

## CHAPTER TWO

### REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORY OF CENTRAL EUROPE

#### The South

Europe is inhabited by Indo-European peoples, except for the Carpathian Basin. The question of the origin of the Hungarians (Magyars), inhabiting the Basin, is beyond the scope of this essay. History tells us that the bulk of this nation moved into the Basin from the East and established a kingdom there in 896 A.D. in concert with the scattered population of the area — most of them their kinsmen who had settled there much earlier.

The new state proved its viability and soon obtained admission on equal terms into the company of Christian kingdoms by the coronation of King (Saint) Stephen:

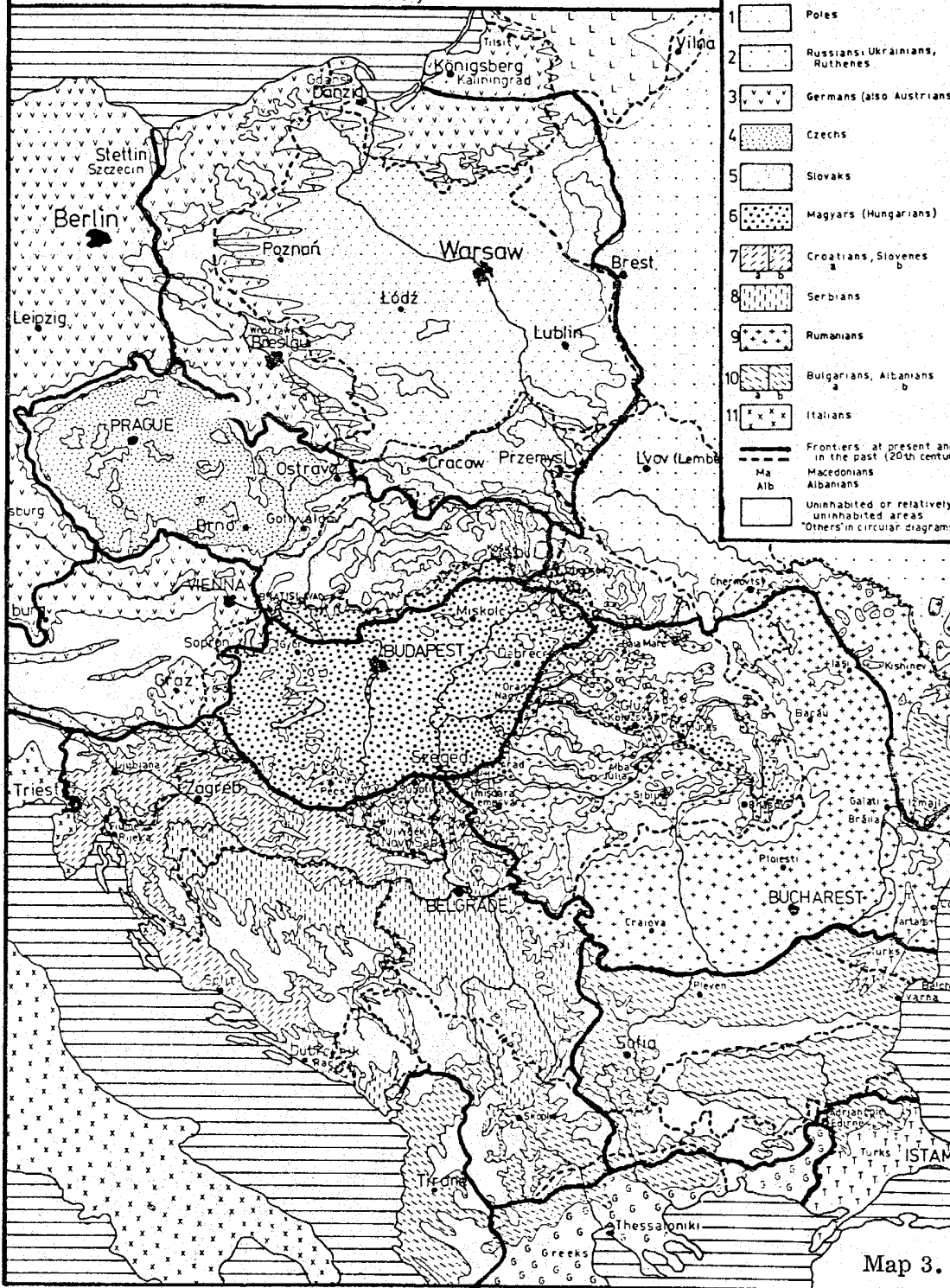
“The coronation and unction took place on Christmas day, A.D. 1000. It is impossible to overemphasise the importance of these ceremonies. By them both Stephen’s (the first Christian king of Hungary) own status and that of his people transformed. The act of conversion changed the Hunga-

