUR, THAT WAS...

(Hungarian art before the sixteenth century)

The ornamental articles of metal, horn and leather found in the graves of the *Magyars' ancestors* show a remarkable degree of artistic interest and talent. One can detect a strong Caucasian (Alanian)-Iranian-Mesopotamian influence upon the basic Turkic-Ugrian motifs.

The richest collection of such articles is the so-called "Nagy-szentmiklós treasure". These articles are believed to have belonged to one of the pre-settlement Princes. They show the *Magyars'* highly developed artistic taste, an interesting synthesis of cultural influences of the migration period. This characteristically Magyar style is different from that of the Central European neighbouring peoples.

The graves of the Avar-Magyars of the VIIth-IXth centuries in the present Hungarian settlement area also show a high degree of decorative artistry, akin to the famous Scythian metal ornaments with Mesopotamian-Iranian inspired figure symbolism.

The earliest Hungarian settlements in the Carpathian area were often built on the sites of Roman towns. The settlers frequently used stones, carved capitals of columns and other material taken from the impressive remnants of Roman buildings.

The influence of the western Christian art style, called *ROMANESQUE*, dominated the architecture of the first churches and castles, built in the Xth century, such as the Arch-abbey of Pannonhalma and the royal castles of Esztergom and Székesfehérvár. The *Byzantine* influence was also considerable in ornamentation, but sometimes also in style, as was the case of the first Gyulafehérvár cathedral in Transylvania. The best



Gothic fragment (Buda castle, XIIIth-XIVth century).

surviving examples of the later Romanesque style are the churches of Ják, Zsámbok and Lébény (of the XIIIth century).

Some fragments of Romanesque and early Gothic fresco painting are found in the ruins of the Esztergom castle and in the undercrofts of some village churches.

Early French-Burgundian *GOTHIC* reached Hungary during the reign of Béla III (1172-1192), who married a French princess.

Gothic *SCULPTURE* survived in some places after the Mongol devastation (1241) mainly as a decorative element and relief-carving. The first sculptors in the modern sense were the

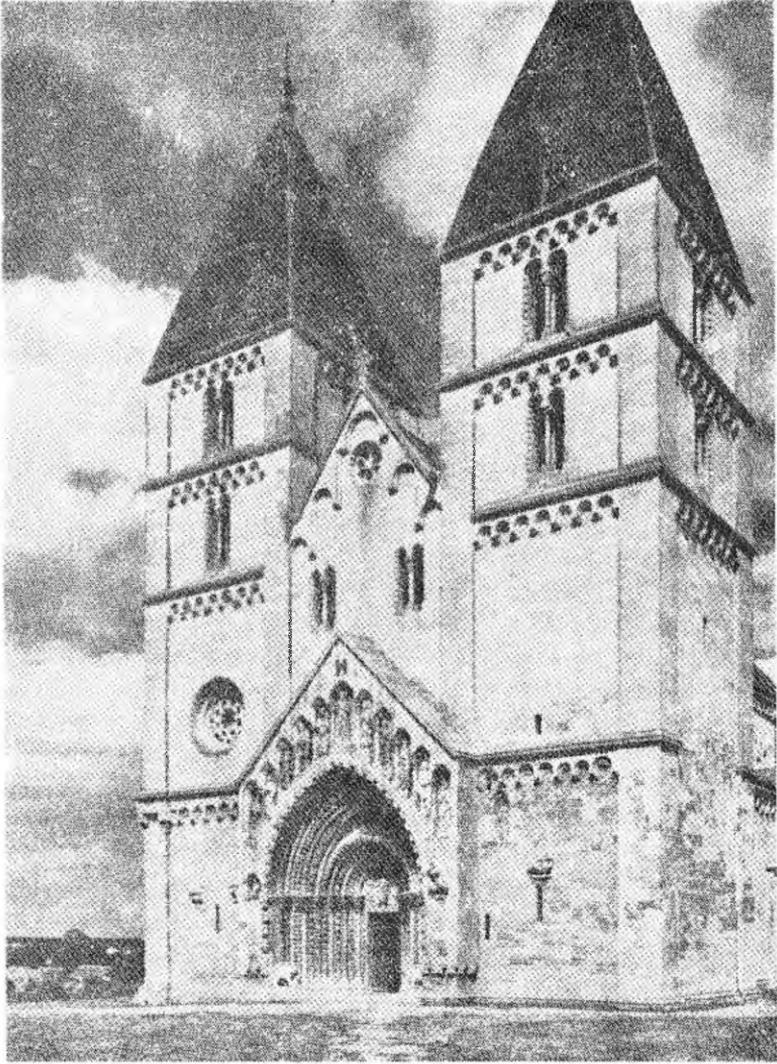
Kolozsvári Brothers, who made the first free-standing bronze statues around 1370. Only one of the monumental statues has survived, the equestrian statue of Saint George (in Prague). They were probably the creators of the silver "herma" of Saint Ladislav (in Győr). The large number of pre-Renaissance stone sculptures found recently during excavations in Buda castle show a remarkably high degree of artistic taste and workmanship. They prove that Hungarian artists of the time of Louis the Great (1342-1382) possessed consummate technical mastery and originality of expression in creating true portrait-sculpture; and this in an era (long before Donatello) when sculpture was still little more than an ornamental extension of architecture.

The characteristic gothic art of *miniature-painting* left fine examples in the "Illuminated Chronicle" of Miklós Medgyesi (1370).

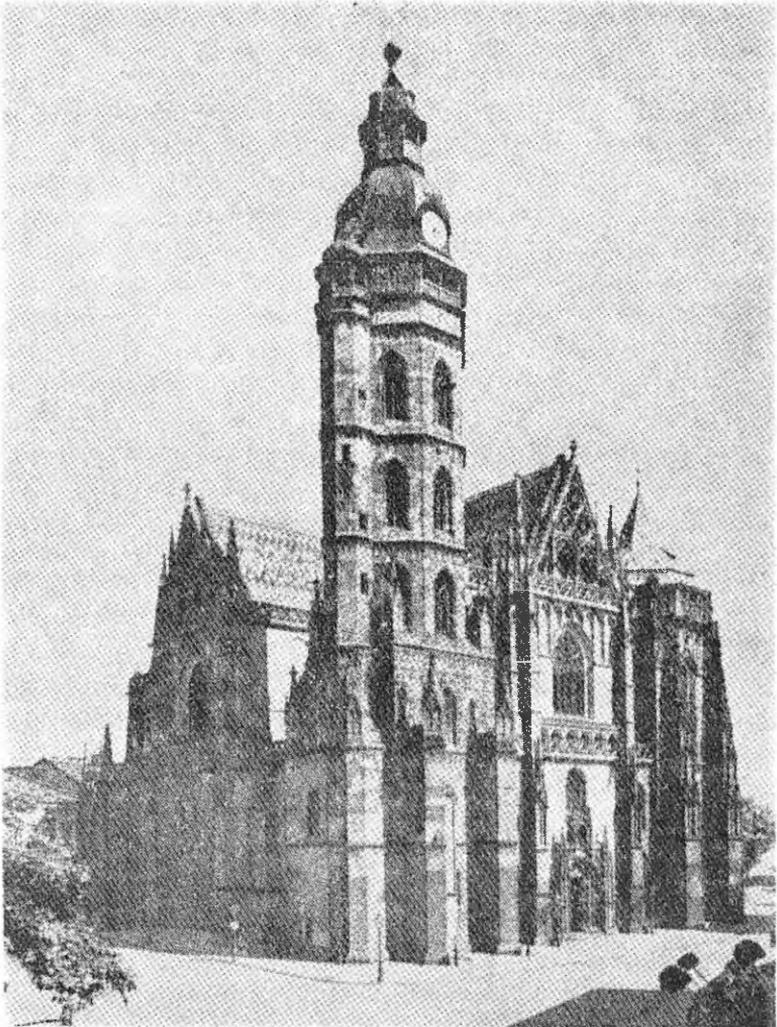
Some beautiful examples of the High Gothic period have survived in the areas not devastated by the Turks, such as the cathedrals of Kassa, (1395), Kolozsvár and Brassó. The royal castles of Visegrád and Diósgyőr and later Buda were built in late gothic-early Renaissance style during the reign of the Anjou kings (XIVth century). Late gothic painting flourished under Sigismund (early XVth century). Well-known Hungarian painters of this period were Thomas Kolozsvári, Jakab Kassai, Pál Lőcsei and the greatest master-painter and wood carver, who only signed his work with "M.S." Beautiful examples of decorative gothic sculpture can be seen in the Bártfa and Kassa churches together with some remarkable wood-carving by some of the above mentioned artists. While most gothic structures show French influence, some churches in the west of the country were influenced by the Austrian-German gothic style.

Wood-carvings and panel painting, forms particularly suited to the Hungarian taste, have survived in many village churches, often the work of anonymous folk-artists. Hungarian *goldsmiths* developed the "filigree enamel" technique, creating a singular style of their own which they used on chalices, hermae and book-covers (Suky-chalice, XVth century).

King Matthias (1458-1490) was a lavish and knowledgeable patron of the arts. Hungary experienced the full impact of the *RENAISSANCE* under his reign, especially after his marriage to the Italian princess Beatrice. Many Renaissance artists worked



The Abbey of Ják.
(Built between 1230-1256)



Saint Elizabeth cathedral, Kassa.
(Built between 1385-1402)

in Matthias' court and directed the rebuilding of Buda castle in "flamboyant" French gothic style with Renaissance ornamentation; they also worked on the Cathedral of Our Lady (the "Coronation" or "Matthias" church). An increasing number of talented Hungarian artists worked under these Italian masters and gradually took over. At the same time, Hungarian artists went to Italy to develop their talent, for instance the well-known "Mihály of Pannonia".

At the height of the Renaissance, in Matthias' later years and during the period before Mohács (1526) both the aristocracy and the people used Renaissance inspiration in building, painting and wood-panelling. Examples are found in the carving of some Transylvanian churches, and in wood-carving in the so-called "Báthori Madonna". In industrial arts and crafts the synthesis of Italian and Hungarian inspiration became more and more evident.

The inspiration of Renaissance art — so close to the pomp-loving artistic soul of the people — spread well beyond the "flamboyant" gates of Buda castle. It soon conquered the imagination of the peasant, for whom it seemed to revive the reflection of a long-forgotten eastern exuberance of colours and shapes. In its many facets, folk-art still preserves this Renaissance inspiration to the present day.

During the Turkish wars, artistic activity existed only in the non-occupied areas. In the western frontier area Italian influence prevailed (Siklós), while in the north German-inspired gothic coexisted with Italian Renaissance until the arrival of the Catholic-Austrian inspired Baroque.

In Transylvania, under the independent Princes, a late Hungarian Renaissance style developed, the "*TRANSYLVANIAN RENAISSANCE*"'s a colourful synthesis of western and Hungarian urban and folk artistry. In the large cities of Transylvania, and in the country castles and even in village architecture, the copious use of flower-motifs gave this style later the name of the "Flowery Transylvanian" style. The Renaissance ornamentation was enriched even more by Turkish motifs, blending with Magyar folk-motifs into a distinctive Magyar-Transylvanian folk art.

Renaissance art, born in princely castles, reached the poor villages and has lived since in the Magyar peasants' royal hearts.



The Virgin Mary and Elizabeth.
(By M.S., around 1500).

Most of the great creations of these periods were destroyed by the Mongols and the Turks. By a cruel turn of fate, the areas left untouched by these destroyers were allotted to the succession states in 1920 under the Treaty of Trianon. Thus Hungary today possesses but a few pathetic relics of the splendour that was Hungarian art during the first seven centuries of the country's existence.



II. WHERE EAST IS WEST

(The people, customs and folk art of the
Transdanubian region)

Settlement, towns

Transdanubia — the region “Beyond the Danube” (in Hungarian: “Dunántúl”) is the area enclosed by the Danube and Drava rivers and the foothills of the Alps. It was once a province of the Roman Empire called Pannonia. The ruins of the Roman cities still attracted the Magyars who settled there after the VIIth century: they often built their towns on the sites of Roman centres and used stones from Roman temples when building their cathedrals. The ornate sarcophagus of Saint Stephen was, for instance, made from an ancient Roman tombstone. This treatment compares interestingly with the Turks’ use of the sarcophagus. They threw the King’s body out of it and used it as a horse-trough.

Transdanubia had the only “open frontier” of the former Hungarian Kingdom, which was enclosed by the Carpathians and the large rivers in the south. This geographic factor has brought about a stratification of regional characteristics among the Magyars born and educated in Transdanubia. They have always represented the search for western culture, Christianity (Catholicism), love of art, science and western technology. In politics they usually sought the ways of peaceful co-operation and understanding as opposed to the fighting spirit of the Great Plains Magyars or to the astute and proudly independent spirit of the Transylvanians.

We shall mention some towns and regions of particular historic or cultural interest.

PÉCS, in the south of the region, the largest and probably the oldest town in Transdanubia. It had been a Celtic settlement before the Romans, who named it "Sopianae". Saint Stephen founded one of the first bishoprics here and the cathedral was built on the ruins of an earlier Christian basilica. The first Hungarian university was founded here in 1367. Near Pécs lies the old castle of *Siklós* with its gothic chapel and Renaissance ornaments. The castle-fort of *Szigetvár* bears witness to the heroic battle in 1566 when 1000 defenders held up Sultan Suleiman's immense army for weeks. *Mohács* on the Danube was the scene of the great military disaster in 1526.

