A Concise History of HUNGARY

Miklós Molnár

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CHRONOLOGY

c. 2000 BC	Separation of the Finno-Ugric languages in western Siberia
1000–500 BC	Separation of the Ugrians, Magyar people group in the southern Ural region (Bashkiria)
AD 500–800	Migration of the Hungarian tribes from the Urals to the Black Sea region
862	Established at Etelköz, near the River Don, the Hungarians venture into Frankish territories
895–900	Conquest of the Carpathian basin
899–970	Forays to the West and to the Balkans
900–1301	Reign of the House of Árpád
1001	Coronation of István I (St Stephen). Foundation of the state, Christianisation, pagan revolts
1077–1116	László I (St Ladislas) and Kálmán I (Coloman) expand the influence of the kingdom to the Balkans, Croatia and Dalmatia. Advances in justice and culture
1172–96	Béla III strengthens the power of the state and the property of the lay nobles
1192–5	The Pray Codex, containing the oldest Hungarian text
1222	The Golden Bull of András (Andrew) II; first charter of equal rights for the nobility
1241–2	Mongol-Tatar invasion, followed by Béla IV's reconstruction
1301	Extinction of the dynasty of the House of Árpád
1310–82	Two Neapolitan Angevin kings, Charles-Robert and Louis I the Great. Period of progress and expansion. Louis becomes King of Poland in 1370
1367	Foundation of the University of Pécs
1387–1437	Sigismund I of Luxemburg, the future emperor. Half a century

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	of struggle with the barons. Withdrawal from the Balkans and from Dalmatia
1416–56	The Ottoman Empire threatens Hungary
1456	János (John) Hunyadi, military leader, governor (1446–52) and great commander, stops Turkish expansion at Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade)
1458–90	Matthias I, Hunyadi's son, reconstructs the kingdom and introduces Renaissance culture
1514	The great peasant revolt under the leadership of György (George) Dózsa. István Werböczi's corpus of civil law (*Tripartitum*) establishes the customary rights of the nobility to the detriment of the peasants, who are reduced to servitude
1526	At Mohács, Suleiman I the Magnificent annihilates the Hungarian army. Two rival kings, János (John) Szápolyai and the Habsburg Ferdinand I, divide the country between them
1541	The sultan occupies Buda, the Turks settle in the middle of the country. The division of Hungary into three parts – the Turkish, the Transylvanian and the western part under Habsburg rule – lasts till the end of the seventeenth century
	The Reformation reaches Hungary and contributes to literary development as does the Counter-Reformation
	Transylvania, under Ottoman rule, becomes a semi-independent principality
1568	The Transylvanian Torda Diet proclaims religious freedom
1571	István (Stephen) Báthori, the future king of Poland, is elected prince of Transylvania
1604–6	Uprising against the Habsburgs led by István (Stephen) Bocskai
1613–29	Transylvania's golden age under Gábor Bethlen. War against the Habsburgs
1657–1705	Leopold I, king of Hungary and emperor, introduces Habsburg absolutism in Hungary
1686	Liberation of Buda, retreat of the Turks
1687	Transylvania falls under Viennese domination
1699	Peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire, the end of 158 years of occupation
1703–11	War of liberation of Ferenc (Francis) Rákóczi II against the Habsburgs
1722–3	The Hungarian Diet sanctions the succession to the throne of the female line of the house of Habsburg. The nobility retain their privileges
1740–80	The conciliatory and enlightened reign of Maria Theresa

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1780–90	Joseph II, an enlightened absolute monarch, tries to impose reforms but fails in the face of resistance by the nobility
1795	At Buda, execution of the leaders of the 'Jacobin conspirators'
1800–48	The language reform movement. Flourishing of Hungarian literature
1830	Publication of the work *Hitel* (Credit) by Count István (Stephen) Széchenyi, the initiator of modernisation and founder of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences
1832–48	Period of reforms in the Diet. Lajos (Louis) Kossuth emerges as leader of the liberal–radical opposition. The Diet committees support national demands
	The opening of the National Theatre at Pest. Suspension bridge to link Pest and Buda. The first railway line from Pest to Vác
1848–9	Revolution at Pest (15 March). War of independence. King Ferdinand V sanctions the 'April law' of constitutional transformation and abolition of serfdom. Hungarian government at Pest
	War of liberation against Austria (September 1848–August 1849). Abdication of Emperor Ferdinand. The young Francis-Joseph I is enthroned (2 December 1848)
	After the victorious spring campaign the Hungarian (Honvéd) army retreats. The National Assembly, transferred to Debrecen, proclaims Hungary's independence and the dethronement of the Habsburgs (14 April 1849). Kossuth president–governor
	In response to Francis-Joseph's appeal, the army of Tsar Nicholas I invades Hungary. The Hungarian army lays down its arms in front of the Russians at Világos (15 August). Kossuth goes into exile
1849–67	Executions and repression. Neo-absolutist regime, passive resistance. Beginning of the reconciliation
1865	Ferenc (Francis) Deák embarks on talks with Vienna regarding the restitution of constitutional freedoms
1866	The Austrian army is defeated by the Prussians at Sadowa
1867	Austro-Hungarian compromise based on mutual concessions. The start of the 51-year period of dualism. Count Gyula (Julius) Andrássy's government
1868	The Hungarian Parliament adopts liberal laws regarding education and the rights of the national minorities of the kingdom. Hungarian–Croatian compromise
1871–9	Gyula Andrássy minister of foreign affairs of the dual monarchy

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1873	Pest, Buda and Óbuda are united, Budapest is born
1875–90	Kálmán (Coloman) Tisza heads the liberal government, the advocates of independence are in opposition
1896	Hungary's millennium
1905	The Liberal Party loses the elections
1906–10	Coalition governments. Serious conflicts with the minorities, with the trade union movement and with the Social Democratic Party
1908	Annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (2 million inhabitants) by the monarchy
1910	Last census before the war. Hungary (without Croatia) has 18,246,000 inhabitants of whom 54.5 per cent are of Hungarian mother tongue. More than 1.5 million Hungarian citizens have emigrated to the United States
1912	General strike
1913	István (Stephen) Tisza's government
1914	The assassination of the crown prince at Sarajevo. Outbreak of the First World War
1916	The death of Francis Joseph I
1918	The defeat and disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy (October). Democratic revolution. Abdication of King Charles IV. Mihály (Michael) Károlyi president of the Republic
1919	The Republic of Councils and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The collapse of Béla Kun's regime (1 August); Romanian occupation. Admiral Miklós (Nicolas) Horthy and the national army enter the capital
1920	Miklós Horthy elected regent of the kingdom
	The Treaty of Trianon (4 June). Hungary loses, excluding Croatia, two thirds of its territory and 10.5 million inhabitants, among them more than 3 million Magyars
1921–31	Count István (Stephen) Bethlen president of the Council of Ministers. Consolidation. Revisionist foreign policy
1927	Italian–Hungarian treaty
	Monetary stabilisation. The new currency, the pengö, is worth 12,500 crowns
1931	Economic crisis. The departure of Bethlen
1932–6	The government of Gyula (Julius) Gömbös. Turn to the right and *rapprochement* with Hitler
1938	The first anti-Jewish law. Hitler's arbitration at Vienna: Hungary regains part of Upper Hungary (Slovakia)