# ETHNOGRAPHIC MAP OF EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

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## LEGEND

- |    |  |                                |
|----|--|--------------------------------|
| 1  |  | Poles                          |
| 2  |  | Russians, Ukrainians, Ruthenes |
| 3  |  | Germans (also Austrians)       |
| 4  |  | Czechs                         |
| 5  |  | Slovaks                        |
| 6  |  | Magyars (Hungarians)           |
| 7  |  | Croatians, Slovenes            |
| 8  |  | Serbians                       |
| 9  |  | Rumanians                      |
| 10 |  | Bulgarians, Albanians          |
| 11 |  | Italians                       |
- Frontiers at present and in the past (20th century)  
 Macedonians  
 Albanians  
 Uninhabited or relatively uninhabited areas  
 Others in circular diagrams



Map 3.

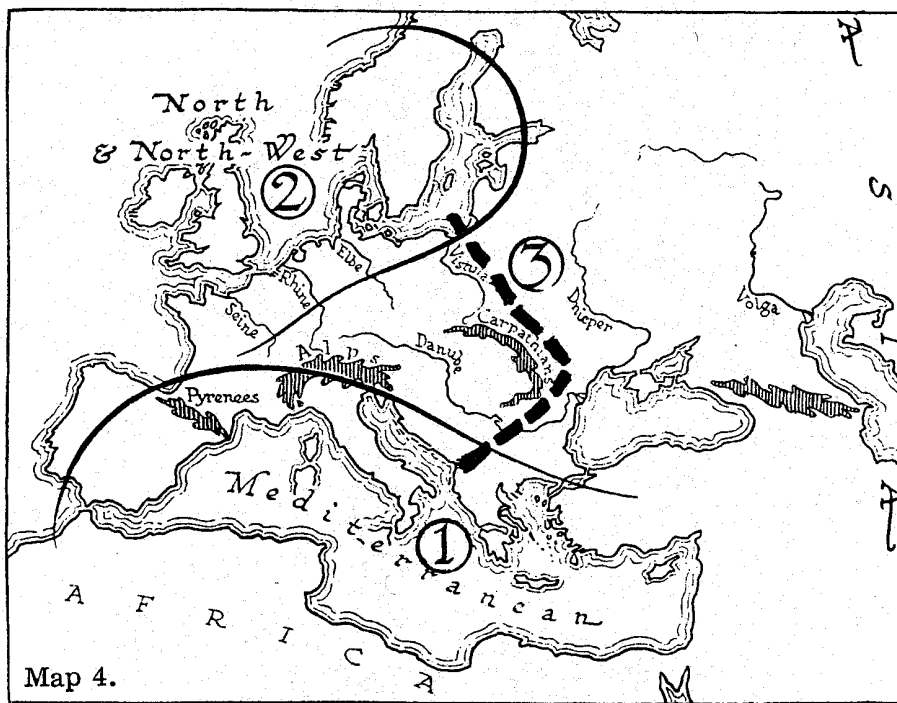
rian people from an outlaw "horde" against whom a Christian Prince was not only free, but bound by duty, to take up arms, into a member of the Christian family of nations, and their prince into one of those rulers by the Grace of God whose legitimate rights his fellow-princes could not infringe without sin. The royal crown made its wearer a true sovereign, not indeed the Emperor's equal in status, but in no respect subject to his overlordship, while the Apostolic insignia made the Hungarian church free of any other authority save that of Rome alone — an enormous reinforcement of the country's real independence". (1)