Further to the north lies *SZÉKESFEHÉRVÁR* the old royal city. Saint Stephen called it Alba Regia and established his royal capital here. This city and its magnificent basilica remained the coronation and burial place for some 36 kings. Parliaments met here until the XIVth century. At the end of the 160 years of Turkish occupation nothing remained except the ruins of the old basilica, blown up by the Turks. They had ransacked the royal tombs and thrown out the bodies. To the north is the small town of *Zsámbék* with its beautiful XIIIth century Romanesque abbey.

ESZTERGOM lies on gently rolling hills on the south bank of the Danube. In Charlemagne's time it was the easternmost outpost of the Empire, called "Oster Ringum". This name was later magyarised in its present form. After the settlement of the country this city became the seat of the ruling chieftains and remained the Árpád kings' administrative capital during the Middle Ages. The hill is crowned by the massive basilica, Hungary's largest church, built in the XIXth century. The left aisle incorporates the so-called "Bakócz chapel", the only intact Renaissance structure in the country. The town itself contains the Christian Museum in the Primate's Palace, rich in early works of Hungarian and Italian masters.

GYŐR is situated on the banks of the Danube at the confluence of two smaller tributaries. Built on the site of Roman Arrabona, it became one of Saint Stephen's early bishoprics. Among the few remaining treasures of the city is Saint Ladislas' silver herma, an invaluable example of XIVth century Hungarian Gothic art. South of Győr lies *Pannonhalma*, the Benedictine Arch-abbey, founded in the Xth century.

In the north-west of the region, near the historic fortress-town Komárom, lies the small township *KOCS*. During the XVth century, the wheelwrights of the town began to build a horse-drawn vehicle with steel spring-suspension. This “cart of Kocs” (pron. “coach”) as the Hungarians called it (“*kocsi szekér*”) soon became popular all over Europe. Practically all western languages borrowed the Hungarian town’s name to describe this new type of vehicle: “coach” (“*Kutsche*”, “*coche*” etc.)

On the western border lies *SOPRON*, built on the site on an ancient Celtic centre. This is probably the only city in Hungary never destroyed by an invader. Near Sopron lies the town of Fertőd-Eszterháza with the sumptuous castle built by the Eszterházy princes in the XVIIIth century. The great composer Haydn spent many years there as court musician. Around *Kapuvár* a characteristic folk-art style has remained in some villages. The Lébény Benedictine abbey was built in Romanesque style in the XIIIth century.

In the south-west area lies the city of *SZOMBATHELY*, the Roman Sabaria. It had been an important Christian centre before the Hungarian settlement. Nearby, at *Ják*, stands the largest remaining Romanesque building in Hungary, the twin-towered abbey built in 1256. North of Szombathely, near the border lies the town and castle of *Kőszeg* where the Turks’ huge army was held up for a month by a small garrison of defenders who thus frustrated the entire Turkish campaign and saved Vienna. (1532).

The *Bakony* mountains lie north of the lake Balaton. The dense forests once used to serve as hiding places for the “*betyár*”, the outlaws who play an eminent part in the folklore of this area. *Zirc*, in the heart of the region, is a Cistercian abbey, founded in 1182.

Veszprém, the picturesque (cultural and religious) centre of the Bakony region, was one of the first bishoprics founded by Saint Stephen.

In the *Balaton* lake area one finds many places of cultural and folkloric interest. The Benedictine abbey of Tihany has preserved, in a Latin document (1055), the oldest recorded Magyar language words. The tomb of Endre I has remained intact in the crypt of the abbey. Keszthely, on the western shore of the lake, is the site of Europe’s first agricultural college.

Population, folk-culture regions

The population of Transdanubia is predominantly Magyar. After the settlement this region was inhabited by the most important tribes. The few remnants of autochthonous pre-settlement population were soon assimilated (some of them had already been related to the Magyars anyhow). The German settlers invited by the Árpád kings formed the only exception in this otherwise homogeneous population. The eastern half of the area suffered from the 150 years of Turkish occupation but the western part remained more or less undamaged.

Within the area, we can distinguish certain *folk-culture regions*, small districts with characteristic folk traditions. They are the results of certain geographical, social and historical conditions which imposed isolation or a certain type of occupation on the population.

South of Szombathely, near the Austrian border, is the area of about a hundred villages called *GÖCSEJ*. This region, formerly isolated by swamps, has kept many old customs, songs, dances and artifacts connected with their mainly pastoral occupations, and a characteristic dialect.

A smaller group of villages near the western border is inhabited by the descendants of frontier guards, possibly Pechenegs (Besenyő: a race related to the Magyar), settled here in the IXth century as frontier guards. This occupation is remembered by the name of the area: "*ŐRSEG*" ("Guards"). A watchtower-like superstructure on some houses is a reminder of the inhabitants' original occupation.

The *SÁRKÖZ* district, near the Danube in the south-east, is a fertile area, inhabited by prosperous peasants who spend their surplus revenue on colourful costumes and artifacts — they could do worse with their money. We shall look at the Sárköz folk art later in this chapter.

One region merits our closer attention: the "*ORMÁNSÁG*", consisting of about forty villages situated on the plain stretching along the northern banks of the Drava river. The floods of the unruly river had created large marshy areas around the slightly elevated hills on which the villages were built. The peasants have developed a unique method of protection against the floods. From the earliest times they have built their houses

on flat, heavy oak-beams placed on the surface instead of foundations dug into the ground. The house itself had solid timber walls with an adobe cover, held together by crossbeams parallel to the foundation beams. The outbuildings were built the same way. When the floods began to threaten the village, they placed rollers under the foundation beams, harnessed teams of oxen before the house and moved it to higher ground.

The most important — and tragic — social development began at the end of the XIXth century: the size of the arable land which formed the property of the former serfs (liberated in 1848) was limited and there was no way of enlarging it. As the young peasants were unwilling to leave their village and marry elsewhere, the heads of the families began to impose the disastrous policy of “egyke” (“only child”) upon the community, and this soon became the accepted social rule. It became customary to have only one child per family and to prevent the birth of the others by abortion. When this single child grew up, he or she was married to another single child and the two family properties were united. Sometimes the “egyke” died before marriage. As a result, whole families died out and their properties were then bought up by new settlers, mainly Germans.

There is a moral in this somewhere for the advocates of “zero population growth”!

Another — happier — result of the villagers’ long isolation was the creation of a characteristic folk-culture. The families’ preoccupation with the happiness of their few children resulted in the encouragement of playful and artistic occupations for them. The village often rented a house (there was no shortage of vacant houses . . .) as a “playing house”, a sort of “youth centre” where the children could play and the young adults could meet. Thus there was no need to go to another village to look for a spouse. Adolescents’ entertainments included such tempting games as “falling into a well”: a lass or lad had to be “pulled out of the well” by the means of giving a kiss to the “rescuer” for each fathom given as the depth of the well. Consequently, Ormánság seemed to have the deepest wells in Hungary — and the least number of young people leaving their villages to marry elsewhere. There may be a lesson here too. . .

The period of isolation also created a treasure of folklore. Stories about the “betyárs” are still popular, especially the ones

about Patkó Pista, who disappeared without trace, leaving behind a number of lovers and legends. At carnival times young lads in humorous disguises invade the villages and play practical jokes on people (such as taking a coach to pieces and re-assembling it in some inaccessible place). At New Year's Eve girls play guessing games, hoping to foretell the future, especially their future husband's name. (They need not bother: their parents probably know it already . . .)

Many customs are connected with death and funerals: a sadly symbolic trait among these dying people. Professional mourners are engaged at funerals, old women who praise the dead in long, wailing songs. The relatives themselves are not supposed to show grief. After the funeral a lavish wake is held. The folk attire is characterised by white: older women and the mourners often wear white. These customs seem to be evocative of ancient Asiatic rituals, just as the custom of the movable house seems to be reminiscent of nomadic times. The predominance of white in folkwear has resulted in exceptionally high standards of cleanliness.

Folk art

Transdanubia, Hungary's West, has produced folk art just as genuinely Magyar as the eastern regions, but this art shows a harmonious synthesis of the ancient, characteristic Magyar elements and of the effects of western influences: here Magyar East met Magyar West.

Western medieval (Gothic) art left its mark in geometrical patterns used in ornaments. The Renaissance left its deep impression here, too, as everywhere else among the Magyar people. The Italian-Renaissance flower clusters and colours are found on folk dresses everywhere. The arcaded porches of the farmhouses and the herdsmen's carvings both show Renaissance design. Because of the closeness of the Habsburg-Catholic influence, the effect of the Baroque is more marked than elsewhere and can be seen in ornamental furniture carvings in the south. Even some Turkish influence can be detected in folkwear ornamentation, though the Turks were hardly their favourite people.

Some of the memorable forms of folk art are: *CARVING*, which used to be a herdsmen's art and flourished mainly in

the Bakony region and in Göcsej. The materials were wood, horn and bone, and the objects were mostly those used by the shepherd: staves, musical instruments, vessels.

The *POTTERY trade* in some western towns dates from the times of the settlement and has followed the medieval system of guild-towns: the entire population of each town practised a particular craft.

The *Sárköz* district is the richest centre of *DECORATIVE FOLKWEAR*. Their special type of weaving (pillow-slips, bedspreads, tablecloths) covers the entire cloth with patterns showing birds, hearts, stars and geometrical patterns. The people are also accomplished embroiderers, their main colour scheme being white on black (the combination preferred by the equally aristocratic Matyós in Northern Hungary).

For their dresses the *Sárköz* peasants use expensive material: brocade, cambric, silk. The most characteristic part of their dress is the fourfold silk shawl. The colour scheme and shape of the head-dress indicate the age and status of women. The shift (of Renaissance design) is made of very fine material called "száda".

At *Kapuvár* (in the north-west) even some men wear traditional costumes. The girls wear blouses instead of shifts. A shawl tied to the shoulders is worn under a velvet or silk blouse. The skirt (brocade or velvet) is folded in large pleats. The apron is iridescent silk with lace trim. Three to four bead strings are worn around the neck.

The originally Slovak village *Buzsák* is famous for its fine embroidered pillow-slips.

Ornamental art is often used on festival occasions with a symbolic meaning. In the *Sárköz*, the "tree of life" — an artistic carving of a tree — is given to a young bride. This motif is of Mesopotamian origin. When a young woman dies, all her fine dresses are buried with her. At *Csököly* the shroud and the funeral pillow show the woman's age and status. When a young, unmarried girl dies, elements of the wedding ceremony are combined with the funeral customs and she is buried in a bridal dress. Some expensive articles are only used once a year, such as the "Christmas cloth" or the glazed dishes used at weddings.



Sárköz folkwear

Folk customs

Transdanubia has preserved a rich folklore in spite of the western influence and the Turkish wars. This miraculous survival of old tradition, going back to pagan times, can be understood if we remember the particularly strong Magyar character of the population of this region. This ancient folk element resisted German influence and Turkish oppression with the help of the natural environment, which favoured the isolation and preservation of small settlements and cultural regions. We shall mention here some of the characteristic Transdanubian folk customs.

Minstrelsy ("regölés") still exists in the western counties. Around Christmas and New Year, boys or men form groups and go from house to house to sing their good wishes. (Cf. Chapter 6). The minstrels carry strange musical instruments: a stick with a chain and a pot covered with taut, thin skin with a long reed stuck in it. When drawn with a wet finger, this produces a strange, droning noise. Other instruments (bells etc.) are sometimes added. The "regös" often dress up as animals: bulls, stags and goats.

The charming custom of the *Whitsun-Queen* procession is undoubtedly of pagan origin. (Cf. Chapter 6). In some areas there is also a "Whitsun King" election or rather a competition among the lads for the title. The winner holds the title for two days with such privileges as free drinks and first dances at weddings and balls.

The Mohács "*buso*" procession claims to celebrate the anniversary of a Hungarian victory somewhat overlooked by orthodox historians. It is said that, shortly after the defeat at Mohács (1526), the population of the town hid in the swamps from the Turks. Eventually they came out of hiding wearing frightening masks of demons and monsters and chased the Turks out of their town. So today the people dress up at carnival time and parade in the streets wearing frightening masks.

There are many lighthearted customs at carnival time, such as the "*mock-wedding*" of Zala county, an elaborate comedy during which a boy and a girl, selected by their respective friends and wearing masks are "married" in a mock procession and ceremony. They remove their masks at the dance following the "wedding". Only then do they recognise each other. Though

there is considerable verbal licence during these games, no rough play is allowed.

Vintage festivals are popular around lake Balaton, which is surrounded by world-famous vineyards. The process of gathering the grapes — “szüret” in Hungarian — became a word synonymous with good cheer and celebrations. Sumptuous meals, dancing and drinking conclude each day of the rather tiring work of grape-harvesting.



12. THE SONG IN HIS HEART

(Lyric folk poetry and folksong)

Hungarian folk poetry is almost always connected with singing and there is hardly any folk music without an accompanying text. This inter-relationship between poetry and music has imposed its mark upon the *structure* of the lyric folk poem. As a breath-unit could not easily extend over more than four syllables, the basic unit of the folk poem is the line made up of four syllables, often followed by another four-syllable or a shorter unit. The first verse of an ancient folksong (recorded in Transdanubia by Bartók) illustrates the point:

*“Felszállott a páva
Vármegyeházára,
Sok szegénylegénynek
Szabadulására.”*

*“Fly my haughty peacock,
Fly to yonder prison.
Where the captives languish,
Set them free, o peacock. . .”*

The rhythmic division is greatly facilitated by the fact that in Hungarian stress falls on the first syllable.

