

Foreword

The Hungarians, who were Finno-Ugric in origin but who incorporated Turkic elements into their culture, occupied their country in the Carpathian Basin at the very end of the 9th century. Their culture, which was characteristic of the steppe, was influenced by the economic and social conditions of Central Europe, the conversion to Christianity, and the numerous neighbouring nations. For this reason it has been said that "Hungary is Europe in a nutshell". Here, folk cultures combine the traditions of East and West into a unit unique to and characteristic only of Hungary. In our work we attempt to illuminate her multiple yet unified character from as many aspects as possible.

Every book is meant for a smaller or larger community of readers. The author's job is the harder, his responsibility the greater, the wider the circle to which he wishes to offer something new. We feel this burden increasingly now that we have undertaken to inform experts and interested laymen alike about what our discipline has concluded regarding the traditional culture of the Hungarian people. The task is difficult not only because we must explore the most important territories of life, but also because we must do so in such a way as to disperse those romantic conceptions which even today often cling to the Hungarian people.

Though experts and lay public make different demands in regard to a book, the two can be reconciled. This is why we attempt a general synthesis without becoming immersed in smaller, or what we judge to be less significant, details. For the experts we include at the end of the volume a selected bibliography, with the help of which they can further research areas of interest to them. We serve both groups by including sufficient sketches, maps and photographs to make the message more understandable and more interesting. There are many debated questions in our field, since the raw material now being uncovered in ever growing quantities continues to raise new problems. We therefore first summarize the results of the debates already settled, or thought by us to have been settled, so that the reader can see the most recent but already established conclusions.

We wish to offer an outline summary of the entire field of Hungarian folk knowledge, a summary which extends into areas of social, material, and intellectual culture, social, material anthropology and folklore. This culture was for centuries primarily a tradition carried and reshaped by the peasantry, who from the time of its development in the Middle Ages was forced for the most part to be self-sufficient both in the material and intellectual areas. This type of culture is much older and more comprehensive than the culture of the ruling classes, and can with justice be called communal, since the widest strata of people passed it on to succeeding generations through tradition.

However, this culture itself developed, was reshaped, changed. It

preserved relics, historical and ethnic characteristics from the Hungarian past, to some extent in the field of material culture, to a greater extent in the field of folklore. Economic and social changes shaped the living conditions of the peasantry, sometimes through slow progress, sometimes with such a rapid tempo that it was difficult to keep up, but to which they needed to adjust and become accustomed, whether they liked it or not. So the peasants' culture developed, changed seemingly by itself, but in fact through the compelling effect of outside forces.

Although Hungarian folk culture changed and developed as a result of economic and social factors, many other elements also played a part in this process, of which it suffices to mention only a few.

Landlords and peasants lived alongside each other within the area of one settlement. The manor-house where the peasants performed their services stood as an example to the humble peasant huts. Often the same carpenter who worked for the landlord made the furnishings for the cottages, at least from the 18th century on. And upper-class culture at every period tried to link itself with the aristocratic, and through them with European trends. Thus the great cultural, artistic currents of Europe, although often a century late and much diluted, still got through to the Hungarian peasants.

The church at different periods also left a significant mark on the culture of the peasants. The buildings of churches, standing at the centre of the villages, gave provincial reflections to European architectural directions, that is, they were the provincial versions of these directions. Church holidays and the name days of the saints left an imprint on the world of custom. Analogies and stories with European currency found their way through the sermons into Hungarian folk poetry. For example, the influence of Gregorian chants is still alive today. The influence of Calvinist psalms, whose French melodies originated in the 16th century, can also be shown.

As a result of different nations living together within the Carpathian Basin, their folk culture mutually influenced one another. This can be demonstrated especially in areas of contact, where the composition of a significant number of the villages is mixed. However, certain cultural elements can also be often found far from border regions, and furthermore not infrequently in a significant part of a linguistic region.

We can untangle and explore all this if present-day ethnology follows with attention the historical direction of the phenomena. Going backwards in time, such surviving documents as written memoirs, illustrations and existent objects can be made to tell their story. In this way we can determine the course of development, and once in a while the origin as well, of a device, a work method, or a certain type of folk poetry. We know of numerous instances where ethnographical investigations can be linked up ultimately with the results of archeological research.

By the Middle Ages the peasantry was no longer homogeneous. Those who were more or less prosperous were distinguishable from indigent servants and were also well separated from the village artisans. During the last two hundred years the social differentiation gradually became more marked, especially within the sphere of economics. An even greater disparity developed between the culture of the prosperous

and that of poor peasants, agricultural labourers and seasonal labourers of the latifundia. Hungarian ethnology considers that the description and analysis of the differentiation of folk culture is one of its most important tasks, and where ways and opportunities are offered, we relate our work to this.

Folk culture, therefore, is not in itself homogeneous and its bearers do not have the same ability to develop it further. Gifted story-tellers and singers not only create variations of their art, but in the spirit of tradition, they also create something new. In the past women of outstanding skill in weaving or sewing gained reputations similar to those of certain shepherds. People came from afar to order an ornamental whip or buy ornate woodcarvings. Agricultural tools were improved and working methods changed mostly by innovators hidden under the veil of anonymity. Outstanding story-tellers and singers were remembered in the same way as masters of ceremonies at weddings, who had to fulfil the function of organizer, versifier and dancer in one person. The peasantry appeared to be a homogeneous mass only when viewed from a distance, since outstanding individuals in the different strata were creators in certain areas of peasant culture and under limited conditions, and their innovations could be built into the whole.

The description of such a complicated process is possible only if we break up peasant culture into chapters, as we do in this book, according to outside points of a view. Furthermore, we do this according to the method developed in our discipline, which separates material culture from folklore only in order to facilitate research. These will be preceded by another chapter, in which we pin-point certain phenomena present in social or community culture, i. e., we shall analyse the relationships between people, and between people and society. This division and systematization serve to make the survey easier. Phenomena co-exist or are connected to each other in everyday life, in the past as in the present. The man who ploughed might be the same as the one who was a redoubtable teller of tales and singer of songs, or who at another time organized a burial and maybe, in the appropriate season, a harvesting group. But the reader must do this synthesizing for himself; the authors can only try to offer help in this effort.

This aim is also served by our introduction, which acquaints the reader with the outline history of Hungarian ethnology, its past and present directions, and some basic characteristics of its current organization and function. Hungarian folk culture is most intimately linked to the history of the entire people and nation. This synopsis provides an ethnological framework within which the reader can place his own knowledge. Similarly, a short excursion into the territory of Hungarian linguistics will introduce the most important ethnic groups and ethnographic regions of the Hungarian people, which differ from each other in more or less significant characteristics. Their names will recur frequently, so the reader can already greet them as familiars. Besides, as we have introduced the main features of Hungarian ethnography, so shall we also outline how and what elements or units of folk culture fit into the socialist culture.