

# THE TIMELESS NATION

Dear Fellow Australian,

You might ask why should such distant lands as Hungary and Transylvania concern you. Consider the following:

There are some 60,000 people of Hungarian extraction in Australia. They have contributed out of proportion with their numbers, to this country's post-war development. Trade relations between this country and a democratically reshaped Hungary could be significant in the future.

For centuries, Hungary has defended Western Europe, while defending herself against devastating onslaughts from the east and southeast. The West could not have advanced as it did if Hungary had allowed the mighty Tartars and Turks to pass over her territory.

To name only one Hungarian cultural achievement, Hungarian legislation at the Transylvanian Diet of Torda in 1568 guaranteed free choice of religion for the first times anywhere in Europe.

On the 10th February, 1947, Dr. H. V. Evatt, then Australian Minister for External Affairs, signed the Peace Treaty of Paris relating to Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Finland. This carved up Hungary without a plebiscite, and Transylvania, formerly eastern Hungary, was given as a reward to Romania. Romania's successive governments have perpetrated cultural genocide against Hungarians in Transylvania ever since.

A voluminous file of formerly secret documents shows that Dr. Evatt had grave foreboding regarding Transylvania's large Hungarian population. Yet, it was in Australia's interest to become a signatory of the Peace Treaty of Paris. To quote Agendum 1294:

"At Paris, the Australian Delegation made a strong fight in favor of the right of small belligerents to fuller participation. Such a stand was necessary to ensure that Australia would have a full voice in the more important settlements with Germany and Japan"

Thus, Australia must have benefited from that "fuller participation." Yet, Australian schools have never taught young Australians the facts about Transylvania, although it alone is 42 times larger than the Australian Capital Territory. Moreover, almost every Australian school and public library holds "Dracula-literature" which for many decades has spread the obnoxious notion that Transylvania, teeming with vampires, used to be the sordid realm of "Count Dracula". The result is that no Australian education institution has ever carried out any serious research on Transylvania.

Yet, this country is unwittingly involved in the cultural genocide being perpetrated there, which is reason enough for you to read this book.

The cultural enrichment, which may be gained from the book, relates to several continents, not the least to Australia.

The Publishers

*To M. Margaret Bodolai I.B.M.V.,  
my sister, who, like her  
medieval namesake,  
Saint Margaret of the Arpáds,  
has sacrificed her life in prayer and work for the future of  
Christian Hungary.*

They ignore the logical sequence of time. Though they had formed a viable nation before Abraham left Ur, they are still searching for their national identity today. They possessed modern social and political institutions a thousand years ago—and in the present century, they still live by a medieval code of naive chivalry.

They defy the dictates of History. Whether it is a life—and-death struggle or a period of lazy prosperity, the present exists for them only as a timeless transition from a glorious past into magnificent future.

Born at the misty dawn of antiquity, having outlived the lifespan of countless empires, this nation hopes to survive until the end of Time.

They are truly timeless.

## **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 generalize 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 honor 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 Juris Hungarii) They embody the ideal of Hungarian humanism, in modern parlance "multiculturalism".*

Zoltan 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 millennia-long search brought them into contact with many races: some related, some strange, some aggressive, and 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 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.”*

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 millennia-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 favorite 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 armor 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. In addition, 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 naiveté. 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 Hungarian' 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.*



## I. THE MILLENIAL QUEST

### 1 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 birthplace. 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 detail, which would seem irrelevant to the non-Hungarian reader anyhow.

#### 1. *The Language*

The ProtoHungarians were at least bilingual. Some of them spoke a Finno-Ugrian type of language, others a West-Turkic (Thranian 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" — "Magyen." — "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 TurkicOnogur-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.