The oldest and still frequent metre is the eight-syllable line, divided into two four-syllable units:

*“Megérem még azt az időt “I shall live to see you one day
Sirva mégy el házam előt. . .” Pass my house bitter-weeping. . .”*

The strophe usually contains four lines. The rhyme is arranged in couplets but it is sometimes omitted when the rhythm alone is sufficient to carry the musical frame.¹

The most frequent *theme* is, of course, love. Happy, contented love, however, rarely inspires the folk-poet. When it does, the poem is short, simple and usually made up of quick, short breath units.² The love of the mother and the mother's love

for her child is also a source of inspiration — a rare occurrence in folk poetry.³ The sorrow of hopeless love is more frequent. Often it is the peasants' rigid moral code or the parents' insistence on choosing their children's future spouses which causes the lovers' unhappiness.⁴



*"You choose me and I choose you,
My flower, my darling. . ."* (Folk song).

The sorrow of parting remains a recurring theme of many folk poems.⁵ Compulsory military service in the army of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy, usually in some non-Magyar province of the Empire, had little appeal for the peasant boys.⁶ Emotional patriotism is a frequent motif, mostly in the context of a farewell song or with melancholic references to the Magyar people's sufferings.⁷ The two great freedom wars have created folk poetry of a more exuberant nature.⁸

The Magyar peasant loves *nature*, the soil which is rarely his, the animals which he seldom owns. He envies the freedom of the birds and the colour of the flowers satisfies his eternal longing for beauty. He feels that he is one with nature and

the animals; the billowing waves of corn and the forested hills can interpret his dreams, joys and sorrows.⁹

The recurring reference to the phenomena of nature leads us to the understanding of the deeper motivations of the Magyar lyric folk poem. The peasant observes nature's eternal logic and knows that the plants and animals obey the unchanging laws to love or to live. The devious tragedies of human destiny do not follow the simple ways of nature. So he asks: why? He becomes a philosopher and pours out the philosophy of his heart in a few moving words.

Thus his beloved river Tisza teaches him the melancholic lesson of the passing of time:

"Down went the Tisza — never shall it turn back — My Love went away — never shall she return. . ."

It is easier to bear his sorrow when he finds an image taken from his environment and uses it as a simile and a consolation. This is why many folk poems begin with a picture of nature, sometimes without any apparent connection with the theme. On a second look, this seemingly irrelevant image may present a surprisingly apt, symbolic parallel: *"There is no forest without boughs — my heart is never without sorrows. . ."*¹⁰

About 100,000 folk poems and songs have been recorded in Magyar-speaking areas of the Carpathian basin. This incredible treasure is, unfortunately, hardly accessible to those who cannot understand the language. Folk poetry, more than any other branch of literature, loses its flavour in translation. Fortunately, there is always the melody, which offers an eloquent interpretation.

The Appendix contains the complete English text of the poems mentioned in this chapter and added specimens offer a cross-section of Hungarian lyric folk poetry.¹¹ The reader is advised to listen to one of the many excellent recordings of these songs, comparing their musical content with the lyric theme indicated by the English translation.



*"Snow-white my Rose is, snow-white she is wearing,
Turn to me, o turn to me, my bride, my darling."*

(Wedding folk song)

13. "BETWIXT TWO HEATHENS. . ."

(The struggle against Turkish aggression and German oppression: the XVIth - XVIIth centuries)

Defeated, divided, doomed

John I (Zápolya) (1526-1540) and *Ferdinand I (Habsburg)* (1526-1564), the rival kings of Hungary began a long internecine warfare against each other. The Sultan, *Suleiman*, took the role of the amused spectator. He knew that Hungary was neither willing nor able to resist and therefore found it unnecessary to establish a permanent Turkish occupation. The Turks left Hungary unoccupied for fourteen years after Mohács, while the two kings performed their strange antics in their "fools' paradise", an "independent" Hungary.

Ferdinand, King of Hungary and Archduke of Austria, had already raised his eyes toward the crown of the Holy Roman (German) Empire. He regarded Hungary only as an expendable buffer-province. John I too was only interested in his own advancement.

Many details of the struggle of the two kings are unclear, unexplained or unimportant. The following events represent only the most grievous of the self-inflicted wounds which hastened the downfall of the once mighty state of Hungary.

After his coronation Ferdinand made a half-hearted attempt at taking Buda, the capital, from John. To Ferdinand's great surprise, John fled at once to his relatives in Poland. Once out of reach of his opponent, he collected what he thought were his wits and came to a disastrous resolution: he offered his fealty to the Sultan in exchange for help against Ferdinand! He was probably influenced by the Poles who had been paying

a tribute to the Sultan, and by the French, whose Francis I had been an ally of the Turks for years. John Zápolya failed to realise that Poland and France, both at safe distance from the Turk. could afford to "ride the tiger", while Hungary could not.

Suleiman magnanimously granted John's request, and accepted his homage on the very field of Mohács, on the third anniversary of the battle . . .

He then chased Ferdinand out of Buda and handed the capital back to John. Later, in 1529 and 1532 Suleiman led his troops against Vienna, but had to call off both campaigns, defeated by the weather (Ferdinand's ablest general). On the second occasion, the small fortress of Kőszeg defied his army for weeks during autumn until it became too cold and rainy to move on. It is not generally known that the Turks relied on camels to transport the heavy supplies of their army and European winters were too cold for these animals.

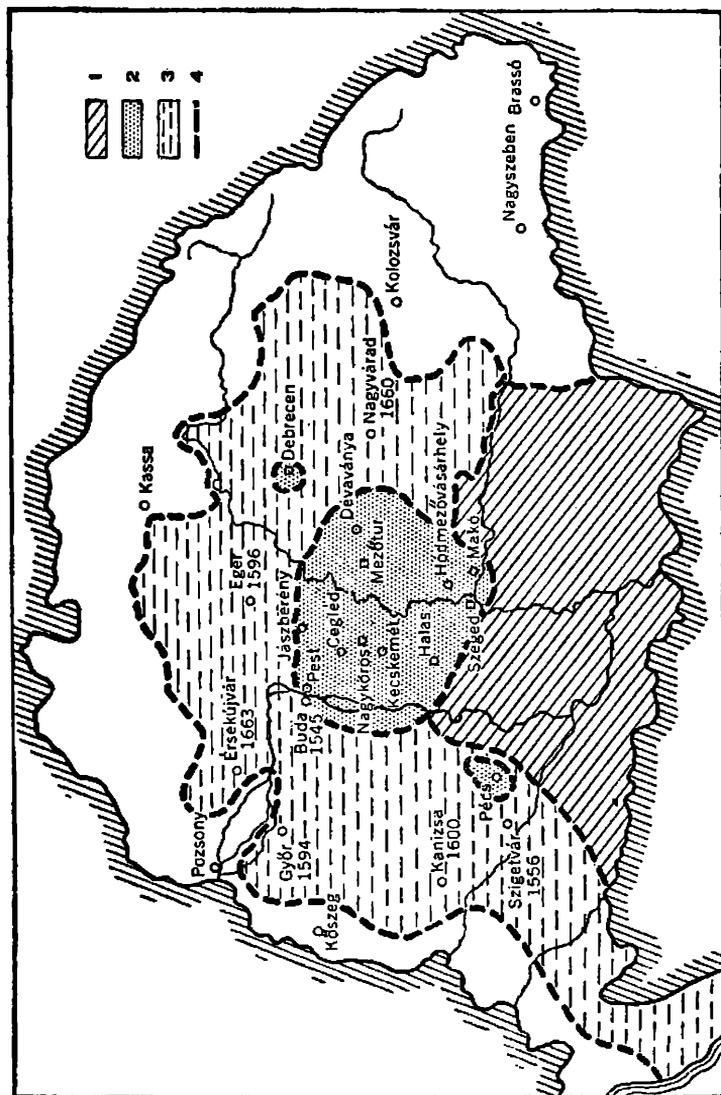
These abortive campaigns did, however, frighten Ferdinand into negotiations with the Sultan. The result was that the Habsburg king of Hungary agreed to pay the Sultan a yearly tribute in order to be left alone.

In order to save what was left of the independence of Hungary, John's able advisor, "*Frater*" (*Brother*) *George*, a Pauline monk, arranged a secret pact between the two kings in 1538. John was to "enjoy" the Hungarian throne alone, but after his death Ferdinand was to inherit the crown. (John was not married at the time). The ink was hardly dry on their signatures when both kings set about breaking the pact. Ferdinand hastened to report the secret agreement to Suleiman, in order to discredit his opponent. John promptly married the Polish princess, Isabella, who duly bore him a son. He then immediately repudiated the pact and appointed his infant son heir to the Hungarian throne. John died soon afterwards (1540), after having entrusted brother *George* with the unenviable task of enforcing his son's claim.

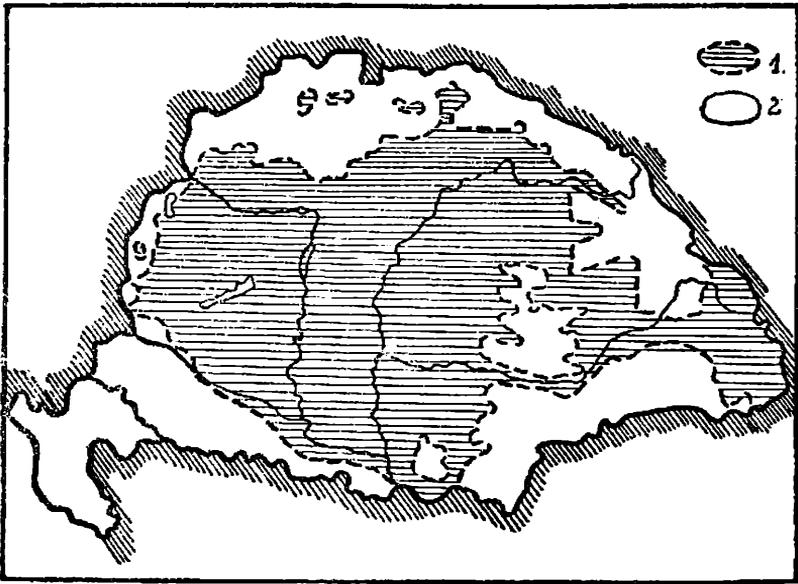
On hearing of John's death, the Sultan moved to Buda, occupied the royal castle (1541) and set up a permanent Turkish military occupation in the centre of Hungary, which he annexed to the Ottoman (Turkish) empire.



“Turkish marauders in Hungary” (A XVth century German drawing)



The three zones of Turkish devastation: 1. total (in the South), 2. heavy (in the centre), 3. erratic (in the fringe areas). 4. Farthest limit of Turkish occupation.



1. The shaded areas show the predominantly Magyar inhabited area of Hungary in 1500.
2. Uninhabited or sparsely settled by nationalities.

Transylvania

Brother George, the only able Hungarian statesman of the period, arranged with the Sultan to set up a semi-independent principality in the eastern regions of Hungary. This state consisted of the area generally known as Transylvania with some adjoining districts and towns. The infant *John Sigismund* (1540-1571), John's son, was accepted as Prince ("Fejedelem") at the first Diet of the three Transylvanian nations (the Magyars, Székelys and Saxons). Another Diet in Torda, in 1568 granted complete freedom to all religions in the principality. This was incredibly progressive legislation in the Europe of the XVth century, then in the throes of the bloody "religious wars."

Brother George, the Regent, managed to keep the small country more or less independent by paying tribute to the Sultan (without becoming his vassal) and by remaining on friendly terms with the Habsburg king. He used this fact as a deterrent whenever the Turks became too aggressive. He did not hesitate to take up arms when he found that either the

Germans or the Turks had violated their agreements. Thus he defeated the Turks at Lippa by leading a cavalry charge in person (before becoming a monk he had been a cavalry officer).

Eventually Ferdinand's commander became suspicious of the brilliant diplomat and had him assassinated in 1551. After his death Isabella and the young Prince continued the policy of "peaceful coexistence" with the Turks. After Prince John Sigismund's death, his able commander, *Stephen Báthori* was elected Prince of Transylvania (1571-1586). Báthori kept paying the tribute to the Sultan but his goal was to reunite Transylvania with the rest of Hungary. Unfortunately for Hungary, the Poles elected him king in 1575 and he accepted. He became Poland's greatest soldier-king: he defeated both the Russians (Ivan the Terrible) and the Germans.

The Turkish occupation area

This area, a giant triangle in the centre of Hungary, included most of the Great Plain, the eastern half of Transdanubia and, at various periods, it extended into the lower mountains of the north. The area was a conquered colony of the Ottoman Empire: the indigenous population (called "raya": i.e. "cattle") had hardly any human rights. All land was owned by the Sultan, who gave it to his officers in fief. As no Turk ever settled in an occupied country permanently, the colonists' only goal was the complete exploitation of the people and their produce. Some larger towns survived only because their citizens bribed the Turkish officers and paid exorbitant taxes to the Sultan. Smaller settlements and villages were at the mercy of the Turks and their Tartar and Balkan auxiliaries who looted and raped at will. They took the young people to the slave markets and slaughtered the others, while rich nobles were kept in prison for ransom and systematically tortured in order to hasten the payment of the ransom. During the 150 years of Turkish occupation at least 3 million Hungarians were killed or driven like cattle to the Turkish slave markets.