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1939	Hungary occupies Carpathian Ukraine
	The second anti-Jewish law
	Rise of the Hungarian Nazis, the Arrow-Cross, at the elections
1940	The second Vienna arbitration: northern Transylvania is returned to Hungary
	Adherence to the tripartite pact of Berlin–Rome–Tokyo
1941	Hungary attacks Yugoslavia. Suicide of Prime Minister Pál (Paul) Teleki
	Hungary enters the war against the Soviet Union (26 June)
1942–4	Miklós (Nicolas) Kállay appointed head of government. He attempts overtures towards the Allies
1943	The Hungarian Second Army is annihilated at Voronezh on the Don. Secret negotiations with Britain
1944	Germany occupies Hungary (19 March). The pro-German government of Döme Sztójay
	The deportation of about 437,000 Jews from the provinces to Nazi concentration camps
	The Red Army crosses the Hungarian border
	Horthy proclaims armistice on the radio (15 October). The Germans occupy strategic points.
	Horthy appoints the Nazi Ferenc (Francis) Szálasi as president of the Council of Ministers
	Bloody terror of the Arrow Cross. Assassination or deportation of 105,000 Jews from the capital
	National Assembly and provisional government at Debrecen (22 December). Three Communist ministers
1945	Armistice signed in Moscow
	Yalta Conference (February)
	The Soviet army liberates Budapest (13 February) and the whole country (4 April). Allied Control Commission presided over by Marshall Voroshilov
	Legislative elections (4 November). Smallholders' Party 57 per cent, Communist Party 17 per cent. Coalition government, including four communists
1946	Proclamation of the Republic. President Zoltán Tildy
	New currency. One forint equals 400,000 quadrillion pengös
	Nationalisation of the banks and of the iron and steel industry
1947	Three-year plan of reconstruction
	Peace treaty signed in Paris. The Soviet army remains. Arrests and processes aimed at the Smallholders' Party. Deportation of

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	its general secretary Béla Kovács to the Soviet Union. Forced resignation of the president of the Council of Ministers, Ferenc (Francis) Nagy
1948	Forced fusion of the Social Democratic Party with the Communist Party. The party's name is changed, its general secretary Mátyás (Matthias) Rákosi leads the country. Police regime Further nationalisation of economic and educational institutions (Roman Catholic and Protestant ones)
1949	The trials of Cardinal József Mindszenty and other Church dignitaries Elections: the Popular Front candidates achieve 96.27 per cent of the suffrage The trial and execution of László Rajk
1950–2	Total dictatorship of the Communist Party. Forced industrialisation, persecution of the kulaks, trials, executions. János Kádár is arrested
1953–5	The death of Stalin. The reformer Imre Nagy becomes prime minister. Mátyás Rákosi remains the leader of the party. Struggle between reformists and Stalinists. Imre Nagy is ousted (March–April 1955)
1956	The Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party (February) The opposition movement of Hungarian writers and of the Petőfi Circle grows. The Russians oust Rákosi (18–21 July) The solemn funeral of Rajk and other victims of Stalinist terror (6 October) Mass demonstration and insurrection in Budapest. The first Soviet intervention. Imre Nagy president of the Council of Ministers. Cabinet of democratic coalition and the establishment of Workers' Councils. Hungary withdraws from the Warsaw Pact (23 October–3 November). The Soviet army invades Hungary (4 November) János Kádár takes over. Arrests. The exodus of 200,000 Hungarians
1957–63	Mass repression. The trial of Imre Nagy; five executions (16 June 1958). Trial of writers and freedom-fighters. Over 300 executions
1961	Recollectivisation of agriculture
1963	General amnesty. Political relaxation
1968	The launching of economic reforms
1972	The reform reaches an impasse

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1985	The Kádár regime, reputed to have been prosperous and the most liberal, runs out of steam. Heavy foreign debts
1987	Democratic opposition spreads. Decline in purchasing power and consumption
1988	Kádár is eliminated from power Foundation of democratic political parties
1989	The crisis of the regime deepens National funeral for Imre Nagy and the other victims of repression Round-table negotiations for a democratic transition Proclamation of the Hungarian Republic (23 October)
1990	Legislative elections. The Democratic Forum forms a centre–right coalition government, headed by József (Joseph) Antall Árpád Göncz president of the Republic
1994	Legislative elections. The Socialist (ex-Communist) Party gets an absolute majority. Gyula (Julius) Horn forms a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats
1996	Commemoration of the eleventh centenary of Hungary

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1

From the beginnings until 1301

HUNGARY BEFORE THE HUNGARIANS: AN OVERVIEW OF THE TERRITORY

From the conquest of 895 up until the First World War Hungary's history unfolded in the Carpathian basin; then it was confined within a smaller territory, that of today's Hungary. This is a land situated at the same latitude as central France and the same longitude as its Slovak and Slav neighbours to the north and the south. Its western boundaries follow those of Austria, with present-day Ukraine to the north-east and Romania further to the east.

The oldest known inhabitants date back 350,000 years and traces of several successive prehistoric cultures have been found, from the Palaeolithic to the Bronze and Iron ages. Among the most important civilisations to have crossed the Danube were the Celts. They dominated Pannonia and a part of the plain which lies between the Danube and the Tisza in the third century BC. Meanwhile, further east, the Dacians, Thracians and Getians left behind their heritage in Transylvania as did the Illyrians in the south.

In the middle of the first century BC, a Dacian empire, led by Boirebistas, occupied vast expanses of the lower Danube region. This power was probably at the root of Rome's expansion towards Dacia and Pannonia. Initially under Augustus and Tiberius, Roman conquest brought civilisation and imperial forms of governance to the two provinces for nearly four centuries. The first stone bridge across the Danube was erected in 103 in what is today Turnu-Severin-Drobeta in Romania

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(Szörény in Hungary). Hungarian Pannonia/Transdanubia (Savazia – Pécs, Sophianum – Szombathely and Acquinicum at Budapest) are dotted with rich remains of Roman settlements.

