

REVIEW ARTICLES

## A Traditional Historian's View of Hungarian History

S. B. Vardy

*Küldetés. A magyarság története* [Mission. The History of the Magyars]. By Ferenc Somogyi. (A magyar öntudat forrásai/The Sources of Hungarian Consciousness I.) Cleveland, Ohio: Karpat Publishing Company, 1973. 656 pp. Numerous maps, illustrations, tables, \$12.00.

To write a brief factual account of an institution's history is not an insurmountable task for a trained historian. Many of them can also produce respectable monographs on limited topics — be these biographies of historical figures, or detailed studies on limited problems in history. To produce a major and complex synthesis of a nation's history, however, is quite another matter. Usually, only mature scholars can tackle such undertakings with a reasonable hope of success. Not that others have not made such attempts. But the results were usually feeble chronological summaries, with little or no understanding of the forces and major trends of the nation's history.

If we look back in the history of Hungarian historical studies, starting with the emergence of "scientific" historiography in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, we note that only a handful of major (mostly multivolumed) syntheses of Hungarian historical developments have appeared. These were written either by such exceptionally gifted historians as L. Szalay (1813–1864), M. Horváth (1809–1878), I. Acsády (1845–1906), H. Marczali (1856–1940), B. Hóman (1885–1951) and G. [J.] Szekfű (1883–1955), or by a group of outstanding scholars under the direction of a gifted organizer, such as S. Szilágyi (1827–1899).<sup>1</sup> The most exceptional among these summaries was undoubtedly Hóman's and Szekfű's joint eight-volume (later five-volume) *Magyar History* (1928–1934),<sup>2</sup> which is still to be surpassed in its sheer brilliance as a synthesis of Hungarian historical developments.

In addition to these really outstanding multivolumed syntheses, Hungarian historians have also produced a number of significant shorter summaries. Some of the better interwar examples include the worthy popular syntheses by such scholars as S. Domanovszky (1877–1955), F. Eckhart (1885–1957), M. Asztalos (b. 1899) and S. Pethő (1885–1940), I. Szabó (1898–1969), and D. Kosáry (b. 1913).<sup>3</sup> A number of these also appeared in one or more of the Western languages. But it was Kosáry's *A History of Hungary* (1941) that became perhaps the most popular short summary of Hungarian history in the Anglo-Saxon world.

The trend set by the above scholars in the area of short one or two-volume syntheses was discontinued after 1945 in Hungary. Marxist historiography initiated the age of collective syntheses. Some of these are major undertakings, such as the four-volume university textbook (1961–1975),<sup>4</sup> the two-volume popular synthesis edited by the “father” of Hungarian Marxist historiography, E. Molnár (1894–1966),<sup>5</sup> and published in three separate editions since 1964, or the ten-volume *History of Hungary*, now under preparation by the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.<sup>6</sup> There are also a few shorter popular syntheses.<sup>7</sup> But whether short or long, they all reflect the collective view of Hungarian Marxist historiography, and not the personal interpretation of the author or the authors. True, these interpretations have become quite sophisticated and of high quality in recent years, but they all have to reflect the Marxist view of history.

The situation is different in Western historiography on Hungary, where the traditions set by the individual interwar interpreters of history were continued by such scholars as D. Sinor (b. 1917) and C. A. Macartney (b. 1895). Moreover, during the late 1960's Kosáry's popular history also reappeared with a sizable addition by the present author.<sup>8</sup> It is to be lamented that none of the above scholars went ahead to produce a major multivolumed synthesis of Hungarian historical developments. That, however, may still be in the making.

In addition to the above English language summaries, Hungarian scholars in the West have also produced a number of small Magyar language syntheses of Hungarian history. Until recently, the most noteworthy of these was G. [J.] Miskolczy's *The History of the Hungarian People* (1956).<sup>9</sup> But this work covers the history of the Magyars only between the Battle of Mohács in 1526, when the medieval Hungarian state fell to the Ottoman Turks, and the First World War. Of the other Magyar language summaries Ö. Málnási's *The Candid History of the Hungarian Nation* (1959) is closer to a political or publicistic tract than

to a detached history.<sup>10</sup> The multi-authored *Hungarian History* by M. Ferdinandy, G. Miskolczy, S. Gallus and B. Szász, on the other hand, was prepared basically for use as a textbook on the secondary school level.<sup>11</sup> Thus, one who wished to read a scholarly and non-Marxist summary of the whole course of Hungarian history in the Magyar language on a higher than secondary level, had to turn to one of the difficult-to-get interwar syntheses.