After Suleiman's unsuccessful attacks against Austria several years of "peace" followed: there were no large-scale campaigns, but the raids along the vaguely defined demarcation line continued. After 1550 the Sultan began to attack systematically the strong fortresses along the demarcation line. Those defended by German troops fell easily, but some smaller forts defended



“The Women of Eger” by B. Székely (cf. Chapter 25)
(Defence of Eger in 1552)

by Magyar troops put up a better resistance. The large fort of Eger, defended by some 2000 Hungarian men and women and commanded by István Dobó, resisted successfully a six-week siege by more than 100,000 Turks in 1552. In 1566 Suleiman's army was again held up by the fort of Szigetvár (in Transdanubia), which was defended by Miklós Zrinyi with 1000 men. Suleiman died during the siege, but Zrinyi and his men could not hold the fort any longer. They stormed out

in a heroic sally and died to the last man. The women and the wounded then blew themselves up in the ammunition tower. During the siege, the Emperor, Maximilian, was waiting nearby with his huge army ignoring Zrinyi's calls for help because it was the height of the duck season and he did not want to interrupt his hunt.

"Royal" Hungary

The western counties of Transdanubia, the northern region and some towns in the north-east belonged to the third of the country which became the share of the Habsburg king of Hungary. Ferdinand I died in 1564. His successor, *Maximilian* (1564-1576) did nothing to stop the Turks. In fact his predatory generals and marauding soldiers soon made the Hungarians realise that the Germans were hardly better than the Turks. The bitterness of the population found its expression in the saying: "between two heathens we bleed for one country." Maximilian's successor, *Rudolf I* (1576-1608), would have settled for peace but the Turks were in an aggressive mood and began the so-called "fifteen years' war." As the Turks were attacking mostly in the general direction of Vienna in western Hungary, Rudolf had to commit larger contingents of his precious troops.

Whether it was "peace" or "war", the fighting along the demarcation line was continuous. The burden of these battles was borne by the soldiers of the "*frontier posts*" manned by Hungarian garrisons ranging from 20 to 200. They fought with tenacious courage and ingenuity as they were very poorly equipped and in case of a major Turkish attack they could not count on help from the Emperor-King's generals. Many of these "frontiersmen" were volunteer nobles for whom fighting the Turk was the only life they knew.

The "golden age" of Transylvania

The unpredictable Prince, *Sigmund Báthori* (Stephen Báthori's successor) (1581-1596) joined the Emperor in the war against the Turks. His able commander, István Bocskai defeated the Turks in Wallachia with the help of the voyvod (Prince) of Wallachia, Michael. Then the Turks counter-attacked in Transylvania and Báthori and his German allies lost an important battle. Sigismund abdicated in favour of his cousin, Cardinal



Prince Gábor Bethlen of Transylvania (1613-1629)

Andrew Báthori. The wily voyvod Michael turned against Andrew and defeated him with the help of the rebellious Székelys, then proclaimed himself Prince of Transylvania (1600). The Emperor rejected his claim and had him and his Vlach troops chased out of Transylvania by the imperial commander, Basta. After a short interregnum, *István* (Stephen) *Bocskai* (1604-1606) was elected Prince of Transylvania and he chased the marauding Germans, Turks, Vlachs and Tartars out of Transylvania. This brilliant soldier decided to reunite Transylvania with Hungary and free the entire country from both Germans and Turks. He

launched a successful campaign against the imperial (German) troops in northern Hungary. The Emperor-King (Rudolf 1) concluded a peace treaty with Bocskai. He acknowledged the independence of Transylvania and granted religious and constitutional freedom to the Hungarians in his (Rudolf's) territory. Soon afterwards, Bocskai arranged a peace between the Sultan and the Emperor, giving a much needed respite to the exhausted Hungarian nation.

Unfortunately, the great soldier-statesman died after only two years of his reign as Prince.

Prince *Gábor Bethlen* (1613-1629) continued Bocskai's policy of "negotiating from strength." He joined the Thirty Years' War on the Protestant side (against the German Empire). Though not entirely successful, he obtained important concessions from the Emperor-King and maintained Transylvania's independence. Under his absolutist, but benevolent rule, Transylvania enjoyed complete religious freedom and a high cultural and social standard unusual in war-torn Europe.

"Royal Hungary" during the XVIIth century

By the end of the XVIth century almost all the Hungarian magnates had adopted Protestantism in protest against the Catholic Vienna regime. This fact only increased the antagonism of the Austrian-German regime against the Hungarians and they began to use forced "Counter-Reformation" as a political weapon. So now the horrors of a religious war were also threatening the nation.

A Hungarian prelate, Cardinal-Archbishop *Peter Pázmány*, and his Protestant friends in Transylvania deserve credit for keeping Hungary out of the bloodbath of the European religious wars.

Cardinal Pázmány, born of a Protestant family, joined the Jesuit order after his conversion to Catholicism and eventually became Hungary's Primate (1616). He convinced the Hungarians that Catholicism was not synonymous with Austrian oppression and that religious debates did not have to degenerate into bloody battles, as in Germany, France and England. His Catholic "Counter-Reformation" used only the weapon of the spoken and written word. He established excellent schools and the university of Nagyszombat. He was a true Hungarian patriot



Count Miklós Zrinyi (†1664)

and the fate of his nation was his foremost consideration. He approved of the independent policies of the Protestant Transylvanian Princes. Under his influence many aristocratic families returned to Catholicism.

The new Emperor-King, *Leopold I* (1657-1705), a pious and bigoted tyrant, was endeavouring to turn the remaining Magyars into Catholic-Germans but he was not interested in chasing the Moslem Turks out of Hungary. A few rich Catholic

magnates were able to conduct limited, individual campaigns against the Turks. The most eminent of these was *Miklós Zrinyi*, great grandson of the hero of Szigetvár. He was the greatest Hungarian statesman and soldier of the century and a talented poet and military scientist. A pious Catholic and a loyal subject of the King he had some liberty to fight the Turks using his own troops — whenever this did not interfere with the imperial policy. Once, when Zrinyi practically forced the cowardly imperial commander into a battle and won it for him, the Emperor immediately concluded a humiliating peace, bribing the Turks with Hungarian territory to stay away from Vienna. Soon after this shameful “peace” treaty, Zrinyi died under very suspicious circumstances. (1664).

Such was the degree of dissatisfaction in Hungary that the (Catholic and Protestant) leaders of the nation began to contemplate the deposition of the Emperor-King, Leopold. These leaders were headed by the Palatine, (the king’s representative in Hungary), *Ferenc Wesselényi*, and they were supported by the Transylvanian Prince and encouraged by France’s Louis XIV. Their aim was to invoke the nations’ constitutional right to “resist”, as codified in the Golden Bull. They had legal and moral justification, as Leopold and his ministers had ignored the Hungarian Constitution. But their plans were betrayed and the leaders brought before a military court in Austria. Wesselényi died before the betrayal, but the others, including Peter Zrinyi, the great hero’s brother, were executed.

Transylvania and the beginning of the “kuruc” uprisings

The military successes of Prince György (*George*) *Rákóczi I* (1630-1648), an ally of the Protestant powers in the Thirty Years’ War were of a rather ephemeric nature. More beneficial were the cultural activities of his princess, *Zsuzsanna (Susanna) Lorántffy*, a lady of remarkable humanistic education and advanced social ideas, a great patron of Protestant education (Sárospatak College).

The Prince *George Rákóczi II* (1648-1660) continued the forceful policies of his predecessors, but with less success. During one of his futile campaigns, the Turks occupied Transylvania and placed a puppet of their own choice on the throne. This practically ended the independence of Transylvania (1660).

The persecution of Protestants and patriots involved in the "Wesselényi Plot" forced many Hungarians to flee from "royal" Hungary to Transylvania. *Imre Thököly*, an able soldier, organised them into troops of freedom-fighters against the Germans. They called themselves "Kuruc", the name Dózsa's crusaders used. With the tacit support of the Turks, Thököly launched lightning campaigns against Leopold's forces in northern Hungary (between 1678 and 1682) and won some victories and useful concessions from the Vienna regime. He had to stop his "kuruc" campaigns after the Turkish defeat at Vienna (1683) and eventually took refuge in Turkey.

The liberation of Hungary

The ambitious Turkish Vezir (Commander-in-Chief), Kara Mustafa launched an offensive campaign against Vienna in 1683. Emperor Leopold was paralysed with fear, but the Pope, Innocent XI, managed to organise a veritable crusade against the Turks. Vienna was saved by its able defender and by the Polish and western armies. After Vienna's relief, the Pope kept urging Leopold and the crusaders to free Hungary. Thus an international army, commanded by the able Prince Charles of Lorraine, continued the counter-attack against the Turks. In 1686 they freed Buda where a large contingent of Hungarian troops (many of them Thököly's former "Kuruc") fought as their spearhead. By 1697 the southern Hungarian frontier was reached: the Turkish rule ended after 156 years.

Through this international victory, the Christian West paid some of its old debts to Hungary. But it was 300 years and 3 million victims too late. Moreover, the Vienna regime regarded its success as a purely Austrian-German victory and treated Hungary as a reannexed province of the empire. It resettled the depopulated areas with Balkan Slav, Vlach and German settlers and allotted the former Magyar estates to Austrian barons. A ruthless process of Germanification began under which Magyar properties were confiscated and resisting nobles arrested or executed on trumped-up charges.

It was not the first and not the last time in history that a country was "liberated" by a great power only to change masters. Hungary was out of the frying pan . . .



"Buda recaptured." (1686) by Gy. Benczur (cf. Chapter 25)

14. THE OTHER HUNGARY

(Transylvania: its settlement, people, customs
and folk art)

Settlement and history

This region of some 25,000 square miles is bounded by the rugged Carpathian mountains in the north-east and south. In the west a thickly forested group of mountains and hills (Bihar) separate it from the Great Plain, to which however several great river valleys provide easy access.

The Latin name, Transylvania, which appeared in the old Hungarian (Latin-language) documents, means "Beyond the Forests" — beyond the Bihar forests as seen from Hungary proper. The Hungarian name, "Erdély", means "The Land Beyond the Forests". The Rumanian language has no word for the land: their name "Ardeal" is a distortion of the Hungarian name.

The region is first mentioned in Roman sources. The rather nebulous "Dacian" empire was defeated by emperor Trajanus (105 A.D.) and held by the Romans until the end of the third century when they evacuated it completely. After them, nomadic tribes (Goths, Gepidac, Huns, Avars and Slavs) settled in the area. At the time of the Hungarian settlement in the IXth century, the remnants of these tribes and the Székelys (of Hunnic or Avar-Magyar origin) populated the area which was, nominally at least, part of the crumbling Bulgarian empire.

In the Xth century, the area was allotted to two Hungarian tribes. The chiefs of these two tribes bore hereditary offices in the Hungarian tribal federation: the head of the southern tribe (probably "Keszi") was the second highest dignitary

("Gyula") of the nation. The Székelys settled in the easternmost part and were given self-government as a tribe of frontier guards.

The powerful "Gyulas" of the southern tribe wished to emulate the head of the largest tribe, "Magyar" (the paramount chief of the Federation) and maintained independent cultural, political and religious contacts with Byzantium. The last "Gyula" actually rose against Saint Stephen's centralising attempts but he was defeated and the King broke the power of the tribal chief.

During the Middle Ages, Transylvania remained an integral part of the Hungarian Kingdom, but because of its relative isolation and strategic position it usually had a "governor" ("vajda") who co-ordinated the territory's administration and defence. During the XIIth century, Germans were settled in the remote areas and granted special privileges ("Saxons").

After the Turkish occupation of the centre of Hungary (1540) the region became separated from the rest of the state and gained a varying degree of independence. King John's son, John Sigismund, was the first Prince of Transylvania. This independence, forced upon the small country, maintained it as the bastion of the Hungarian nation during the 170 years of Turkish and German oppression.

After the failure of Prince Rákóczi's fight for freedom, the Habsburg regime ruled the region as a separate "grand-duchy" from Vienna. It did so against the protests of the Hungarians, who demanded the area's return to the mother-country. The compromise of 1867 reunited Transylvania with the rest of Hungary.

The Trianon Peace Treaty (1920) gave the territory and adjoining districts to Rumania. Of the total population of 5.2 million, 2.8 million were Rumanians (Vlachs), the rest Hungarians, Székelys and Germans. During the Second World War, the Second Vienna Award (handed down by Germany and Italy at Rumania's request), returned about 40% of the area to Hungary in 1940. During the rest of the War, the Soviet Union promised Transylvania to the country which changed sides first (both Hungary and Rumania were fighting on the German side). Rumania changed sides in 1944 and received Transylvania as her reward.

The Rumanian claim to Transylvania

Some Rumanian politicians claim that the Vlachs of Transylvania are the descendants of the original Dacian and Roman population and thus claim Transylvania as their ancestral homeland.

The racial characteristics of the Dacians are unknown, but we know that the Romans evacuated Dacia in 271 A.D. when the Emperor (Aurclius) ordered the entire Roman garrison to withdraw from the untenable and distant province. Contemporary Roman historians report that *all* the Romans left Dacia¹, that no Roman settler remained and that no Roman had mingled with the local population. There is no mention of Dacian or Latin-speaking descendants of the Romans in Transylvania until 1224 when a Hungarian document first mentions Vlach shepherds who began to move into the mountains and spoke a Latin-type language. As a matter of fact, the Rumanian language is partly Latin and partly Slavonic. German historians (not known for their Hungarian sympathies) place the Viachs' original homeland in the centre of the Balkan peninsula² where they lived under Roman rule and probably spoke a mixed Latin-Slavonic language. From there they gradually moved away, a large contingent reaching the Wallachian plain in the XIth century and then Transylvania in the XIIIth century. Under Turkish pressure (XVth-XVIth centuries) many more found refuge in Transylvania. Although the Viachs were not numerous enough in the XVIth century to become one of the "three nations" of Transylvania (Magyars, Székelys and Saxons), they received complete religious and cultural freedom under the tolerant rule of the Princes during Turkish times. They were, for instance, given the opportunity to print books in Rumanian. In fact, during the Turkish occupation of their home country (Wallachia), the only Rumanian-language books were printed in Transylvania.