The two Danubian provinces – separated by the great plain – experienced prosperity and relative peace throughout the reigns of Trajan, Marcus Aurelius and Caracalla until the decline of Rome. But by the second half of the fourth century, the rump of the Roman Empire was under attack from a number of peoples: Sarmatians, Quadi and Goths. The Roman army suffered a series of major defeats, the worst of them at the hands of the Goths in 378 near Andrinopolis (Edirne), where they were decimated. Within a few decades the Romanised 'two Pannonias', along with the whole of the region south of the Danube, had become a transit zone for new migrations and a collision point for warring Germanic, Turkish and other peoples.

The Huns, a nomadic people from Asia, were to leave an indelible mark on the collective European memory. Attila's people invaded the Balkans, the future Hungary (Attila's headquarters), northern Italy and Gaul. Following his death in 453, this empire would disappear, leaving the way open to fresh invaders, among them the ancestors of present-day Hungarians, the last and the only people to establish a state and to fend off subsequent invasions. Before them, during the sixth century, the Avars did succeed in establishing themselves for a relatively longer period before being absorbed into the ethnic fringes of Charlemagne's oppressive Frankish Empire.

The origins of the Avars are relatively unknown. Probably Turks from Central Asia, driven out by other Turks, they arrived in the lower Danube around 562, and under the *kagan*, Baian (Bajan), fought the Byzantine Empire. By 567 they had occupied a large part of the Carpathian basin. Over the next 230 years, the Avars fought numerous battles, but after the 620s, they began to suffer setbacks generally inflicted by the Byzantine Empire that forced them to retreat into the territories of future Hungary. Archaeological findings nonetheless reveal a new cultural flowering during the years after 670. Among the greatest finds is the fabulous Nagyszentmiklós treasure (named after the place of its discovery in 1799), a collection of gold artefacts, twenty-three of which are held in the Museum of Art History in Vienna. They were probably buried around 796, just before the collapse of this 'second Avar Empire', under attacks by Kroum Khan's Bulgars on its

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Plate 1. Hungarian warrior (?) on the Nagyszentmiklós golden goblet.

south-eastern front and by Charlemagne from the west. From 796, the Avars were forced to submit to the Frankish Empire's occupation of Western Pannonia. The entire eastern and Balkan part of their empire was conquered by the Bulgars and further pressure came from the Moravians under Prince Moimer and his successors.

Thus, by the second half of the ninth century, at the time of the Magyar conquest, the country was a kind of crossroads of peoples and military marches, divided between the eastern Franks, the Moravians, the Bulgars and what was left of the Avars.

The territories encircled by the Carpathians were therefore neither empty nor abandoned. They were soon to be repopulated with the arrival of the new Magyar conquerors. Contrary to certain legends, the 'last of the Avars' were not 'wiped out without a trace' by the Franks. A significant Slav population also remained in the region with numerous other tribes to the east and south-east under the feeble rule of a declining Bulgar regime. The end of the ninth century, by contrast, appears politically and militarily blank, despite frequent battles

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between local armies – the Franks and the Moravian princes, in particular. The Hungarians, still established at Etelköz, were not entirely unaware of the situation since, in 862, they had made forays as far as the Frankish Empire, and in 894, just before leaving for their new homeland, had fought alongside the Byzantine emperor, Leo the Philosopher, against the Bulgar Tsar Simeon.

The Moravians, led by Svatopluk (replaced by Moimer II after his death in 894), more than any of the peoples of the time, represented – for a short period – a distinctive political and military identity called Great Moravia. As for the land of future Hungary, it offered numerous advantages to the steppe peoples from the Black Sea region and its environment turned them from nomads into settlers. The climate, continental and moderate, had been traversing a mild cycle since the early Middle Ages. The land, almost entirely covered with loess, was fertile and richly endowed with fish-filled rivers and lakes. Hydrographic maps show vast areas of intermittent flooding, covering more than one eighth of the country's surface. This was to be a key aspect in the eventual occupation and settlement patterns of the new conquerors.

In the meantime, however, they were still on their way to this new destination. It was the penultimate stage of a very long journey in both time and space, which will need to be retraced before the history of Hungary can begin.

DISTANT ANCESTORS: A LINGUISTIC ASIDE

The prehistory of the Magyar peoples' distant ancestors begins several thousand kilometres further east and north of Hungary, in a time beyond memory, when a people speaking a language called 'Uralian' inhabited a vast region that probably straddled both sides of the Urals. It should be said at the outset that all we have is a hypothetical language matrix and that nothing is actually known about those that supposedly spoke it. Indeed, their geographical whereabouts also relies on hypotheses. What is scientifically certain is the existence of a language group originating in the area. Its evolution and diversification constitutes a golden thread tracing a path through history. It is important to point out the distinctive nature of this primitive Uralian language, unrelated to the Indo-European, Altaic, Semitic and other languages. Uralian constitutes the origin of several linguistic families. Finno-Ugric, one of its

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derivatives, is in turn the common base for twenty or so languages, of which Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian are the best known. The closest linguistic relative to the latter is not, however, the Finno-Baltic branch but the Ugrian one, that is, the languages of the Voguls (or Manysi-s) and Ostyaks (or Hanti-s), small tribes that today inhabit western Siberia, to the east of the Urals. Other descendants of the Finno-Ugrians are to be found further south, on the other side of the mountains.

In contrast to the Germanic and Latin peoples of Europe, these Finno-Ugric-speaking peoples were geographically scattered. Out of the dozen or so that have been identified, all but the Hungarians and those of the Baltic region live in Russia. These include, along with the Voguls and Ostyaks already mentioned, the Komis and the Maris (or Cheremisses). These family connections, and indeed the entire linguistic network stretching back four thousand years, have been sketched out by comparative linguists, who are also responsible for suggesting the approximate period during which separation occurred. However, what still remains a mystery is both the ethnic composition of the groups who spoke these languages and the itinerary that was to lead them, on the one hand to the Gulf of Finland, and on the other to the banks of the Volga, the Ob and the Danube. Proto-Hungarians did not emerge from the nebula as a distinctive entity until the middle of the first millennium BC and their itinerary is unknown until the middle of the following millennium. A temporal desert of a thousand years or more remains, during which time the ancestors of the Hungarians, having parted company with their 'cousins', became a distinctive people.