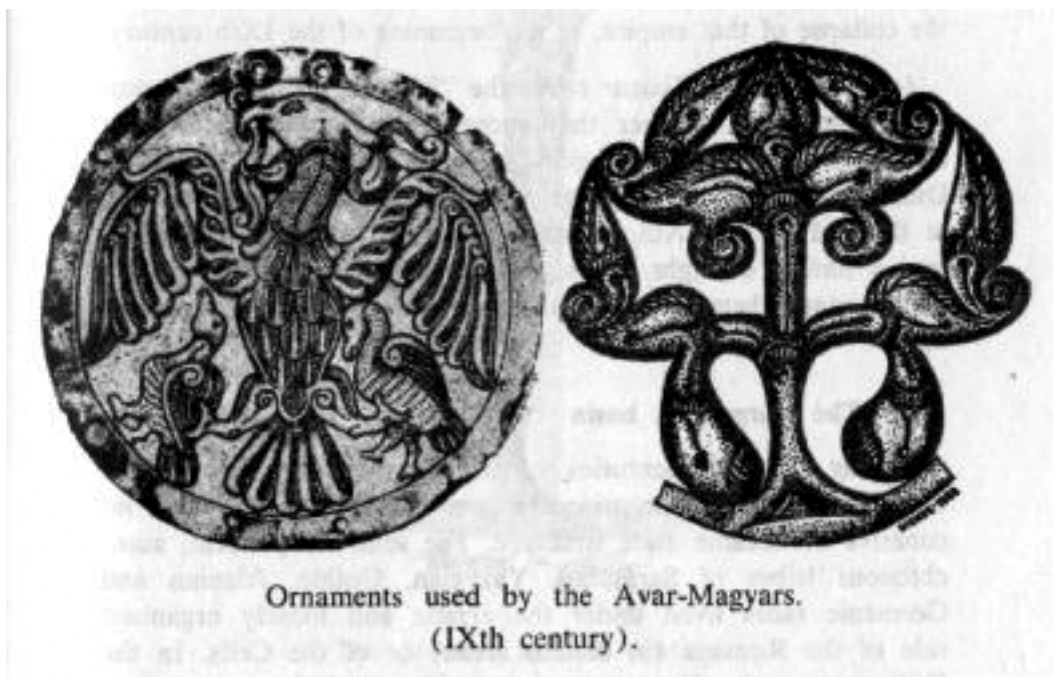
#### 3. *Ethnogenesis*

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 colorful, 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.

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

(a) *IIIrd and IIrd millennia BC* 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.



(b) *1st millennium BC* 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 XVIIIth 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 Khazem-Iranian empire. More Turkic-Hunnic-Scythian elements join them in the Caspian region.

(d) *During the Vth-IXth centuries AD.* The Proto-Hungarians moves 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 ProtoHungarians and together they move further west to the area called '*Etelkoz*', the "Region between the Rivers" (Dniestr, Dniepr). During this last stage of their westward movement, at the end of the IXth century AD, they organize themselves into a nation of eight tribes, elect a hereditary ruling dynasty and prepare themselves for the occupation of the Carpathian basin.

#### 4 **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 organized 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 Szekelys, who lived in Transdanubia and Transylvania.

The VIth century marks the arrival of the Avars (also known as "Proto-Avars", "Avar-Huns" and "Varchonites") from theCaucasus area, where they had been in contact with the Proto-Hungarians. At the same time the first Slavonic immigrants arrived in the basin.



The VIIIth 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”). They were peaceful agriculturists, 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 BC (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 civilized, 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 (Szekelys etc.), hut 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.

- 5 Recent researches indicate the probability of even closer links by suggesting that the Sabirs
- 6 (Subarians) of the Caucasus-Caspian region were either Sumerians or related to them. Their
- 7 association with the Proto-Hungarians (c/f. p.10 and 12) would account for the Sumerian linguistic and
- 8 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 civilization 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 lengths "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 millennium BC, must have formed a viable nucleus for the future nation.