During the XVIIth and XIXth centuries the Hungarophobic Viennese administration encouraged Vlach immigration and at the same time oppressed the Magyars and Székelys in Transylvania. After the Compromise of 1867, Transylvania was reunited with the rest of Hungary, but the neglect and complacency of the Hungarian administration resulted in the decrease of the Magyar and Székely population as a result of their massive emigration to America. Thus by 1920 the area had a Vlach population slightly in excess of the Hungarians.

Towns and districts with historic or cultural interest

Kolozsvár (Rumanian: "Cluj", a distortion of the Hungarian name). This old city on the Szamos river used to be the capital during independence. It is the birthplace of King Matthias. The city still has many houses built in the typical "Transylvanian Flowery Renaissance" style. The Saint Michael Church is one of the few remaining Gothic cathedrals in the area. The city is the see of the Unitarian bishop of Transylvania. The Unitarian Church was founded by a Transylvanian Protestant preacher and is known only in the United States outside its country of origin.

Szamosujvár, north of Kolozsvár, is the centre of the Armenian community. They were given asylum from the Turkish persecutions in the XVIIIth century.

The *Mezőség* region around Kolozsvár is an interesting Hungarian folklore region with characteristic art and customs. So is the larger *Kalotaszeg* district between Kolozsvár and the Bihar mountains, which consists of about 40 villages. The Magyar population of this region has preserved its customs, folk art and architecture, as well as magnificent folkwear to the present day.

At Keresd, south-east of Kolozsvár, the first books were printed in Transylvania in 1473. The town of *Torda* was often host to the Transylvanian Diet.

Torockó, near Torda, possesses the most sumptuous of all Magyar folk costumes, including some elements of Rhineland folk art borrowed from the neighbouring German settlers. Nearby, the gold-mining region in the Aranyos river valley used to be the centre of the gold and silversmith industry.

Gyulafehérvár on the Maros river, a former Roman centre, used to be the capital of the Magyar tribe of the "Gyula". Its first cathedral was built in the Xth century in Byzantine style. The crypt was the Hunyadis' burial place and the cathedral the scene of the coronation of many Princes.

The easternmost districts are the traditional homeland of the *Székelys*. The largest city is Marosvásárhely with its fascinating "Székely Museum" and Library. Csiksomlyó is the pilgrimage centre of the Catholics among the Székelys. The "Csángós" who live in seven villages in Rumanian Moldavia and Bukovina are Székelys who migrated there in the XVIIIth century. There are today about one million Székelys and Csángós.

Folk art and crafts

Transylvania is the only area where Magyar folk *architecture* is still found in its original form. Larger structures (churches) often combine stone foundations and walls with timber-roof superstructures. Separate timber bell-towers were added to the castles and churches. The timber constructions had to be renewed every two to three centuries but the renovators retained the original style (usually Gothic) of the building. The interior of many churches, especially in the Kalotaszeg area, presents elaborately carved, wood-inlay ceilings, pulpits and pews. The interior ornamentation is usually "Flowery Transylvanian" (Renaissance).

The entrance to the Kalotaszeg or Székely house is usually through an ornamental wooden gate, shingle-capped, carved, coloured or painted, with high side posts. These are called the "*székelykapu*" (Székely gate). In Székely regions the gates are more elaborate; the carved columns are ornamented with flower motifs, allegorical, mythical figures and runic writing. Among the flower-motifs the tulip and rose are the most frequent. They are reminiscent of old pagan symbolism: the tulip represents the male principle, the rose the feminine symbol. Another unique custom in Székelyland is the use of the carved wooden headboards in cemeteries: these are called "*kopjafa*" (lance-tip). The inscriptions are often humorous.

We find some special types of *weaving* in the Kalotaszeg region. The Székelys weave frieze-cloth for their trousers and coats. Their best-known product is the "Székely-rug", made of goat's or sheep's wool, richly patterned. Kalotaszeg is the home of the richest *embroidery*; some of it has free designs and patterns traced by skilled "writing women" (designers). Torockó produces a most elegant embroidery, finished in satin stitch. The Székely embroidery uses gothic geometrical patterns or free design.

In the Kalotaszeg and Székely areas even *men wear folk-costumes* on solemn occasions. They usually wear tight breeches of home made frieze and in winter sheepskin vests or jackets (called "ködmön") and boots. The colour scheme is grey and black-white.

Women's costumes are, of course, more colourful. Young girls wear colourful headgear ("párta") and the dresses are em-



“Kalotaszeg” folkwear and the “Székely gate.”

bellished with embroidery and woven ornamentation. The shirts, skirts and aprons are long. The skirt, called “nuszuly” — often has one or two corners tucked in at the waist, displaying the colourful lining of the shift. The skirt is always covered with an embroidered silk or satin apron. Torockó girls wear strings of beads around the neck to complement their lavish

costumes. The Székelys, the poorest and most practical of these groups, wear simpler, more sombre dresses, with the red and white colours dominating.

Some folk customs

The old customs connected with the collective spinning of the flax-yarns in the *spinneries* have survived in the mountainous areas until the present day.

In the Székely villages, the families rent a house where the women and girls perform the tedious task of spinning during the long winter evenings. There, with the aid of the village lads, they enliven their work with songs, story-telling, games and occasional dances. This arrangement has made the spinnery into a pleasant centre of village social life where work and play find their desirable combination. It provides the young with an opportunity to meet socially under the watchful (but understanding) eyes of their elders. The quality of the hemp-yarn may suffer but the romantic yarns spun may have a more lasting effect.

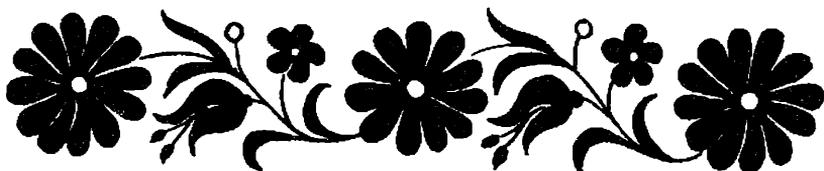
The girls arrive first and they begin their spinning at once as each of them is expected to spin a certain quantity before the games may begin. Eventually the lads arrive, settle down near their respective "girl-friends" (a relationship taken rather seriously) and try to distract the girls with singing and story-telling. If a girl drops her spindle, she has to ransom it in the "customary" way, with a kiss. On completion of the quota (of spinning, not of kissing), the games may begin. Some of these are pantomime-like ballets by which the boys show off before the girls. One such pantomime is the imitation of the usual farming tasks. The boys sing in choir and mime the actions of sowing, reaping, thrashing and selling their corn. Then they end by mimicking how the wives spend on drink the hard-earned price of the corn³.

The boys may sing then the "Bachelor's Song"⁴ in order to tease the girls, though boys entertaining the ideas of eternal bachelorhood (which the song advocates) would hardly entertain girls in the spinnery. This may be followed by games, such as the "selling of the girls", during which each girl is driven to a boy by two lads holding a knotted handkerchief. The songs sung on these occasions retain echoes of pagan love-chants used

to "charm" couples together. The mildly erotic games of the spinnery follow certain strict rules, guaranteed by the presence of the parents. They have learned to tolerate these games and thus make it unnecessary for young people to seek secret meetings out of the sight of their elders (or so the parents hope, anyhow).

The ancient custom of *kaláka* is unique among the Székelys. It consists of mutual, collective help with hard, tedious tasks, to be rendered by each member of the community to each other member. House-building, well-drilling, ploughing and harvesting may be expedited by this system — invented by the Székelys a thousand years before the birth of socialism. Widows and elderly people receive these services without the obligation of reciprocation; the others are expected to pay with equivalent work. Winter tasks, such as corn-husking and spinning are always performed this way.

The Székelys thousand-year-old role as frontier guards has made them into a proud race of battlers. Today they fight the elements of their rugged country, poverty and constant pressure on their national identity from the Rumanian state. Their history has turned them into expert "survivors": a self-reliant people with a devastating sense of humour, unlimited faith in their ability, a deeply emotional love of their language and sincere Christianity. Their rough pastoral occupations have made them into excellent handymen, skilled tradesmen and good businessmen (this last quality separates them from the "ordinary Magyars"). Their wives are resourceful and they rule their families with firmness and faith. Their exuberant husbands need a good measure of discipline, which they accept from their wives — but from no one else on earth.



15. "BEYOND THE BEYOND. . ."

(Folk ballads, tales and legends)

As the plots and themes of most *ballads* are based on events, situations or conflicts brought about by the most common human emotions, love and hate, their origins can rarely be traced to any particular folk-culture. Thus the Magyar ballad owes its peculiar charm to its characterisation, ornamentation, dramatic structure and poetic technique, not to the originality of its subject. Whilst these characteristics draw a clear dividing line between Hungarian and neighbouring Slav and Rumanian folklores, there are some surprising similarities of structure and technique between the Székely ballads, (the majority of the Magyar ballads), and those of the Scots. As no historic or racial ties exist between these two nations, the similarity must be the result of parallel historic circumstances and environment effects of similar nature.

The well-known ballad "*Ilona Görög*" tells of a not very original ruse employed by the mother of a lad in order to gain his girl's love. On his mother's advice, the lad pretends to "die" and then miraculously "comes to life" when the girl appears among the mourners. The rapid, colourful dialogue maintains the suspense to the very end.¹

"*Clement Mason*" treats a legend popular among the Balkan story-tellers. Twelve masons are commissioned to build the castle of Déva (Southern Transylvania) but they can make no progress. They decide to perform a ritual sacrifice by killing the first wife who arrives. Her blood mixed with the mortar would then assure success. It is Clement's wife who arrives first and is killed.

The tune is of the old Magyar pentatonic type, but the subject is not of Hungarian origin. Genuine Magyar tales do not favour

black magic. Special Magyar ornamentation is the repetition of the wife's premonitions, her folk-tale like misinterpretation of the dream which eventually leads her to her doom and her child's pilgrimage to the walls in search of his mother.²

"*Kate Kádár*" is based on a real historic episode: the ballad is the re-creation, in peasant setting, of the story of Agnes Bernauer, the beautiful commoner who married the Prince of Bavaria and was, subsequently killed by her jealous in-laws. In the Magyar ballad, the husband is a nobleman and the wife a poor peasant girl. The girl is killed by her snobbish mother-in-law. On learning this, the young husband commits suicide. The two lovers are united in death and the flowers growing on their graves put a curse on their murderer.³

The "*Wicked Wife*" is a short ballad with a measure of macabre humour. The wife is gaily dancing while her husband is dying. Her daughter calls several times but the wife goes on dancing. When finally the poor husband dies, the wife suddenly begins to grieve — for having lost her breadwinner⁴. This is a Székely ballad. As we said before, the Székelys have a devastating humour.

The "*Fair Maid Julia*" is one of the few ballads in world folklore to use a Christian mystic theme. It is also that rare exception: unique to one folk culture, the Székely. Its deep religious emotion, subtle symbolism and rustic simplicity rank this poem among the greatest ballads of the world. The theme is inspired by the Catholic doctrine of the Holy Virgin's mystic elevation and heavenly union with God. Christian and pagan elements blend in a strange harmony: the reference to a "white, curly lamb" ("Jesus, Lamb of God") is followed by the pagan image: "carrying the sun and the moon between its horns. . ." (a typical "regös" song imagery). The miraculous picture of the gates that "open and shut by themselves" reminds us of the candles in the "regös" song that "light themselves" (cf. Chapter 6). The heavenly "wedding" invitation resembles the traditional ritual of the Székely wedding ceremony.⁵

"*The Clever Prince*" is a charming, gay poetic fantasy, a transition between ballads and folk tales, known in many variants in the Great Plain region. This "Cinderella in reverse" story tells of the search of a disguised Prince for his true love. He

eventually marries the modest daughter of the poor basket-maker and teaches the haughty judge's daughter a lesson. The easy-flowing, short metres and musical rhymes carry the song-tale to its natural happy conclusion. The gay ballad is suited to romantic, pantomime-accompanied presentation to singing or to reciting."

* * *

The tales, myths, legends, religious parables, anecdotes, animal fables and other prose creations of the people are too numerous to be adequately treated here. We can only look at some selected features.

Folk-tales are characterised by certain recurring patterns and ornamental motifs. The beginning usually places the event somewhere "beyond the beyond. . .", "beyond the Glass mountain" or "beyond the Operencian Sea" . . . This last name is a mispronunciation of the name of the Austrian district "Ober Enns" — the westernmost frontier of King Matthias' Hungary. The ending — usually a happy one — describes a wedding, often followed by the wry statement: "And if they are not dead, they are still alive today . . ." Some story-tellers add a touch of personal involvement: "I was there myself . . ."

A specially Magyar character of the tale is the "Táltos", a person (or a horse) possessing magic powers. He reminds us of the "shaman", the medicine-man priest of the ancient Asian religions. The "Táltos" may have been born with his special talents, in which case he is a "Garabonciás", but more often he acquires these gifts by performing certain difficult tasks. The (good) hero may also receive help from a "Táltos horse" which gives him sound advice or practical help, when needed. The "Tündér" (Fairy) appears in many shapes, pleasant or unpleasant. One of the latter is the "Lidérc", a haunting, ghost-like creature. The extracts from a very popular and specially Hungarian tale in the Appendix illustrate some of these features.⁷

Needless to say that the gothic horror tales of "Dracula", vampires, werewolves and zombies are but the figments of Hollywood's fertile imagination and have nothing to do with the earthly folklore of the Magyar people (in Transylvania or elsewhere).