The situation remained unchanged until three years ago, when Ferenc Somogyi's *Küldetés* [Mission] appeared. Professor Somogyi's work is the first more-than-cursory attempt in the last three decades by a non-Marxist Hungarian scholar to summarize the whole course of Hungarian history in the Magyar language. Naturally, he undertook this task from the vantage point of an idealist, rather than a materialist philosophy of history. Yet, while breaking sharply with the philosophy that rules current historical scholarship in Hungary, Somogyi made great efforts to take into consideration the most recent developments and results of Hungarian historical sciences.

Even a cursory glance will tell the reader that Somogyi's *Küldetés* is the result of long years of research, meditation and teaching. It is the product of a scholar who started out as a legal historian at the University of Pécs in Hungary during the 1930's, and then ended up as a socio-cultural historian in the United States.<sup>12</sup> His synthesis is basically the refined version of his lectures on Hungarian social, cultural and political history that he delivered during the 1950's and the 1960's, both at St. Stephen's Free University, as well as Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio.<sup>13</sup> Thus, it is not the esoteric work of a secluded research scholar, but rather the product of a teaching historian who had devoted long years of his life toward making the history of the Magyars comprehensible to an audience that had little or no background knowledge about Hungary. This is demonstrated both by the structure, as well as by the content of the work.

Structurally, Somogyi's *Küldetés* is divided into five parts, each of which is sub-divided into a certain number of chapters. Each of the five parts deals with a different problem area or phase of Hungarian history, which fit into Somogyi's conception of Hungarian historical evolution. The five parts contain fifty-one chapters, which adds up to roughly twenty-five chapters or lectures per semester.

Contentwise, the five chapters in Part I are devoted to such fundamental matters as the nature of civilization, history, and man, the development of human civilization, the nature of the Eurasian nomadic empires and their relationship to the sedentary civilization of Europe.

The seven chapters in Part II start out with a discussion of the ethnic and linguistic development of the Magyars, continue with their proto-history before the conquest of the Carpathian Basin, and finally end up in the conquest itself and the subsequent establishment of the medieval Christian Hungarian Kingdom. This part contains much that is new in Hungarian proto-historical scholarship. Professor Somogyi even considers — and then basically discards — the so-called “theory of the Sumerian origins of the Magyars,” which has been proposed by a number of mostly self-trained historians and linguists, and enjoys considerable popularity among the general public.<sup>14</sup> Somogyi’s coverage is particularly good in the area of the socio-political system, and the material and spiritual culture of the Magyars. This reader would have probably given more attention to the theory of the “double conquest” proposed by Professor G. László in Hungary, which holds that the “Late Avars” of 671 were in fact Magyars.<sup>15</sup> He would also have discussed the institution of the “double kingship,” and along with it the role of Prince Kurszán as the supreme, if perhaps nominal ruler of the conquering Magyars.<sup>16</sup> Attention may also have been given to the theory of “Southern” Moravia, proposed by Professor I. Boba of the University of Washington,<sup>17</sup> and to G. László’s theory of the possibility of two separate Moravias in the ninth century. But these developments are so recent, and their acceptance or non-acceptance so tenuous, that their inclusion may simply have confused the readers. Certainly none of the relatively recent Western syntheses have anything to say about them.

The remaining three sections (Parts III–V) of Professor Somogyi’s *Küldetés* deal with the history of the close to nine and a half centuries since the death of Hungary’s first Christian king, St. Stephen, in 1038. Part III covers the period between 1038 and 1433, Part IV the period between 1433 and 1699, and Part V the period from 1699 to our own days.

The above periodization of Hungarian history is rather unorthodox. The usual dates are connected with the Christianization of Hungary in 1000 A.D., and the destruction of the medieval Hungarian Kingdom by the Ottoman Turks in 1526. But in Somogyi’s view of Hungarian historical evolution, his new periodization scheme does make a great deal of sense. For the foundation of medieval Hungary was basically a long process that began with the Magyar conquest and came to fulfillment with the rule of St. Stephen. Thus, his death can in fact be regarded as the end of that foundation process, which established her firmly in the community of European states.

The next turning point in Somogyi's scheme — King Sigismund's coronation as Holy Roman Emperor in 1433 — is perhaps less easily understood and defensible. But in his scheme it still falls into place. It was roughly around that date when Hungary assumed her "mission" as one of the main defenders of Europe and Christianity against the Ottoman Empire and Islam. In fact, from the mid-fifteenth century on, the primary determining factor in Hungary's history was the advancing Ottoman Turkish power, or more specifically, the Ottoman-Christian duel that was shaping up and fought for the next two and a half centuries largely on Hungarian soil.