In the foothills of the Urals

To anticipate the course of history in a few lines, separation took place in the mid- or southern Ural region, probably on the eastern side of the mountains, in other words in western Siberia. In the period that followed and during the first centuries of the modern era, a number of factors place the ancient Hungarians to the south of the Urals, in the region of present-day Bashkiria, or perhaps nearer to the Volga itself. Having left this region, they dropped south towards the Azov Sea, and then moved on towards the Black Sea. Another split then occurred for reasons that remain obscure. One of the Proto-Hungarian groups, the Savards, broke away, heading towards the Caucasus, leaving the majority to pursue their

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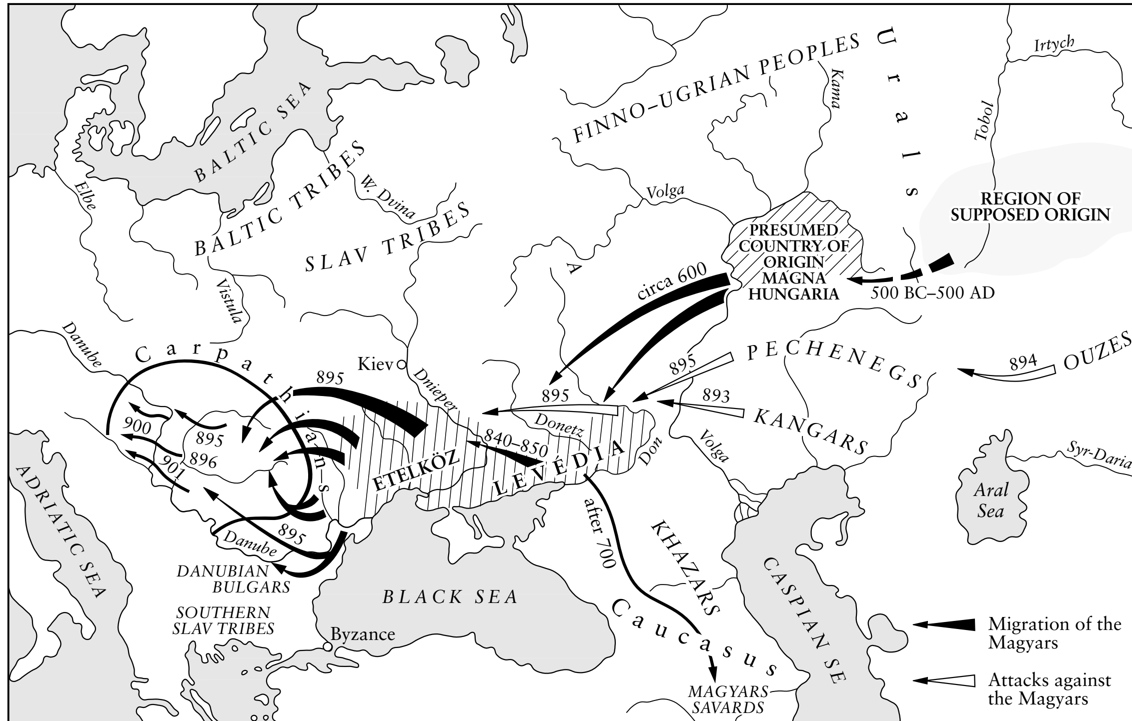

Map 1. Migrations of the ancient Magyars

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nomadic existence in the steppes and then to push west, through the lower Danube, ending up in the Carpathians and future Hungary. Map 1 traces these patterns of movement, diversions from them and settlements founded throughout this long journey.

Such landmarks are approximate and remain so until the ninth century. We must therefore turn to linguistic matters and to what little other data exists in order to draw historical conclusions. As we have seen, the linguistic thread enables us to follow these peoples through their various separations. But when and where did they take place? Historians believe that there is enough evidence to support cohabitation until the beginning, perhaps the middle, of the first millennium BC. As regards the geographical origins of these people, these are far more uncertain. Were they Asiatic or European? Their most identifiable cradle is in the vicinity of the Urals, but on which side?

To resolve these problems, scholars have turned to a number of sciences other than linguistics: archaeology whenever possible, historical geography, musicology too, since the pentatonic scale common to the popular songs of some of the peoples in this family seems to indicate certain mutual connections, though often rather tenuous ones. For quite some time, scholars even took to following the flight of bees, based upon the hypothesis – which turned out to be false – that bees, in those faraway days, had not crossed the Urals into Siberia in pursuit of plunder. And since the words 'bee' and 'honey' appeared in their basic vocabulary, the deduction seemed logical: the origin of these peoples was European. This anecdote illustrates just how difficult it is to follow the geographical movements of a people without written evidence.

The other hypothesis situates these populations either in western Siberia or in Europe, the only certainty being their transmigration to Siberia. In any case, their descendants are found on both sides of the Urals and nothing suggests that they have not been there since time immemorial. Moreover, since the Urals are far from impassable mountains, it would have been perfectly possible for them to move from one place to another more than once, from east to west and back again.

In search of lost languages

Separated from the other Ugrians who travelled north, the Proto-Hungarians were able to survive in western Siberia and for quite some

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time (half a millennium?). While coming under the influence of other neighbours, notably Iranians, they nonetheless took on the distinctive characteristics of a people who were later to be known as the 'Magyars' and by the various other forms of the name 'Hungarian' (*hongrois*, *ungar*, *hungarus* etc.) used by other language groups. And yet, apart from the hypothesis concerning their having settled to the west of the Urals, the thousand-year period that followed, until the appearance of Hungarian tribes identified as such in the early Middle Ages, remains blank. The only evidence of any continuity is language, but in order for language to be useful in the generation of historical knowledge, the evolution of the Finno-Ugric languages and the Ugric branch, to which Hungarian belonged, required investigation. It was a task undertaken by comparative Finno-Ugric linguistics, initially developed in Germany (at the University of Göttingen), and from 1770 in Finland and Hungary, linked to a publication by János Sajnovics on the relationship between Hungarian and Lapp idiom. Then, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Hungarian Antal Reguly and the Finn M. A. Castren collected invaluable linguistic data in the field in Russia, in those regions inhabited by the descendants of the Ugrians.