Legends and myths are probably the most ancient type of folklore. Historic legends claim to retell some important event

in the nation's past. Nebulous as they may be, these popular sagas are usually based on historic facts remembered for generations. Many historic events concerning the ancestors of the Magyars were recorded by the pagan priests in runic writing. During the XIth century, these "pagan" writings were destroyed by the Christian priests. Only in the remote areas (Székely region) do we find some ancient runic writing today. After the destruction of the runic records, the ancient legend lived by word of mouth among the people. The legend of the "Blood Treaty", for instance, as told by the peasants of the Great Plain, is based on a historic fact (Cf. Chapter 4).⁸

Among the historic anecdotes the ones connected with King Matthias are frequent. His wise judgments protected the poor and restrained the overbearing rich.⁹

The religious legends are, of course, anthropomorphic: Jesus and Saint Peter visit the Hungarian "puszta" and give lessons in common-sense Christianity to the shepherds.¹⁰



16. THE LOST CENTURY

(Hungary's history in the XVIIIth century)

The first European generation of this century lived under the rule of the absolutistic kings, such as France's Louis XIV, Russia's Peter I and Germany's Leopold I. The second generation saw the gradual weakening of these absolutistic empires. The third generation witnessed the rising of the oppressed in Europe and in America and the birth of new social structures and new, independent nations.

The Hungarians, with their "timeless" contempt for the logic of history, went through these three phases — in the reversed order. They rose against the monolithic German-Austrian Empire at the beginning of the century. They did the right thing — at the wrong time. The Empire had just defeated the Turks and now stood at the zenith of its power under its most Olympian monarch, Leopold.

Defeated, the Hungarians of the second generation watched at first stoically as their once mighty foe began to disintegrate for a rather ironic reason: the Habsburgs, who had established their rule over half of Europe through their clever marriage strategy, had suddenly run out of male heirs. Then, taken in by a clever, pretty queen, the Hungarians rushed to the rescue of the tottering Empire and offered their "Life and blood" to the same monarch whose grandfather had done his worst to wipe the Hungarian nation off the face of the earth. Having saved the Habsburg dynasty — the wrong thing for a Hungarian to do at any time — the third generation of Hungarians decided to do nothing — and they did it at the wrong time. While the rest of the world was busy creating new social, economic

and state structures, the Hungarians turned their back to the world and went into a national hibernation of smug conservatism.

* * *

"Cum Deo- Pro Patria et Libertate"

FERENC (FRANCIS) RÁKÓCZI II (1676-1735) was a descendant of some of the greatest freedom fighters of Hungary. His mother, Ilona Zrinyi, the wife of Transylvanian Prince Ferenc Rákóczi I, was the finest example of patriotic Hungarian womanhood. She held the family fortress of Munkács for three years against the Austrian-German imperial troops after the defeat of her second husband, Imre Thököly, a great "Kuruc" leader. After the fall of Munkács, Ferenc was taken to Vienna with his mother. There they were separated, never to meet again. The young Prince was left to the care of the Magyar-hating Archbishop Kollonich, who had him educated in a Catholic Austrian school. On completion of his studies, Rákóczi returned to Vienna, married a German princess and remained under the watchful eyes of the Emperor Leopold, his godfather.

The handsome, mild-mannered Prince of the Holy Roman (German) Empire, a loyal subject and a devout Catholic who could not even speak Hungarian, seemed unlikely to stir up a Magyar rebellion, so the Emperor allowed him to visit his estates in Hungary.

It may well be that, on his arrival in Hungary, Rákóczi sincerely wished to reconcile his rebellious compatriots with their pious Emperor. Soon, however, the impact of the conditions he saw in Hungary and information gained from his Hungarian friends began to change his views about his "pious" godfather, the Emperor, and his "rebellious" Magyar subjects. He found the peasants and common people burdened with exorbitant taxes, the nobility intimidated and silenced and the imperial soldiers treating the country as their booty by right of conquest. His friends, especially Count Miklós Bercsényi, urged him to lead an armed revolt but Rákóczi agreed only to begin negotiations with the dynasty. In his naive manner he wrote a letter to France's Louis XIV, seeking his sympathy and moral support for Hungary's demands for her constitutional rights.

The correspondence was betrayed and the angry Emperor had Rákóczi arrested and held in the same prison in which his grandfather, Peter Zrinyi had been executed for treason. Rákóczi



Prince Ferenc Rákóczi II (1676-1735)
(By A. Mányoki)
(Cf. Ch. 17)

*"Our weeping is more bitter,
More piercing torments try us.
A thousandfold Messiahs
Are Hungary's Messiahs."*

(Ady)

managed to escape, however, and took refuge in Poland. The Poles offered the crown of their country to him, but he did not accept it.

In 1703 the insurgent peasants of Northern Hungary called upon Rákóczi in Poland to lead their uprising against Leopold. This time, the Prince responded to their appeals and to his friends' urging and returned to Hungary to direct his nation's armed fight for freedom. In his moving manifesto, "Recrudescunt . . .", he recounted his nation's grievances and stated that he wished to fight for the freedom of the entire nation, including the serfs and national minorities. It speaks well for the Hungarian aristocracy of the time that most of them joined Rákóczi's "Kuruc" troops. The nobles and the urban middle class joined them without reservation and so did the Slovak, Ruthene and Vlach peasants, and even the northern Hungarian Saxons. Catholics and Protestants swore allegiance to flags bearing the image of the Holy Virgin, Patron of Hungary and the motto "Cum Deo – Pro Patria et Libertate" (With God for Country and Freedom).

Only some prelates and magnates failed to join the uprising, either because they owed everything to the Emperor, or because they thought that the war was ill-timed and wasteful for a nation which had almost bled to death during the preceding three hundred years. Thus some honest and patriotic Hungarians remained in the imperial camp and their loyalty to both the Emperor and their nation was to alleviate later the sufferings caused by the war.

The bulk of the Kuruc troops consisted of light cavalry led by gallant, able but sometimes undisciplined commanders. They scored some spectacular successes at the beginning of the war but could not hold the occupied territory. More successful was the old general Bottyán in Transdanubia. In Transylvania and on the Great Plain, the imperials held most of the fortified cities but the Kuruc freed the countryside. In the north, the main theatre of operations, the Kuruc scored several victories but could not win decisive battles against the well-trained and better equipped imperials. In 1707 and again in 1710 the main Kuruc army was badly defeated, in both cases because the Kuruc commanders ignored Rákóczi's orders.

The lack of equipment, the general shortage of food and the lack of financial resources contributed to the final defeat

of the Kuruc cause. Rákóczi did not tax the people. He tried to finance the war from his own income and the revenues of mines and excise — a woefully inadequate financial basis for a war lasting eight years. In 1710 a final, fatal blow struck the Kuruc army: the plague broke out in the Kuruc-held territory and killed half a million people, a fifth of Hungary's population.

Development in *international politics* also contributed greatly to Rákóczi's defeat. It had suited Louis XIV to have a rebel army in the east of the Habsburg empire but he never seriously considered concluding a formal alliance with Rákóczi. He kept encouraging him with vague promises and occasional financial support. It was on Louis' instigation that Rákóczi agreed to the dethronement of the Habsburg dynasty at the Diet of Ónod (1707). This assembly created Rákóczi "Ruling Prince" of the country. The timing of this fateful step could not have been more unfortunate: the Austrian-English victory over the French and Bavarians at Blenheim (1704) had already ruled out the chances of a military co-operation between the French and the Hungarians.

Rákóczi tried to find new alliances and hoped to negotiate with Peter I of Russia, who was even less reliable than Louis XIV. Still, the Prince went to Poland in 1711 hoping to meet Peter there. During his absence, his commander, Sándor Károlyi, correctly assessing the situation as hopeless for the Kuruc, concluded an armistice with the commander of the imperials, Count John Pálffy, an honest Hungarian soldier and statesman. Both commanders overstepped their authority but they were motivated by the best of intentions: the dying nation had to be saved.

"Vitam et Sanguinem . . ."

The armistice and capitulation of the Kuruc army was followed by the Peace Treaty of Szatmár (1711). Leopold had died in 1705: his successors, *Joseph I* (1705-1711) and *Charles III* (1711-1740), showed a little more understanding of the grievances of the Hungarians. The Peace Treaty granted amnesty to all participants and promised religious freedom and a constitutional government for Hungary.

Rákóczi and his closest friends did not accept the amnesty and left for Poland, then France. Eventually they were given refuge in Turkey, at Rodosto. The Prince died there in 1735

and his two sons, both unmarried, died soon after him. They were the last scions of the Rákóczi, Zrinyi and Báthori families.

Rákóczi's outstanding intellectual and moral qualities would have made him the nation's greatest king. It was his and the nation's tragedy that this charismatic leader was drawn into the unsuitable role of a rebel. Still, his struggle was not entirely in vain: with immense sacrifices, the Hungarians again proved that they would not tolerate tyranny. Rákóczi's revered memory has since lived as his nation's inspiration in victory and consolation in defeat.

The wars of the preceding three hundred years had taken a frightful toll: the country which in Matthias' time (1460) had a population of over 4 million (85% Magyar) had now about 2½ million inhabitants, only about half of them Magyars. The war-weary nobles were now only concerned with their "privileges", such as their tax-exemptions. The survivors of the Magyar peasantry were expected to bear the crushing burden of taxation and to carry out the agricultural reconstruction of the country.

The Diet of 1723 accepted the decree called "Pragmatica Sanctio", which assured the right of succession of the Emperor-King's daughter, Maria Theresa. In return, the sovereign, Charles III, accepted the principle of "dual monarchy": an independent Hungary united with Austria under one sovereign. This "independence" was, however, little more than "home rule" as the important portfolios of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Finance remained under Austrian control. Neither was the territorial integrity of Hungary restored: Transylvania remained a "grand-duchy" administered from Vienna and the southern districts were made into a "military zone", (against the Turks) similarly under direct Viennese control.

When *MARIA THERESA* (1740-1780) ascended the throne, the Hungarians accepted her as their Queen but some provinces refused to do so. This eventually led to a war of succession between Austria and France-Prussia-Bavaria. Maria Theresa, whom someone once called the "only man of the Habsburg dynasty", began to show some remarkable qualities — mostly feminine ones. She had the Hungarian Diet recalled and appeared before the assembled nobles in mourning. With her infant child in her arms and tears in her eyes, she looked very much like

the image of the Holy Virgin, Patron of Hungary — a familiar picture, indeed, as only a generation before this emblem had decorated Rákóczi's Kuruc flags . . . Now the beautiful, young Queen appealed to her "beloved, noble and chivalrous" Magyars for help against her enemies. Her "noble, chivalrous" (and forgetful) Hungarians stood up and cheered, promising her their "Vitam et Sanguinem . . ." ("Life and blood . . .")

Whatever the historians may say about her, Maria Theresa was quite a woman . . .

So Hungary, not long before a subdued colony, a defeated rebel, came to the rescue of her oppressor, Austria. Hungarian hussars, commanded by Hungarian generals, fought gallantly to defend their "Queen in distress". Thanks to their help, the war, which began disastrously for the Austrians, ended in a compromise; so did the following Seven Years' War (1756-1763).

The Queen rewarded the Hungarians by respecting their constitution and by guaranteeing the privileges of the landed nobility. Unfortunately, these privileges seemed to encourage agriculture and discourage urbanisation and industrialisation — in the age of the Industrial Revolution. Thus Hungary remained the backward agricultural provider of rapidly progressing Austria and Bohemia. It seems that, in addition to her other qualities, Maria Theresa was quite an economist, too.

Her education policy was the product of "enlightened absolutism": a central, state-controlled system. *Latin* had been the language of government legislation and education in Hungary since the XVIIth century. Some historians have called this a "tactful" arrangement, as the use of Hungarian would have offended the nationalities. We have seen that, apart from the autochthonous Slovaks, all nationalities were immigrants settled with or without the Hungarians' permission in the territory of Hungarian sovereignty. Thus this "tactful" arrangement is comparable to the suggestion that the United States or Australia should replace English by, say, Esperanto in order to spare the susceptibilities of its migrants.

Unfortunately, *Transylvania* was still an Austrian colony and the drastic resettlement and military recruiting methods used by the Austrian commanders led to many clashes, such as the tragic incident at Mádéfalva where Székely families were

massacred for refusing to allow their lads to be recruited for the Austrian army. As a result of this "Siculicidium" ("Székely massacre") (1764) whole Székely villages left their homeland and settled in Moldavia and Bukovina, then under Russian and Turkish occupation. The Austrian military authorities encouraged the mass immigration of Vlachs and Serbs to the eastern and southern depopulated areas.

Among the nobles of Hungary, unaware of all this, Maria Theresa's benevolent repression created an atmosphere of complacent, self-deluding euphoria.

Joseph II (1780-1790) brought the principle of "enlightened absolutism" to its logical conclusion: he decided to make his subjects happy, whether they liked it or not. He refused to be crowned and ruled by decrees, ordering reforms for which his multinational empire was neither ready nor grateful. He abolished the religious orders and granted freedom to all religions. Then he abolished the 700 year-old Hungarian county-system and replaced it with a German language central administration. He eased the burden of the serfs and prepared plans for universal taxation. Some of these reforms shocked the Hungarians and the other nationalities. Disappointed, Joseph withdrew his edicts before his death.

His successor, Leopold II, had little trouble pacifying the nobles — they saw the unpleasant things happening in France to nobles who insisted on their privileges.