The tenth century was the time for nation and state formation in Central and Eastern Europe. Beside Hungary, the kingdom of Poland was established in a very similar manner. Both countries become in-

dependent as a state as well as a Church Province. Bohemia, the third country born at the time in Central Europe, was not so fortunate: it became a Province of the German Holy Roman Empire.

Eastern Europe followed this trend. From the South up new states came into existence: Servia, Bulgaria, Russia, Lithuania, Esthonia. The first three of these became the missionary territory of the East Roman Empire, the Greek type of Christianity, which became the pravoslav religion.

This development established the Eastern border of Europe alongside the Eastern borders of Poland and Hungary. This border is not just a dividing line of religions, it is the frontier of almost everything which implies the meaning and essence of Europe for all times until today. The real border of Europe indeed.



1. European history began in the Mediterranean.
2. Civilization spread northwards and north-westwards to the islands and peninsulas of the Atlantic coastline and to the great northern inland sea.
3. In this central region the tenth century was the time for state formation.

— — — — — European defence frontier.

The Eastern border of Europe was not only the religious, cultural or political border of the Continent, it was also its defence frontier, first against the Mongol invasion, later against the Islamic expansion, recently against the Russian invasion.

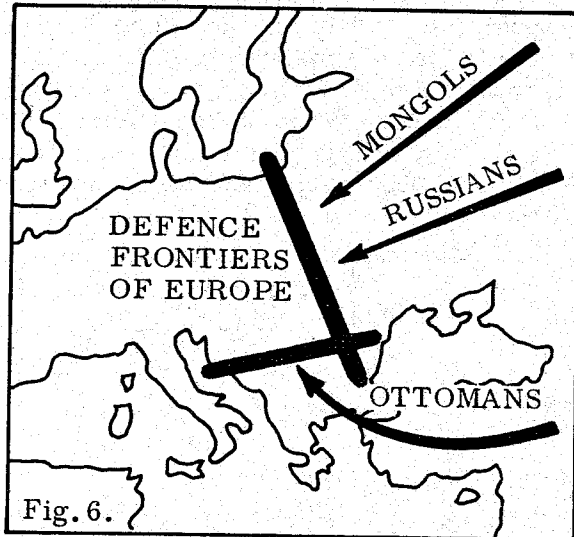
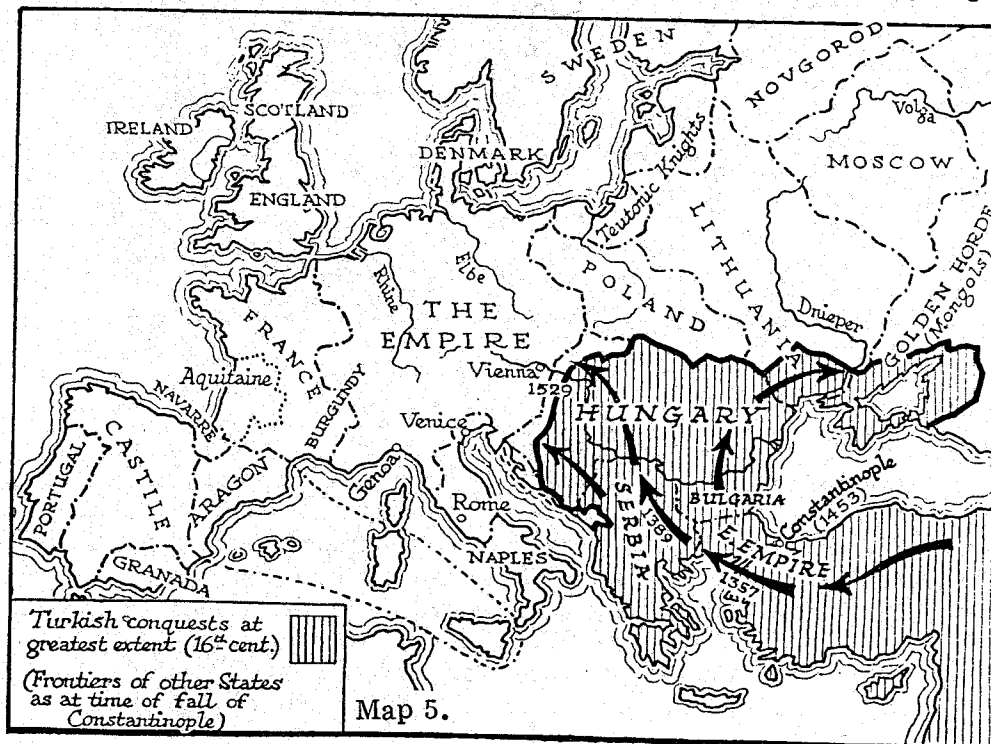