One of the basic linguistic propositions establishes the existence of a grammatical structure particular to these languages. One of its characteristics is agglutination, in other words suffixes are juxtaposed with the root word. Seventy-five per cent of the words used in present-day spoken Hungarian come from basic Finno-Ugric. This linguistic theory has, however, been fiercely disputed. From the nineteenth century onwards, Hungarian public opinion was reluctant to accept the family connections between their language and that of poor, primitive fishermen, finding the possibility somewhat humiliating. Hungarians nurtured more glorious dreams: some connection with Attila's Huns or Sumero-Babylonian culture would have been more acceptable, just like the mythical Trojan origins of the French! Although such fantasies continue to feed the collective imagination, the Finno-Ugric theory is unanimously accepted by scholars and is taught in schools.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: MIGRATIONS FROM THE URALS TO THE DANUBE

And so the Proto-Hungarians, while subject to the influence of neighbouring Scythian and Sarmatian cultures, became an autonomous

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people of western Siberia. They discovered the use of iron and led the lifestyle of horsemen, semi-nomadic shepherds and primitive farmers. This is evidenced by the existence of Iranian loan-words from that time. The Proto-Hungarians then reappear during the first millennium of our era to the west of the Urals, close to Bashkiria, between the Kama and the Volga Rivers. Was this due to climatic change? Or perhaps an assault from Attila's Huns, on the move at the time? We do not know. Written sources, dated much later, support this approximate location. Between 1232 and 1237, King Béla IV of Hungary, upon hearing news of the Tatar invasion of Russia, sent a number of Dominican monks in search of those Hungarians who had remained in the 'homeland of the ancestors' when the other tribes had taken the road for the Carpathians. The expedition is proof that the break-up of the ancient tribes, somewhere in the steppes, remained in the collective memory. The Dominicans initially searched to the north of the Caucasus, on the site of one of the ancient encampments established before the migration towards the Danube and the Carpathians. Their search was fruitless. Following the death of his companion, the monk Julianus eventually found the people he was looking for, much further north, on the Volga. His narrative does not locate what he called 'Magna Hungaria' with any precision, but he talks about the River Etil (Volga) and about a nearby Turkish-Bulgar town, thus confirming the site as being somewhere in the region of Bashkiria.

The great trek south and then on to Hungary is thought to have begun during the sixth century according to some historians, and around 700 according to others. The Dominican's 'reunion' with his ancestors in Magna Hungaria thus took place after half a millennium or more of separation. His findings may well be less than wholly reliable, but his account, written up by a fellow monk, was sealed and delivered to the papal chancellery. It then received added confirmation when Julianus undertook a second journey in 1237. This time, Julianus also brought back information about the Mongol-Tatars, successors to the great Genghis Khan (d.1227), who would invade the entire Danube region, including Hungary, in 1241–2.

As for the Hungarians who left their ancient land, they reappear in the eighth and ninth centuries, much further south along the Volga, then the Don, cohabiting with Turkish Bulgars, the Onogurs in particular, as well as having some kind of connection with the Khazars. Relations with the Onogurs probably lasted two centuries or more, as

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evidenced by more than two hundred Hungarian words which are Turkic-Bulgar in origin, while other borrowings indicate the persistent Iranian cultural–linguistic influence of the Sarmations and the Alains.

The importance of the Onogur influence begs questions about the nature of their political and military ties: did the Hungarians and the Onogurs (meaning 'ten tribes') belong to some form of confederation, or did the latter rule over the Magyars? There are no answers. It must be remembered that written sources come much later: the first mention of the Magyars dates from 830.

Between the seventh and tenth centuries the Khazar Empire dominated first the Caspian Sea region, then the steppes stretching from the Don, the Dnieper and the Crimea. Apart from its military might, its economic role was important, trading between Kievan Russia, the Byzantine Empire and the Arabic Orient. Initially converted to Islam, the Khazar princes adopted Judaism towards 740 and were eventually converted to Christianity by St Cyril in the ninth century. The Onogurs, along with many other peoples, including the Hungarians, were part of this vast empire. The nature of their relationship is open to interpretation, of course, and in any case the fortunes of the army or force of circumstance would have altered it at various times. Furthermore, and at least twice, the Hungarian tribes undertook the journey through the steppes from east to west, from north of the Caucasus to north of the Black Sea, perhaps as far as the River Sereth at the foot of the Carpathians. One of the countries they occupied was called Levedia, the other, further to the west, was established as Etelköz by the ninth century. In Etelköz, by around 850, the Hungarians were no longer dependants of the Khazar Empire.

We have followed the trail of the ancient Hungarians far back into the vaults of time, tracing thousands of kilometres. There is, however, a quite different mythical journey to the new homeland, preserved in the collective memory and documented in the *Gesta Hungarorum*, lost in its original version but recorded in later chronicles. According to these, Hunor and Magor (the sons of Gog and Magog, kings of the Scythians), out hunting one day, caught a glimpse of a stag which they set about following. They soon lost it in the Meotide swamps – ancient name for the Azov Sea – and bewitched by the beauty of the landscape, the abundance of herbs, wood, fish and game, they decided to stay. One day, they again set off hunting, this time in search of women. They

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found their future wives, the two daughters of Dula, prince of the Alains, among the abducted women. From these unions came 'the famous and all powerful King Attila and, much later, Prince Álmos, from whom descended the kings and princes of Hungary'. Later, so the legend goes, their homeland became cramped and so the forefathers of these peoples took to the road once more.

The authors of the first Hungarian chronicles (*gestae*) written in Latin, an 'anonymous notary' (Anonymus – around 1200) and Simon Kézai (around 1280), were not historians who practised critical appraisal of sources. The legend of the 'miracle stag' nonetheless fed the Hungarian imagination, merging the very likely memory of an abode near the Azov Sea with the improbable legend of a family connection with Attila's Huns.

A more reliable, if not totally trustworthy, source has survived on the origins of the Hungarians and their settling of Hungary at the end of that long journey. This information, a source dated after the event but nonetheless of immense value, will be referred to extensively in this narrative. It is *On Imperial Administration*, written around 950 by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, Byzantine emperor. Constantine, son of Emperor Leo the Philosopher, himself a famous writer, obtained his information from two Hungarian princes who came as ambassadors to the court. He was also able to draw upon Arab and Persian sources, as well as the writings of his father, who had already known and described the Hungarians from before the conquest in his military work, *Tactics*. Indeed, in 895, Leo the Philosopher had called the Hungarians to his rescue against the Danubian Bulgars. Thanks to these sources, the ninth century is well documented. The name Etelköz undoubtedly meant 'between the rivers' but since at the time both the Volga and the Don were known as Etel (or Etil) it is not easy conclusively to locate this settlement. According to the historian István Fodor, Arab sources have placed Etelköz between the Don and the lower Danube. This immense area covers the steppes of Russia and of modern southern Ukraine and suggests that whoever the occupants were, they must have been militarily formidable. Another possibility is that the Hungarians moved several times from east to west. An Arab traveller visited them somewhere 'between the rivers' and described a semi-nomadic and opulent lifestyle. The Hungarian warriors (who in 862 had already ventured to the borders of the eastern Frankish kingdom)

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constituted a fearsome, mobile army. Meanwhile, they maintained trading relations with Kiev as well as capturing Slavs and selling them into slavery in the Byzantine ports.