At the beginning of his long, dull reign, *Francis I* (1792-1835) hastened to reiterate the standard Habsburg procedure of reassuring the nobles that their privileges will remain untouched — as long as they kept producing food for the Empire and stayed out of mischief. He had no cause to worry: the world-shaking events in France found very little echo in Hungary. Only a small group of amateurish intellectuals attempted to organise some sort of a "Jacobin" plot. This was promptly discovered and quickly and ruthlessly suppressed by the most efficient branch of the Viennese government, the police.

Thus Hungary's "lost century" ended with the nation still licking its well-healed wounds and looking with full confidence into its glorious past . . .

17. "IN THE MIDST OF ARMS. . ."

(Hungarian literature and the arts in the
XVIth - XVIIIth centuries)

Literature and music during the Turkish wars

Threatened with destruction, the Magyars found strength, hope and consolation in their literature and music during these turbulent centuries.

The wandering minstrels of the war, the "lute players", were the soldier-poets and musicians of the XVIth century. The best-known of these, *Sebestyén Tinódi* (called "Lantos": lute player), who died in 1556, sang the praises of the frontier soldiers to the accompaniment of lute-music, composed by himself. His epic accounts of heroic deeds (e.g. "The Siege of Eger"), exhortations or humorous sketches ("Of the Many Drunkards")¹ cheered the tired soldiers of the border fortresses and spread the news of the glorious battles. His music, noted down and printed in his lifetime with his poetry, had a characteristically Magyar richness.

The greatest poet of the XVIth century was BÁLINT (VALENTIN) BALASSA (1554-1594), an aristocrat who led a very eventful life, fighting as a volunteer among the frontier soldiers and getting into all sorts of amorous and financial troubles. His poetry reflects all facets of emotional expression: erotic passion and lusty love alternate with deeply religious sincerity and patriotic devotion. His poetic technique was quite remarkable, his language rich and colourful, unmatched by anything written in Hungarian until the XIXth century.

His "Soldier's song"² is a youthful, glowing praise of the frontier-soldiers: their sorrows, joys, sacrifices and rewards during

a short life in the service of the nation. The poem "Forgive me" is a moving credo of his deep Christian faith³. Balassa was one of the Magyar millions who died with the name of "Jesus" on their lips. Mortally wounded, his last words were: "Jesus died for me — why should I have any doubts — I have been your soldier, my Lord, I have fought in your army . . ." His farewell songs⁴ and love poems⁵ show a fresh, natural inspiration, akin to that of folk poetry.

The ideas of the Reformation reached Hungary during the XVIth century. The need for Magyar-language hymns in the Protestant service helped the development of religious literature: original works and translations were required. The best-known *poet-preachers* were the Transylvanian Protestant pastors, Gáspár Héltay, also known for his fables, and Gáspár Károlyi the first Hungarian translator of the Bible. Their writings present many examples of a blend of patriotic and religious inspiration.

The rich magnates of the territories not occupied by the Turks had replaced the royal court as patrons of the arts. Their composers and orchestras provided relaxation and emotional comfort in the short periods of rest during the almost continuous fighting. Many of these composers' melodies have survived in foreign collections bearing such titles as "Ungaresca", "Ungarische Tänze", etc. The best-known Hungarian composer of the period was Bálint Bakfark of Transylvania. ("Lute Fantasia").

The XVIIth century presents a picture of spiritual and cultural consolidation. The Catholic "Counter-Reformation" produced some great writers, such as Cardinal *Péter Pázmány* (1570-1637), Archbishop of Esztergom. His many Magyar-language sermons, polemic writings, prayers and translations have greatly enriched the Hungarian language.⁶ His contemporary, Albert Szenczi Molnár, a Protestant preacher, scholar and humanist translated psalms and set them to music of his own composition.

Count Miklós Zrínyi (1620-1664), the great general and statesman was also a remarkable poet. His long epic poem, the "Peril of Sziget",⁷ describes the heroic defence of Szigetvár by his ancestor. Zrínyi dedicates his work not to the Muses, but to Hungary's Patron, the Blessed Virgin. His numerous prose works are political and military studies concerning the war against the Turks and written in racy, colourful Hungarian.

The two regions free from Turkish occupation had, by this time, developed a relatively secure and civilised form of living.

Dance and entertainment melodies, many inspired by folk music, have been preserved in notation in various manuscripts, such as the “Kájoni”, “Vietorisz” and “Virginalis” “codices”. The collection of Prince *Pál Eszterházy's* (1635-1713) Catholic hymns (“*Harmonia Caelestis*”) contains many fine compositions by the great statesmen, including some inspired by Magyar religious folk melodies.

The “Kuruc” literature and music

The freedom wars, led by Bocskai, Bethlen, Thököly and Rákóczi, have created a rich treasure of poetry and music. These poems and melodies have survived by oral tradition only: it was treasonable to write them down during the decades following the Kuruc wars. For the same reason the authors preferred to remain unknown.

An early Kuruc poem: “Between the fire and the water” from around 1670 describes the bitter dilemma of the Hungarians of that period: between the Turkish aggression and German tyranny only their trust in God gives them consolation. The author may have been a Protestant pastor. Another song — obviously created by a common soldier — expresses the same idea, using the phrase which has since become the motto of those troubled times: “*Betwixt two heathens — fighting for one country —*” the Kuruc soldier, always hungry, always in battle, sheds his blood for one nation fighting the Turks and Germans.

The songs of the early Rákóczi period are more exuberant: they praise the bravery of the gallant hussars and their leaders who raided Austria. They ridicule the imperials (called “Labanc”: from the German word “Lanze”), comparing the Kuruc’ colourful, fine uniforms with the shabby looks of the “Labanc”.

Toward the end of Rákóczi’s struggle the songs again become melancholic. They are full of bitterness, recriminations and fear for the nation’s future. The most moving of these poems is the so-called “Rákóczi Song” known in many variations, including folk song versions.⁸ From these elements an unknown poet composed the final version around 1730.

Ferenc Rákóczi himself was not only an inspiration to poets but also a forceful and emotional orator, the author of manifestos, memoirs and history in Hungarian, Latin and French.

His faithful chamberlain, Count *Kelemen Mikes* (1690-1761), who followed him into exile and died there, wrote a number of letters to a fictitious aunt in Transylvania. These "Letters from Rodosto" are a deeply moving record of the lives of the exiles, a fine example of Transylvanian-Hungarian style.

Literature during the period of repression and stagnation

After Rákóczi's defeat a period of constant "benevolent repressions" followed: the various Habsburg regimes tried to Germanise the nation. At the beginning, the Hungarians, exhausted, offered little or no resistance. In a gesture of defiance, the Catholic schools turned to Latin and the study of classics, while the Protestant colleges maintained the use of the Magyar language. Some writers, during the second half of the century, began to discover the inspiration of folk poetry.

Some young members of Maria Theresa's Noble Guard in Vienna became interested in French literature and philosophy. The leader of this circle was *György Bessenyei* who, influenced by Voltaire, wrote several dramas as well as epic and lyric poetry of a philosophical nature with more enthusiasm than success. His most memorable work is the political-satirical novel: "The Travels of Tarimenes."

The repression and Germanisation increased under Joseph II. Even the complacent country nobility began to show some mild resistance. József Gvadányi, for instance, ridiculed the propagation of German and other foreign customs in his "Travels of a Village Notary". *Mihály Fazekas'* comic epic, "Ludas Matyi" ("Matthias and the Geese"), satirised the archaic social conditions of the late XVIIIth century in the form of a witty folktale in verse.

Music during the period of stagnation

The aristocracy of the XVIIIth century — especially in the western regions — welcomed and promoted Austrian and German music in Hungary. In the East, especially in the Protestant colleges, Magyar music became one of the means of maintaining and protecting the Magyar culture. The Hungarian songs of these schools — including those from some Catholic schools — show the mixed influence of western and Magyar folk melodic elements.



*Hungara, quid trepidas Tellus? accede Patronum
Non patitur vacuas Illa perire procer.
Sunt sua Scuta alio, sua sint munimenta, et Arces
Virgine, Hungariae, praebet Aeyla, Thronus.*

“Patrona Hungariae”

(The Virgin Mary with the Hungarian Saints.
Altar painting at Kolozsvár, XVIIIth century).

The army of the Empire was being organised as a permanent force. Recruiting for this army used the methods of the "press gangs" of the British Navy, as the peasant boys showed little inclination to leave their families for 7 or 12 years. The Viennese government knew what effect music had on the emotional Hungarians and sent recruiting teams with bands of gypsy musicians to the villages and towns. The band then played fiery music while the members of the team performed the "toborzó" ("recruiting dance" also called: "verbunk"). The impressionable young men, tempted by their favourite tunes, often joined in the dance — only to find that they had signed up by this symbolic act as recruits. This clever method seems to bear the trademark of a certain Lady in Vienna who must have been an expert in the psychology of Hungarian men . . .

The gypsies collected and ornamented many contemporary folk melodies. The richer, new-style folk songs were particularly suitable for this type of orchestration. From this "toborzó" or "verbunk"-type music evolved, during the XIXth century, the well-known "Magyar song".

Fine arts and architecture

The *Baroque* style reached Hungary through Austria during the XVIIth century. The Catholic inspiration of this style found its main expression in *church architecture*, religious painting and decorative sculpture. The church of the Minorites in Eger is the best example of this style in Hungary. The simpler, one-tower type of Baroque church became the prototype of the numerous village churches built during the XVIIIth century which constitute today the architectural image of the Catholic villages in Hungary.

Secular architecture consisted mainly of palaces, such as the sumptuous Eszterházy residence at Fertőd.

Baroque *sculpture* served mostly as a decorative element in ecclesiastical architecture. One of the few Hungarian sculptors was Sebestyén Stulhoff, a Benedictine monk.

While Austrian artists were commissioned to decorate the churches and palaces with their *paintings*, Magyar artists were often obliged to leave the country for political or religious reasons. To these belonged *János Kupeczky* who spent most of his life in Germany, except during Rákóczi's freedom war. His "Kuruc Soldier" was painted during that period.

Ádám Mányoki (1673-1756) the greatest Magyar painter of the XVIIIth century, worked in Rákóczi's court during the war. After the armistice he followed his Prince into exile. He painted his masterpiece, Rákóczi's portrait during their exile. He captured the true personality of the great man in this fine portrait (P. 121).

Unknown, probably Hungarian craftsmen left fine examples of woodcarving in many churches. Goldsmith János Szilassy of Lőcse used the Renaissance "filigree enamel" technique of painted enamel work — a Hungarian innovation.

It seems that the Baroque, a form of artistic expression imposed upon the Magyar people by a regime which had remained foreign for centuries, had little appeal for the peasants. Their folk art rarely uses Baroque motifs — a surprising fact if we remember what a deep impact Matthias' short-lived Renaissance had on folk art.

* * *

The damage caused by the Turkish and German devastations to the nation's spiritual and artistic potential was not as obvious as the appalling loss of life and material but the result, Hungary's cultural retardation, has taken much longer to remedy. This is why the foreign observers of the XIXth and early XXth centuries were struck by the "conservative" or even "retrograde" aspects of Hungarian art and way of life. Yet before the XVIth century Hungary was in the forefront of European social and cultural progress. Even during the XVIIth century embattled Transylvania managed to remain the easternmost bastion of Christian humanism and culture.

Then, after the collapse of the last great struggle for freedom in 1711, the nation reached the point of physical and spiritual exhaustion. The Magyar soul was empty, the one million survivors of this people had lost their wish to seek new horizons.

So began a long century of cultural convalescence. Apathy, passivity, retrospection and slow awakening marked the various stages of this period — from 1711 to the Vienna Congress, 1815 — while the rest of the world was making rapid industrial, social and cultural progress. When, at last, the Hungarians awoke from their long torpor, the West was a century ahead of them.



On the Great Plain
*"Tinkling beneath a sky mirage-possessed,
Kis-Kútság's fatted herds by hundreds stray"*
(Petőfi)

18. "HERE YOU MUST LIVE AND DIE. . ."

(The life, customs and art of the people
of the Great Plain)

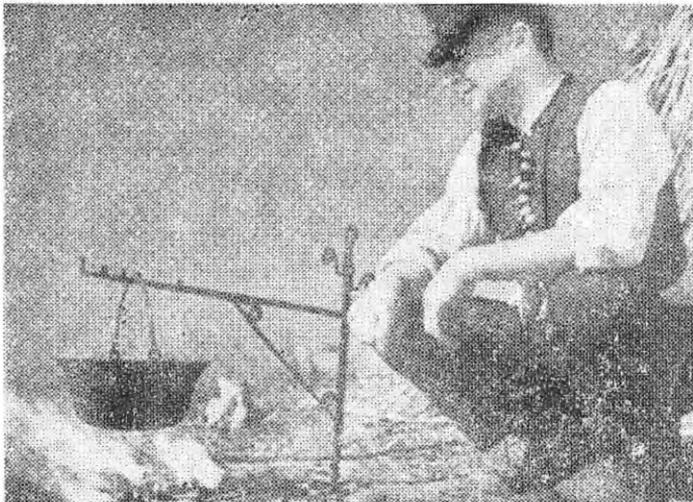
Towns and settlement areas

The "Great Plain" is not large by Australian standards: only some 30,000 square miles, but for the land-locked Magyars, surrounded by foreign, often hostile nations, the uninterrupted vistas create the illusion of unimpeded freedom. "*My spirit soars, from chains released, when I behold the unhorizoned plain. . .*" said the poet Petöfi.