Fig. 6. Ever since the establishment of Hungary, Asiatic hordes of various denominations have carried out military raids over the Carpathian Mountains.

In 1241 Mongols or Tartars invaded Europe under Ghengis Khan's grandson, Batu. After having crushed the Polish and German armies, the Tartars ravaged Hungary in 1241-42. Though they vacated the country in 1242, they left total devastation behind them and annihilated half of the country's total population.

The 14th century brought another threat to Europe's Christian civilization: the onslaught of the fanatic Ottoman empire of the Turks. After 150 years of defensive battles, the Hungarian resistance collapsed at the battle of Mohács (1526). This was the beginning of the most disastrous period of Hungarian history: almost two centuries of Turkish aggression, occupation and oppression in the centre of the country with the German-Habsburg empire holding the western fringe under a rule almost as brutal as that of the Turks. The flickering light of Hungarian independence barely survived in semi-independent Transylvania.

At the end of the 175 years of Turkish occupation the population of Hungary was a mere 2.5 million — compared to the 4.5 million in the 15th century (the same as the population of 15th century England.)

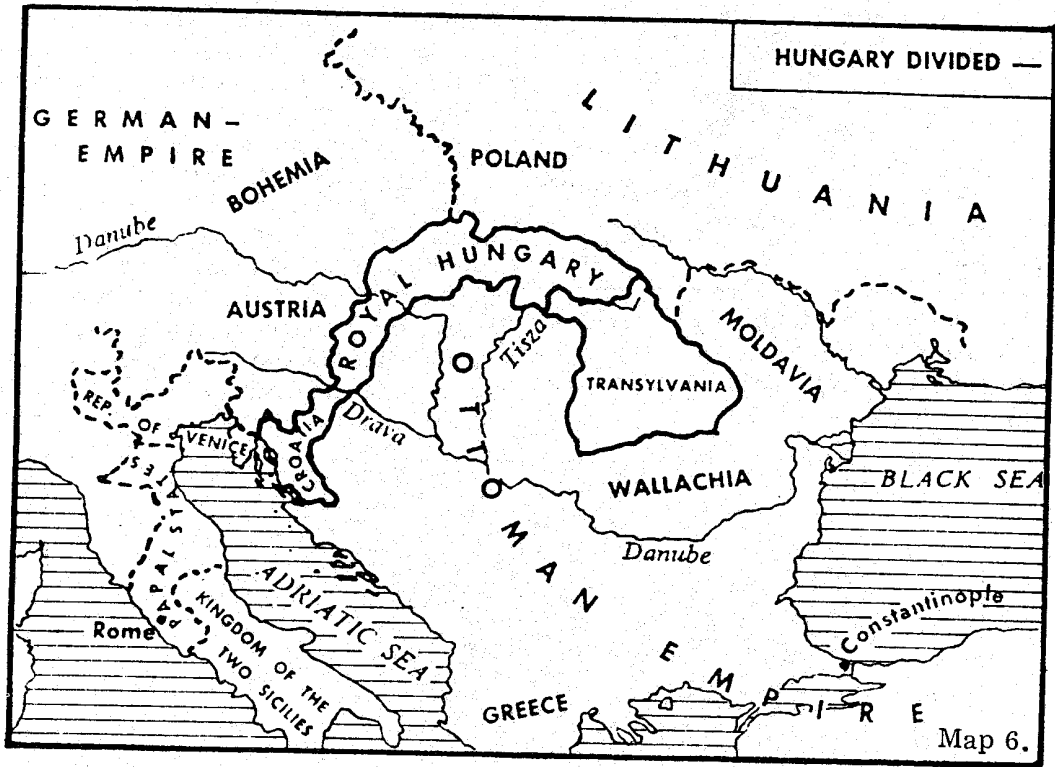


Weakness is a punishable crime in history. Hungary's heavy losses during the Turkish wars were not all caused by the Turks and did not end with their departure.

The Habsburg domination, based on the western strip of the country during the Turkish wars, was extended over the rest of the country after its "liberation" from the Turks (in 1699). The Habsburgs' final aim was to incorporate "liberated" Hungary into their family empire.

The losses inflicted by the Turks ( and often by the "liberating" German armies) resulted in a radical alteration of the de-

mographic conditions of Hungary. Vast regions had been depopulated. The Habsburgs promoted their Germanization policy by repopulating these areas with German settlers and immigrants from neighbouring countries, thus creating foreign islands and belts inside Hungary. No Hungarians were permitted to settle in the southern area of the Great Plain — the German administration settled these formerly pure Magyar territories with Serbs from the Balkans. They also allowed Rumanian shepherds coming from the Balkans.