During the last centuries before the Carpatho-Danubian conquest, contact with the Turks left a deep impression: language, the organisation of tribal society and military fashion, as well as culture, testify to their influence. Among the two hundred or so Hungarian words that are of Turkic-Bulgar origin we find wheat (*búza*), barley (*árpa*), wine (*bor*) and even the word plough (*eke*), no doubt referring to a far more sophisticated tool than the *araire* used earlier. The names of domestic animals and the words cheese (*sajt*), wool (*gyapjú*), enclosure (*karám*) are perhaps evidence of an intermittently sedentary way of life. The word for letter (*betü*) and the verb to write (*ír*) date from the same period, but writing, if indeed it existed, was probably runic (in the form of notches), surviving only as engravings on some objects. In any case, this script had probably already been used by the Szeklers (*székely* in Hungarian), an ethnic group that joined the Hungarians whose identity and provenance remain enigmatic.

The same goes for the Kabar tribes, of Turkish origin, who probably joined the Hungarians at the time of the conquest or just before, since they appear alongside the seven known tribes. Further evidence of a significant 'Turkish connection' lies in the tribal names. Of the seven, only two, the Nyék and Megyer tribes bear Finno-Ugric names, the others are all Turkish. The same is true for the names of the leaders. Were the warlords Turkish (a kind of 'ruling class') or only 'Turkified' through living in the Khazar Empire? The Emperor Constantine also referred to the Magyars as 'Turks'. However, this could be simply because their military organisation followed the Turkish model. While different interpretations abound, what is certain is that the Finno-Ugric roots of their language was a key evolutionary factor. Another theory, put forward by Gyula László, offers a rather original explanation. According to him, the Hungarians of the conquest found a group of people who spoke Finno-Ugric already living in the Carpathian basin, having arrived in the Avar Empire two centuries earlier. This is the so-called 'two-stage conquest' theory, very popular with lay opinion but rarely shared by the specialists.

The Hungarian people and their culture are therefore the product of a gradual accumulation: a prodigious collage of borrowings; a nation

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of nearly 15 million men and women speaking a language from the dawn of time, the largest of a linguistic family dispersed to the four winds by the vagaries of history.

THE CONQUEST OF HUNGARY

Around 895, Hungarians, already settled in Etelköz, probably to the west of the Dniester or even the Prut, suffered a lightning attack by the Pechenegs who were themselves retreating from invasion by other steppe tribes. The effects of this surprise attack must have been catastrophic, as most of the Hungarian armies were busy fighting elsewhere, having been called upon to help Leo the Philosopher, the Byzantine emperor, to ward off the Danubian Bulgars. The Hungarian tribes, fleeing the Pechenegs, crossed the Carpathians through two or three passes. The conquest began under the leadership of two chieftains, Árpád and Kursan, leading the seven Magyar tribes and the Kabar tribes of Turkish origin who joined the Hungarians. By 900, the occupation of the basin was completed and in 902 the Hungarians turned their attention to the Moravian principality of King Svatopluk's sons (the king died in 894). The Moravian Empire was in a state of collapse, while the eastern kingdom of the Franks – ruled by the last Carolingian, Louis the Infant – no longer exercised anything more than symbolic authority over Pannonia, and the powerful empire of the Danubian Bulgars had recently suffered a severe defeat. Conditions for occupation were therefore favourable.

The tribes that had initially occupied the plain, choosing land with easy access to water and pasture and then spreading progressively to other areas, had already established a form of organisation. The tribal leagues, following a Khazar model, recognised the authority of two princes: a religious leader, the *kende*, and a military chief, the *gyula*. It is not known which of the two roles was assigned to Árpád and which to Kursan. According to legend, Árpád's father Álmos was killed at the time of the invasion, in accordance with the Khazar custom of sacrificing the chieftain. This would suggest that he and his son were the successive *kende*. Kursan, for his part, died in 904, when the custom of a dual principality was abandoned. From this moment on, all sources regard Árpád and his descendants as a single line of princes until the extinction of the dynasty in 1301. The title of *gyula* did not, however,

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disappear: the Transylvanian lords carried it and exercised quite extensive local control, becoming increasingly independent of the princely and then royal authority. The title eventually became the family name Gyula. Árpád and his sons occupied the central area of the basin, between the Tisza and the Danube. The Árpád residence was probably situated not far from what became Budapest. Árpád and his sons would therefore have assumed the titles and responsibilities originally assigned to Kursan. In addition, the crown prince received an entire province as ducal land. As for the tribal chieftains – the 'seven Magyars' as they are still known colloquially – a few may have maintained control over their respective tribes until central power was reinforced. Did this mean that the tribal system had already disintegrated? In the final analysis, the tribes were made up of individual clans, a large number of which – about a hundred – survived long after the disintegration of the tribal system.

In modern Hungarian, the words *bö* and *böség* mean 'breadth' and 'abundance', the word *inség* 'poverty', and the word *jobbágy*, 'serf'. At the time of settlement, each of these words had different meanings. The lords, chieftains of the tribes and clans, were called *bö* (also *úr*), members of the warrior class were the *jobbágy* while the poorest, downtrodden tied labourers were known as the *in*. The latter were slaves who had either arrived with the conquerors or were from the local population, perhaps captured during looting and pillaging. There may have been other classes: in particular those persons – or indeed entire villages – assigned to practise certain trades, as indicated by place-names. Cemeteries provide other clues: tombs, filled with weapons and jewels, contain horses and harnesses belonging to the chieftains, who were buried alone; warriors from the large free families (the future nobility) were buried together; finally, the common cemeteries were reserved for the lower orders.

FORAYS TO THE WEST AND THE HOUSE OF ÁRPÁD

During the tenth century, the country of the Magyars frequently appears in Western sources under the name of the Avar Empire. Emperor Constantine, on the other hand, talks of the 'country of the Turks'. The uncertainties surrounding this first century following the conquest stem from contradictions between sources. Nonetheless, from