This area lies between the Danube river and the northern and eastern foothills of the Carpathians. It is cut into half by the Tisza river. The Treaty of Trianon has allotted the southern districts to Yugoslavia and the eastern fringes to Rumania.

Debrecen is the cultural and economic centre of the area east of the Tisza and the spiritual centre of Hungarian Protestantism. This town played an interesting role during the Turkish occupation. Situated on the crossroads of the three divided parts of Hungary, the town managed to retain some degree of independence by skilfully manoeuvring between the warring powers, paying taxes to all when this was necessary. The town fathers — peasants and burgesses with remarkable commonsense and will to survive — made their town a refuge for the population of the nearby smaller towns and villages plundered by the Germans and Turks. Their numbers were thus swelled and reached a size which had to be respected by the marauders.

The *Hortobágy* is a grassy plain between Debrecen and the Tisza. Until recently it was a semi-arid area, called the “puszta” (desert). For centuries, the “puszta” represented, for the foreigner, the genuine “Magyar” atmosphere and the primitive lifestyle of the semi-nomadic herdsmen (“csikós”) and outlaws (“betyárs”), the proverbial “Magyar” way of life. This myth, born in the imagination of the XVIIIth century German travellers, was gleefully propagated by the Viennese rulers of Hungary and gullibly supported by the songwriters of Budapest (who sweetened it, of course, with romantic “gypsy” music).



A shepherd of the “puszta”.

*“It is time to go
And to get married.
The question is only
Whom should I marry?”* (Folksong).

Irrigation and artificial fertilisation have now made this area fertile again and only a few “reservations” remain where the “csikós” perform remarkable feats of horsemanship for the benefit of tourists.

Kecskemét is a sprawling town between the Danube and the Tisza, situated in a region ideal for fruit-growing. During the Turkish occupation, this town — in the centre of the Turkish

occupation area — remained relatively unharmed because the astute town-leaders managed to make the town a “Sultan’s fief”. This assured its protection against plundering troops at the cost of enormous collective taxes paid to the Sultan. Other large towns (Szeged etc.) followed Kecskemét’s example protecting a considerable number of refugees, mostly peasants.

The city is Zoltán Kodály’s birthplace and the fine “Kodály Music School”, the prototype of scores of music schools, preserves his memory.



Village with sweep-well

*“It gave thee life and in thy death
Its earth will cover thee . . .”*

(Vörösmarty)

Large areas around Kecskemét are settled by scattered farmsteads, called “tanya”. The “Bugac” “puszta” is a grazing area among barren dunes with some relics of primitive agriculture of the past (sweep-wells with their tall upright and cross-beams). It has a “romantic” reputation similar to that of Hortobágy.

Szeged, on the banks of the Tisza in the south, is well-known for its “Votive Church” (in memory of the 1879 flood), which

forms a majestic background to an open-air theatre with 7,000 seats. The rich alluvial soil around the town produces the famous "paprika" (red pepper or capsicum) rich in Vitamin C (the study of which earned professor Szentgyörgyi his Nobel Prize).

Kalocsa, near the Danube, was one of the original archbishoprics founded by Saint Stephen. Two of the archbishops died on the battlefield commanding Hungarian armies. The peasants of the neighbouring villages have enjoyed great prosperity since the draining of the swamps at the beginning of the last century. They have used their affluence to develop luxurious folkwear and decorative artifacts.

Certain *regions* were already settled by non-Magyar ethnic groups before the Turkish occupation. Such a region is the *Kúnság* (Cumania) in the north. The ancestors of the Cumanians were eastern nomads (related to the Magyars), when they fled to Hungary in the XIIIth century before the Mongol onslaught. They were given refuge and have since completely assimilated into the Hungarian population.

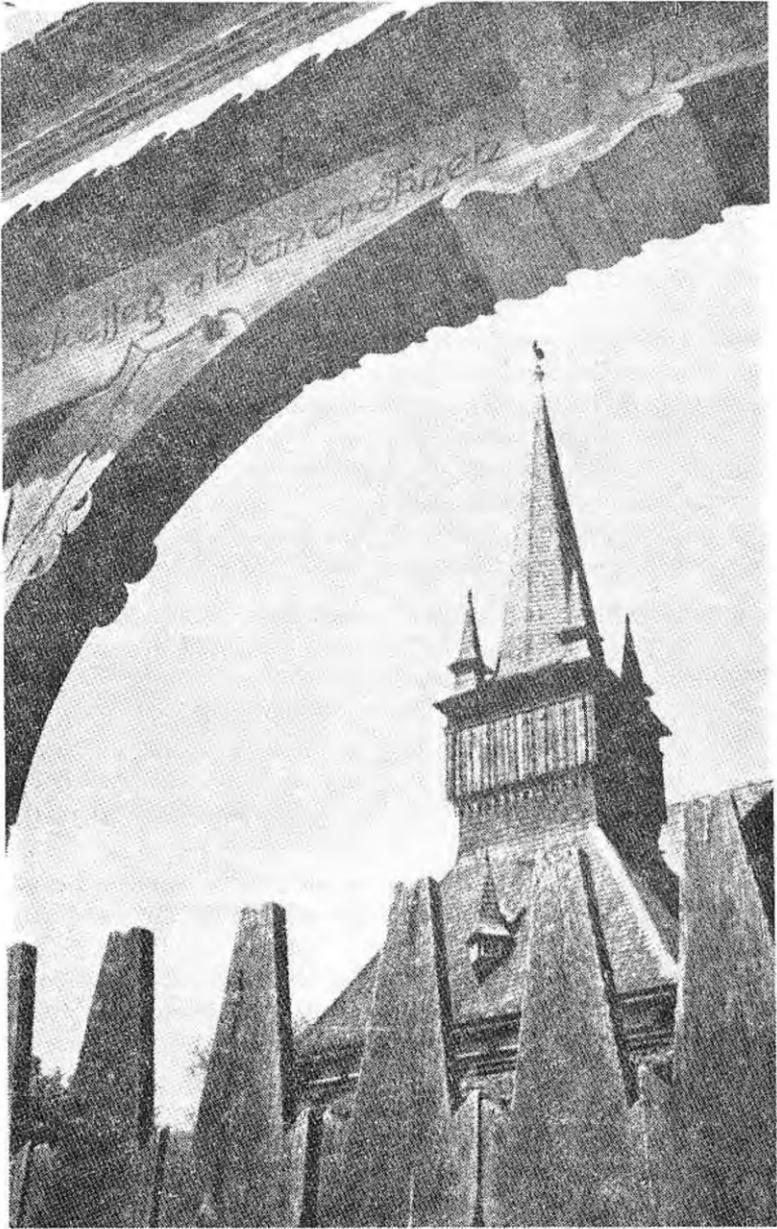
The *Jászság* is a neighbouring area populated by the descendants of the "Jász" (Yazygs), a people of Caucasian (possibly Iranian) origin. They came to Hungary at the same time as the Cumanians and integrated the same way.

The *Hajdúság* around Debrecen is named after the "Hajdús", who were Magyar cattle drovers, then, during the Turkish wars, foot-soldiers. In recognition of their gallant service, Prince István Bocskai of Transylvania gave them special privileges and resettled them in this area.

The people and their art

The Great Plain is the most typically Magyar region of the Carpathian basin. Árpád's Magyars settled here first and in Transdanubia. Their descendants constitute the hardy peasant stock which has survived a thousand years of floods, droughts, wars, pillage and destruction. Their destiny is best described by the words of one of the Hungarian national anthems: "Here you must live and die . . ."

The peasant culture of the Plain is remarkably uniform as the development of large market towns and easy communication have prevented the formation of specific regional cultures.



Timber belltower (Northern Great Plain).

History left its mark on the *art* of the people here. The inheritance of pre-Christian art still lives in certain ornamental patterns on carved objects. Asian motifs are sometimes found in folk-costume decorations, such as the patterns of Iranian inspiration in the Jász region. The Renaissance culture left its mark on costume decoration. Turkish influence was also rather strong: gaudy ornamental patterns were introduced by Turkish craftsmen.

In this treeless area the main *building* material used to be reinforced adobe. Timber structures are found in the north-eastern wooded areas only, around the town of *Nyiregyháza* where several villages have fine timber belltowers with steeples topped by four little turrets. Woodcarving has been an ancient art in the Nyiregyháza district, the best example being the Calvinist church at Nyirbátor. Furniture carvings often preserve the religious medieval inspiration on the hewn (bridal) chests. Around Kalocsa women paint the furniture and walls with improvised, gay flower designs.

Leatherwork and horn-carving had been the favourite craft of the nomadic horsemen before their settlement in Hungary. Shepherds and others connected with animal husbandry have kept this ancient art alive till the present times.

The Plain is a thirsty country — drinking vessels of various shapes, mugs, pitchers and jugs are popular artifacts. During the Middle Ages *potters* settled in special towns and specialised in certain types of pottery.

The cold winters of the continental climate suggest the use of hides and sheepskin as the basic material of the shepherds' outer *clothing*. Short jackets, called "ködmön" or "bekecs", are worn by men as well as women. The shepherd's thick coat, called "suba", is made of the skins of long-woolled sheep. The wool is left in its natural state whilst the skin side is often ornamented with applique embroidery made by the men. It protects the wearer against the extremes of the Plain climate: in summer, with the wool outside, it protects him from the heat; in winter the wool is inside to keep him warm. The "szür" is more elaborate: it is a frieze mantle or felt-coat with applied embroidery.

Women's dresses are, of course, much brighter and more varied. The *Kalocsa* region is world famous for its brightly



Kalocsa folkwear

coloured, embroidered dresses. The colour schemes are gay (22 shades are used), as befits the sunny climate, and the decorative patterns are mostly stylized flowers (roses and tulips): their choice of colouring shows the effects of Renaissance taste. The white apron is trimmed with lace, the full skirt pleated and many petticoats are worn under it. Coloured stockings and (red) slippers complete the dress. Unmarried girls wear a bright-coloured headdress ("párta") which they exchange for a bright-coloured kerchief after marriage. As they grow older the colours become sombre. Blue is the colour of the widows.

Embroidery in all shades is frequently applied not only to dresses but also to pillow slips, tablecloths and bedcovers. The designs often contain imaginative flower patterns or shapes resembling peacock-tails. In the Cumanian region homespun linen is decorated with applique homespun wool — a special art, the Cumanians' eastern inheritance.

Folk customs

Unlike folk music and poetry, customs do not change with the times. They perpetuate the original gestures and actions connected with some long-forgotten myth or rite of pagan times or some mystic, superstitious belief which is no longer respected. The pantomime-like movements add colour and mystery to festival occasions of the peasants' life without any religious or moral relevance.

The folk customs mentioned in this chapter are common to most regions in Hungary. The central and open location of the Plain did not favour the development of characteristic regional folklore.

Easter is the first festival of spring and spring is the herald of love. Thus on Easter Monday the boys sprinkle water on the girls in a poetic well-wishing gesture. Usually scented water is used, except when things get out of hand with a few bucketfuls of fresh well-water "thrown in". The girls thank the boys for the gesture by offering them colourful painted eggs — an old pagan symbol of spring. This old custom has survived everywhere in Hungary and even among Hungarians settled in foreign countries.

Setting up *maypoles* on the first of May used to be a popular custom. The lad set up a tall pole with a large bunch of lilac (a native Hungarian flower) at the top in front of the house

of his sweetheart. She indicated her acceptance by adding colourful ribbons to the decoration of the pole.

Each region has its characteristic *wedding customs* with local songs, dances, well-wishing and farewelling addresses in verse. The most moving scene is the bride's farewell to her parents and their reply, often tinged with nostalgic childhood reminiscences and good peasant moral philosophy.¹ Peasant weddings are elaborate and expensive affairs and it is no wonder that divorce is unknown among peasants: obviously no one can afford two weddings in a lifetime.

Harvest and vintage festivals are still popular in a country where so much depends on the year's harvest. At these festivals, a variety of slow and fast dances and songs expresses the various moods of the harvesters: the dignified ritual of thanksgiving alternates with the more temperamental celebration and tasting of the results of their toil: the fresh bread and the new wine.

The long continental *winter* is the period of light work around the house, rest and relaxation for the peasant. The winter calendar has many festival days connected with some ancient customs which have lost their original significance. The period before Christmas is also the right time to kill the fattened pigs which provide many items of the farmers' winter diet. The killing and preparing are usually done in a co-operative fashion with the help of the neighbours, who stay for the tasting of the fresh products.

The Christmas and Epiphany customs with their Christian religious character are discussed in Chapter 21.

On New Year's Eve and on New Year's Day the usual revelries are often seasoned with certain customs of pagan origin. Such a custom is the "kongó" (sounding), a noisy procession. The noise is supposed to "frighten the darkness away": a relic of pagan Winter Solstice rites.

Name-days are welcome opportunities for family celebrations, especially in winter. Hungarians do not celebrate their birthdays, but they celebrate the Church feast day of their patron saint, whether they are Catholics or Protestants. On this day, especially if it is a parent's name-day, the family and friends gather and often sing one of the beautiful well-wishing folksongs and include the name of the person celebrated.² By the same token,

Catholic villages hold their annual fair (“búcsú”) on the feast-day of the patron saint of their local church.

Constant *social changes* characterise the peasants' life today. Young men and girls flock to nearby towns or big cities to find employment, abandoning their ancient, peasant way of life. Thus much of the folk art, music and customs have ceased to be the spontaneous manifestation of the peasant soul. Instead it has become a carefully preserved and treasured cultural heritage. Folklore and folk art have, by their originality, inspired urban art, music and literature and by their very decline have helped to create a revival of folk-inspired art and music in Hungary.