This heterogeneous racial and cultural structure, superimposed on a millennia-old national identity, had provided the Hungarians with certain recognizable 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, colorful 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, and 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 organizing talent in military and political matters. These talents enabled them to resettle and reorganize 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 is 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 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 folk music, 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.

They’re 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.

*Honor* — 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 stargazing 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 humor — 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 fervor 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 “Megyeri” — “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' favorite 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 civilization?

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. It is 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 organizers in military and political matters, their naive faith in human goodness and *credulous innocence* left them defenseless 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 softhearted humanism is well illustrated by their behavior 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, characterized 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 colors. 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 Savior ("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 afterlife do not interest him. At any rate, Heaven cannot be as beautiful as Hungary, so there is no hurry to get there...



Peasant girl dressed for a "Bethlehem" play.  
*"An aristocracy of virtue and talent . . ." (Jefferson).*

Even *religion* seems to offer many examples of Hungarian humanism. Among the 40 Hungarians canonized by the Catholic Church (and one canonized by the Buddhist faith) there are no mystics: they were all practical men and women, martyrs, Fighting priests, soldiers, kings, and hard-working women. Even Princess Margaret chose the lowly tasks of a scullery maid in a convent as her sacrifice for Hungary's liberation from the Mongols in the XVIIIth century — in an age when mysticism and prayer seemed to be the straightest way to Heaven.

\* \* \*

The Hungarians have never built pyramids, ruled slave empires, and conquered new worlds. They are a proud, strange and lonely people. They live in the Carpathian basin and just about everywhere else, engaged in all possible (and some impossible) occupations. No two Hungarians are alike, and yet the magnetism of their diversity seems to bring them together: they seem to be united by their differences. When they meet, they greet each other like long-lost brothers, laugh, dream and sing together for a while, then discover some of the innumerable, specially Hungarian differences and go their own, lonely ways, working and dreaming (they are very good at both): fourteen million Don Quixotes in search of new windmills to fight.

It is said that all Australians claim to be equal some even more equal than the others. Hungarians are all different and each one claims to be more different than the others are. They deny having common characteristics — yet they all present the same attitude towards life and things beyond. — One is inclined to believe the American saying: "Hungarian is not a nationality, it is a way of life."

1            They believe in God. They also believe in miracles, in beautifully useless ideals, but first of all  
2 they have unlimited faith in themselves. They love women, music, poetry, romantic history (their own),  
3 pure mathematics, applied humor, sumptuous dresses, dignified or fiery dances, melancholic music  
4 — but most of all their unique language, a flowery relic of bygone ages with its strange mixture of  
5 oriental colour and Nordic majesty.

6            They have survived at the crossroads of history where more numerous nations had perished.  
7 Strangers came by the millions to join them and to die for them, attracted by that strange magic which  
8 is Hungary. They have survived and with them have survived a unique, complex culture, the synthesis  
9 of ancient Euro-Asian humanism and modern, western Christianity.

### 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 Kodaly, Bartok 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 Pillow Dance" (children's song and game).

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 neighboring peoples (Slovaks, Serbs, and Rumanians) and no influence from their melodic types. If anything, the Hungarian music has influenced these neighbors, 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, suvolt..."

An old pentatonic melody recorded by Kodaly in 1905 in Northern Hungary, can be traced to similar melodies among the Mari (Cheremis) and Chuvash peoples (Upper Volga, Eastern Russia), 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. Zoltan Kodaly, 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, Aeolian 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 “toborzo” (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 “folksy” song became the favorite musical style of the middle classes, mainly through the production of countless stereotyped “Magyar songs” by urban composers and operetta composers, such as Lehar, Kalman 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) string percussion instrument. The band, led by the “prima’s” (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 ("regos"). 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 "Kodaly 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 Kodaly, Bartok 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, Bartok and Kodaly saved the treasures of the Hungarian folk music in the eleventh hour. In a few decades, urbanization and industrial progress would have destroyed all traces of this magnificent treasure.