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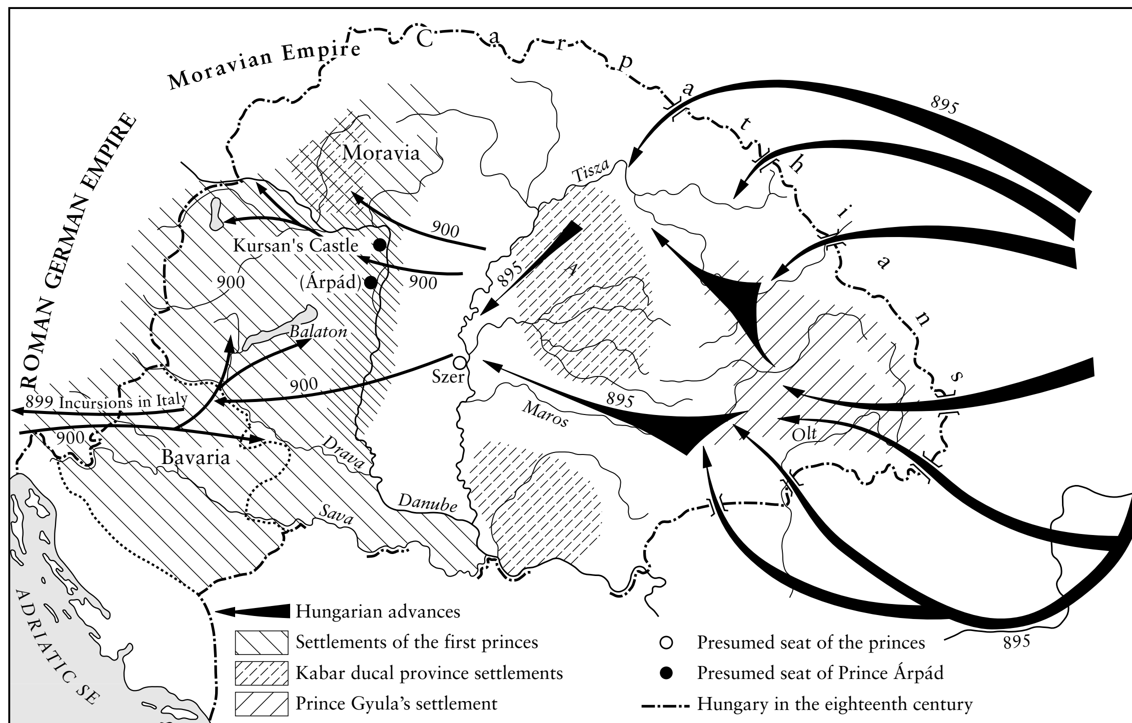

Map 2. The conquest of the Carpathian basin

this time onwards dozens of chroniclers from Fulda, Ratisbon (Regensburg), Saint-Gall, Salzburg, even Cordoba – scholars, bishops and kings – have left annals bearing witness to the Hungarians. Until then practically unknown, these horsemen of the steppes found fame through their devastating raids into Moravia, Bavaria, present-day Austria, Italy, Saxony (Saxe), Lotharingia, Burgundy, Aquitaine and as far as the Pyrenees and Spain. The desperate plea, '*De sagittis Hungarorum . . .*', asking God for protection from 'the Hungarian arrows', echoed a Western world terrorised by what Hungarian historiography rather indulgently calls 'the age of adventures'.

The Hungarian tribes certainly benefited from disarray of a Western Europe under attack from all sides. In the Germanic lands including Saxony, Thuringia and Bavaria – and in Italy – rival factions were busy tearing each other asunder. The France of the last Carolingians, under attack by the Normans, the Saracens and the Hungarians, was disintegrating. Even the Byzantine Empire, despite its power throughout the tenth century, thought it preferable to submit to a few Hungarian affronts rather than to alienate this occasional (admittedly turbulent but often useful) ally, particularly against Bulgaria.

Despite these circumstances, it is still astonishing that a semi-nomadic cavalry was able to carry out around seventy incursions in just fifty years with impunity. Often called upon to assist one or other side of a conflict, these adventurers invariably took the opportunity to carry out a bit of pillaging and ransacking for themselves. And yet, even taking into account the vulnerable state of the European world, the overall strength of the Hungarian forces seems insignificant. According to Paul Bairoch's calculations, in his book *De Jéricho à Mexico,* the population of Europe excluding Russia was around 40 million. Hungary consisted of 60,000 souls, and could raise around 20,000 horsemen, a considerable number at the time but very limited when compared with the territory that had to be covered. The phenomenon of their military success is all the more astonishing because these armed bands were supported by a society that had yet to be fully organised.

The family of the first prince had carved out massive sections of the territorial and military cake for itself. Árpád and his successors (in the tenth century, succession sometimes passed to the eldest son of the reigning prince and at other times to the eldest member of the family) held the long line of the Danube – a strategic position if ever there was

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one. Other prestigious and presumably wealthy sites were granted to the heirs, whether brother or son, and to dignitaries like the *gyula* and the *harka*. By what was known as the 'grand ducal' system, an entire province could also be granted to one of the heirs. Such dukedoms, received as privilege, usually consisted of territories settled by 'auxiliary peoples': the Kabars, for example, later called 'Kalizes', Muslim warriors who had arrived with the Hungarian tribes, as well as Pechenegs and Szeklers. Control over these military frontiers and buffer zones meant that the dukes exercised considerable military power. One of the first of them, Szabolcs, was the eldest of Árpád's cousins and therefore his heir.

We know the names (all Turkish, without exception) and, to an extent, the respective roles, of five of Árpád's sons. None of them attained the rank of first prince and, apart from the supposed reign of Szabolcs, the order of succession until around 950 is not known. At the time, one of Árpád's grandsons, called Fajsz, had been reigning for a number of years. He was succeeded by Taksony (from 955? to 970?) who decided to put an end to westerly incursions and to abolish accession according to seniority in favour of accession through direct descent.

Decades of armed incursions coincided with struggles for succession and with the obscure period between the disappearance of Árpád around 907 and the rise of Fajsz, then Taksony around 955. During this long period, the *gyulas* ruled over Transylvania and various other chieftains emerged, but the supremacy of the House of Árpád seems to have remained unshaken.

Defeat at Augsburg, 955, and its consequences

Raids continued unabated until the Battle of Augsburg in 955: from wars of plunder to expeditions undertaken in response to calls from rival Germanic and French kings, or from the Byzantine emperors. The astonishing military prowess of these Hungarian 'light-horses' left towns and monasteries more or less defenceless and ripe for pillage. As far as we know, these expeditions were never led by the first prince in person. Their main purpose was the collection of ransoms and tributes destined for the 'state' coffers. Expeditions like these were obviously fruitful, as evidenced by protection money paid to the Magyars for many years by the Byzantine emperor and the Germanic kings.

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The devastating defeat inflicted upon them by Henri l'Oiseleur at Merseburg in 933 certainly changed things. In 945–55, however, in response to King Otto's rivals – including his son-in-law Conrad the Redhead, duke of Lotharingia, Arnolphe of Regensburg and Otto's son, Liudolphe – the Magyars set off adventuring again. The conspirators then switched allegiance but the Hungarian army made the mistake of besieging Augsburg anyway. King Otto rushed to the rescue of Augsburg at the head of an army that now included all the Germanic kings as well as the conspirators back in his service. A catastrophic defeat ensued. The Hungarian chieftains, led by the *harka* Bulcsu, were hanged at Regensburg in Bavaria, the ancient eastern capital of the Carolingians.