The Turkish presence in Hungary ended basically with the Peace Treaty of Karlowitz of 1699. This treaty also initiated a new chapter in Hungary's history, and set her upon a new course that was characterized by a growing search for national self-determination. This Hungarian "search for freedom" is the dominant theme of the fifth and final section of Somogyi's synthesis. It is a theme that characterized Hungarian history under Habsburg rule, as well as during the past six decades, when the Magyars were subjected to German and Russian pressure and domination.

Throughout his coverage of the history of the past one thousand years, the author pays considerable attention to Hungarian constitutional, social and cultural developments — which is completely in harmony with his interest and his scholarly background.

In addition to what has already been said, the dominant themes that run through Somogyi's synthesis are his religiosity and his belief in the ordained mission of his nation. Undoubtedly, this is an idealist view, which, if combined with his traditionalism, may not appeal to many of the so-called "modern" historians. But it is a respectable view, that may even be called "refreshing" in this age when the historical sciences are dominated by various far-out materialist, quantitative, psychohistorical, and a multitude of other "modernistic," but also hopelessly chaotic and mostly ephemeral orientations.

Somogyi's text of about 550 pages is supplemented by nearly 100 pages of appended material. These include linguistic and genealogical tables, lists of Hungary's monarchs, statesmen and prime ministers, ruling princes of Transylvania, the number and names of counties at various stages of Hungary's administrative development, as well as a detailed name and subject index. There are also a number of maps and illustrations in the text itself.

No single historian agrees with all of the conclusions and approaches of another historian. And this will also be the fate of Professor So-

mogyi's synthesis of Hungarian history. The views and conclusions he presents here are the results of his own experiences in the study of Hungarian history. But whatever one's agreement or disagreement, the *Küldetés* is a worthy synthesis of Hungarian historical evolution that deserves the attention of all historians. It combines the more traditional and idealist philosophy of its author with the up-to-date research results of Hungarian historical sciences, and does so with the needed scholarly detachment, and without prior ideological commitment to any deterministic philosophy. Should it ever be published in an English version in a slightly revised form, it could serve as a healthy idealist counterpart to the recent English language Marxist synthesis of Hungarian history that appeared under the editorship of E. Pamlényi.<sup>18</sup>

## NOTES

1. László Szalay, *Magyarország története* [History of Hungary], 6 vols. (Leipzig, 1852–1854 and Pest, 1857–1895); Mihály Horváth, *Magyarország történelme* [History of Hungary], 6 vols. (Pest, 1860–1863; 2nd ed., 8 vols., 1871–1873); Ignác Acsády, *A magyar birodalom története* [The History of the Hungarian Empire], 2 vols. (Budapest, 1903–1904); Henrik Marczali, *Magyarország története* [History of Hungary] (Budapest, 1911); Bálint Hóman and Gyula Szekfű, *Magyar történet* [Magyar History], 8 vols. (Budapest, 1928–1934; 7th ed., 5 vols., 1941–1943); and Sándor Szilágyi, ed., *A Magyar nemzet története* [The History of the Hungarian Nation], 10 vols. (Budapest, 1895–1898). The main Hungarian authors of the latter volumes were: H. Marczali, A. Pór, G. Schönherr, V. Fraknoi, I. Acsády, D. Angyal, G. Ballagi, S. Márki, and G. Beksics.
2. See above.
3. Alexander Domanovszky, *Die Geschichte Ungarns* (München and Leipzig, 1923); Ferenc Eckhart, *Magyarország története* (Budapest, 1933) and its English version, *A Short History of the Hungarian People* (London, 1931); Miklós Asztalos and Sándor Pethő, *A magyar nemzet története* [The History of the Hungarian Nation] (Budapest, 1933); István Szabó, *A magyarság életrajza* (Budapest, 1941), and its German version: Stefan Szabó, *Ungarisches Volk. Geschichte und Wandlung* (Budapest and Leipzig, 1944); and Dominic G. Kosáry, *A History of Hungary* (Cleveland and New York, 1941).
4. *Magyarország története. Egyetemi tankönyv* [History of Hungary. University Textbook], 4 vols. to date (Budapest, 1961–1975). Of the four volumes, the first deals with Hungarian history up to 1526, the second between 1526 and 1790, the third between 1790 and 1849, and the fourth between 1849 and 1918. The authors and editors include well over a dozen prominent Hungarian scholars.
5. *Magyarország története* [History of Hungary], ed. Erik Molnár, 2 vols. (Budapest, 1964; 2nd ed., 1967; 3rd ed., 1975).