### The North

There are hardly any two neighbouring nations in Europe with such similar history as Hungary and Poland. There is also no instance of any discord between the two countries during their thousand years of European history. Poland, in the North, suffered more from the Mongols (1241, 1259 and 1287) but less from the Turks because of her geographical situation. On the

other hand, Poland's open eastern and western frontiers invited aggression by her two powerful neighbours, Germany and Russia. Thus German colonization in the 12th-13th centuries deprived Poland of considerable territories. Lithuanian aggression only ceased when, in the 14th century a Polish queen of Hungarian birth united the two countries. Friendly cooperation between

Hungary and Poland thrived in the 14th century when the Poles invited the Hungarian king, Louis to their throne (1370-82) and again, in the 16th century, when Hungarian Stephen Batori became Poland's king and successful defender against Germans and Russians. During the period of the Hungarian-Polish union (14th century) the dual empire represented a giant zone of peace and prosperity in Central Europe. And indeed, whenever both Hungary and Poland prospered, peace prevailed in Central Europe.

Poland's problems with feudalism were also similar to Hungary's and her approach to the problem was also similar to the Hungarian solution: the establishment of a strong, centralized state-structure. Still, the country's defenceless eastern and western borders were too much of a temptation for her aggressive neighbours and so the country lost its statehood on two occasions in

the 18th century and did not regain her independence until 1919 — only to become the target of German and Russian expansionism again.

It can be said that threats of aggression against either country generally implied similar dangers against the other. This has been the case of the Tartar, Mongol, Turkish, German and Russian menaces against both countries. Each aggressor was common enemy to Poland and Hungary.

We may therefore state that the geopolitical equilibrium of the Marchland should be based on a strong Hungary and a strong Poland. Only these two are able to defend the region against both the East and the West.

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- (1.) C.A. Macartney: Hungary, A Short History, The Edinburgh University Press, 1962.