6. *Magyarország története* [History of Hungary], editor-in-chief Zsigmond Pál Pach, projected 10 vols. (Budapest, 1976- ). So far only vol. 8 dealing with the interwar period (1918–1945) has appeared in print under the editorship of György Ránki. It is a massive volume of 1,400 pages.
7. *A magyar nép története* [The History of the Hungarian People], G. Heckenast *et al.* (Budapest, 1951; 3rd ed. 1953); *A magyar nép története* [The History of the Hungarian People], E. Pamlényi *et al.*, 2 small vols. (Budapest, 1954); and Mátyás Unger and Ottó Szabolcs, *Magyarország története* [History of Hungary] (Budapest, 1965; 2nd ed., 1976).
8. Dominic G. Kosáry and Steven B. Várdy, *History of the Hungarian Nation* (Astor Park, Florida, 1969). Várdy added the section on the period between 1918 and 1968.
9. Gyula Miskolczi, *A magyar nép történelme a mohácsi véstől az első világháborúig* [The History of the Hungarian People from the Battle of Mohács till World War I] (Rome, 1956).
10. Ödön Málnási, *A magyar nemzet őszinte története* [The Candid History of the Hungarian Nation], 2nd ed. (Munich, 1959).
11. Mihály Ferdinándy, Gyula Miskolczi, Sándor Gallus and Béla Szász, *Magyar történelem* [Hungarian History] (Cleveland, 1957).
12. On Ferenc Somogyi, see S. B. Várdy, *Modern Hungarian Historiography* [East European Monographs, No. 17] (Boulder and New York, 1976), pp. 192, 195, 274, 275.
13. On Somogyi's activities in Cleveland see S. B. Várdy, "Hungarian Studies at American and Canadian Universities," *Canadian-American Review of Hungarian Studies*, vol. II, no. 2 (Fall 1975), pp. 104–105.
14. For two English language works on this theory see Ida Bobula, *Origin of the Hungarian Nation* (Gainesville, Florida, 1968), and Sándor Nagy, *The Forgotten Cradle of the Hungarian Culture* (Toronto, 1973).
15. Gyula László's most significant relevant works are: *Hunor és Magyar nyomában* [In search of Hunor and Magyar] (Budapest, 1967); *A honfoglalókról* [About the Conquerors] (Budapest, 1973); and *Vértesszőlőstől Pusztaszerig* [From Vértesszőlős to Pusztaszer] (Budapest, 1974).
16. György Györffy first came up with the idea of the "double kingship" and Kurszán in 1955 in his study entitled "Kurszán és Kurszán vára" [Kurszán and the Castle of Kurszán], in *Budapest régiségei*, vol. 16 (Budapest, 1955), pp. 9–40, which he later republished in his *Tanulmányok a magyar állam eredetéről* [Studies on the Origins of the Hungarian State] (Budapest, 1959).
17. See Imre Boba's two works: *Nomads, Northmen and Slavs* (The Hague, 1967), and *Moravia's History Reconsidered* (The Hague, 1971).
18. *A History of Hungary*, ed. Ervin Pamlényi, translated by László Boros, *et al.* [Compiled under the auspices of the History Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences] (London, 1975). This work is basically a shortened and revised version of the work listed in note 5.



## The Folk Traditions of Rural Hungary A Photographic Record

Veronika Gervers-Molnár

*Elindultam világ útján: magyar népszokások* [I Set Out on the Highway of the World: Hungarian Folk Customs]. By Péter Korniss. With a preface by Sándor Csoóri, and ethnographical notes by Ferenc Novák. Budapest: Corvina (1975). ISBN 963 13 1051 5.

Hungarian folk culture, customs, and art have been studied extensively by scholars since the mid-nineteenth century, and have been a major subject taught in the departments of ethnography at several Hungarian universities. The richness of this culture has inspired writers, musicians, dancers and other artists as well as enthusiastic amateurs, who all found in it a Source, a 'Fountain of Life'. On the other hand, the material culture has been carefully collected by museums, and the folklore preserved in writing and on tapes. Against this background, Korniss' volume stands out as a new and possibly last effective attempt to save the essence of Hungarian rural life and the reality of folk customs.

Korniss, a photographer of exceptional talent with a particular interest in human subjects, introduces the "reader" of his book to a selection of traditional customs, still alive in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in eleven photographic essays of over a hundred pictures. Some of these essays are connected to the great religious festivities of the year, Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, which recall the theatrical plays of the Middle Ages as well as certain elements of a much earlier, pre-Christian past. Other customs, which to a great extent survived in children's games, are purely pagan in character. In a few essays, the emphasis is on such major events in a human's life as marriage and death; while elsewhere the secular festivities of rural life are depicted, as the harvest of the grapes, the 'dance house', or the ceremonial dressing of a young girl for Sunday.

*Illustration on opposite page: Shepherd from Szék [Sic]. Kolozs County [Jud. Cluj], Transylvania, Romania. 1967.*