Otto's victory is considered a decisive turning point in his rise to the imperial throne. In the aftermath of the defeat, the Hungarians had little choice but to make peace with the Holy Roman Empire. As for the Byzantine Empire, its rapport with the Hungarians, already long established, was now set in stone with the accession of Taksony's son, named Géza, around 972. Hungarian conversion to Christianity had already begun, through the Greek Church, during Byzantium's apogee under the Macedonian dynasty. Constantine, one of its emperors, had received Bulcsu the *harka,* who was to be hanged seven years later at Regensburg. It was in the interests of the Hungarians to maintain good relations with Byzantium but, above all, they needed to re-establish order at home. These tasks fell to Géza.

Though the honour of being the 'founder of the state' was attributed to his son István – the future St Stephen – Prince Géza's long reign (972–97) undoubtedly paved the way. This was achieved through a foreign policy aimed at establishing external stability between the two empires, and a domestic policy aimed at centralising power and subtly redirecting Christian conversion away from the Greek Church towards Rome and the Holy Roman Empire.

By the time of Géza's death, at the close of the century, decisive changes had taken place all over Europe. The Capetians came to power in France; England had been conquered by the Danes; the Kievan state had been created in Russia; the Piast dynasty had been founded in Poland and the Premysl dynasty in Bohemia. The successors of Otto – conqueror of the Hungarians at Augsburg – and his Holy Roman Empire controlled both Germany and Italy. The Byzantine Empire, however, was also at the zenith of its power and its glory. The choice of

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Roman Christianity was a political gesture and, as such, of the utmost importance, all the more so because despite occasional conflicts with Constantinople, the latter remained the central focus and source of Christianity for Hungarians in the mid-tenth century. Following an ambassadorial visit to Constantinople by Princes Bulcsu and Tormás in 948, the *gyula*, second great dignitary and lord of the eastern part of the country, converted to the Greek religion and brought back with him Bishop Hierotheos. Though the success of the latter's evangelical mission was limited, the Orthodox Church retained a presence until and indeed beyond conversion to Roman Christianity favoured by St Stephen. A Greek religious convent was in fact founded at Veszprém in Transdanubia either by St Stephen himself or by his father, Géza, and several Greek or Bulgarian Orthodox monasteries existed in various other locations. Prince Gyula had remained faithful to his religion, yet his daughter Sarolt married Prince Géza, who was baptised by the Bishop of St-Gallese, Bruno (or Prunward), who was attached to the imperial chapel and personally mandated by Emperor Otto II. The advent of Bruno in the early years of Géza's reign marked a nascent, systematic and countrywide conversion to Christianity, along with a reorientation of foreign policy towards the Holy Roman Empire. Géza succeeded in stabilising the frontier zone, a no man's land – *gyepü* in Hungarian – situated between his country and Bavaria, which at the time also included the Eastern March, Ostmarck, in other words the future Austria.

Géza's choice was essentially political and his methods more violent than pious. He forced large numbers of lords and warriors to convert whether they liked it or not and persecuted recalcitrant 'shamans' and pagans. Whether dark legend or truth, he is said to have buried alive Thonuzoba, chieftain of the Pecheneg tribes, who had arrived in Hungary a few decades before. The chronicles speak alternately of his devotion and of his cruelty. Whatever may have been the reality, Géza was faced with numerous revolts, stemming either from attachments to old beliefs or from resistance against his authority as prince. Géza gained ground both physically and metaphorically. His military escort, now established in the villages, became an embryonic royal army, and he was able to count on the loyalty of the majority of lords. As for the cohabitation of various ethnic groups – Magyars, Turks, Slavs – it does not seem to have affected his domestic policy.

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'White' and 'black' Hungarians

This ethnic cohabitation nevertheless raised historical problems. In Géza's time, there were supposedly two Hungarian countries: that of the 'white' Hungarians and that of the 'black'. The latter comprised Szekler and Turkic tribes who had joined the Magyars as auxiliary soldiers, including the Kabars or the Pechenegs, whose descendants still lived in the Transcarpathian region, at the heart of future Romania, between Kievan Rus and the Bulgarian Empire. Most of the Hungarian 'blacks' were under ducal command but, towards the end of the tenth century, small groups formed under the authority of great rebel lords like the Transylvanian Gyula and his geographical neighbour, the chieftain Ajtony. On the other hand, similar or identical groups in the east were under the authority of the prince. Were these 'blacks' really more resistant to Christian conversion than the Hungarian 'whites' or were they simply following their leaders? The fact is that once the rebellion had broken out, it was fought under the banner of the Eastern Christian leaders, like Gyula and Ajtony, the one baptised in Constantinople, the other in the same town or in Bulgaria. Without minimising the pagan character of many of the revolts, the Greek Orthodox faith underlying the major conflicts suggests that there were more complex aspects to the fight against the refractory lords. Roman Christianity had not yet replaced the influence of Byzantium and of the Greek Church. Indeed, circulation of currency and usage of Byzantine measures attest to the continuing economic importance of these ties.

The final instalment of Géza's struggles was intimately bound up with preparations for the succession. Born c. 970 and originally named Vajk, Stephen was baptised and brought up in the Roman religion. In 996 he married Gizella, daughter of Henry of Bavaria. This was the first Hungarian dynastic marriage to a Western princess but in order to secure Stephen's succession, Géza, who was to die the following year, was forced to take further measures. Pretender to the throne was one Prince Koppány who owned the south-western ducal territory. Seniority succession rights went hand in hand with a levirate which consisted in marrying the prince's widow thereby ousting the son – in this case the heir-apparent, Vajk-Stephen. Géza arranged for Koppány's domains to be surrounded by Szeklers, Pechenegs and other Turkish soldiers and, after his death, it was King Stephen who led them into battle.

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ST STEPHEN'S HUNGARIAN STATE

Before he could be crowned king of Hungary in title and in fact, the young Prince Stephen had to battle for three years to overcome rebellious lords led by, among others, his relative and rival Koppány and his uncle, Gyula. Stephen – with an army comprising his military escort, soldiers from the 'black' settlements and Gizella's Bavarian knights – inflicted a devastating defeat upon Koppány. The corpse of his enemy was quartered and the pieces sent to the main strongholds for public display. As a 'family warning', one quarter of Koppány's body was delivered to Gyula at his Gyulafehérvár (Alba Julia) residence in Transylvania. And not without reason. Gyula was in fact planning to rebel against his nephew's new order. Stephen set out to fight him but the battle never took place: Gyula surrendered and was treated magnanimously. Stephen also had to face other rebellions, both before and after coronation, by chieftains who either opposed the widespread conversion to Christianity or the prince's increased authority. The most prestigious among them, Ajtony, seems to have maintained his grip on the eastern region and even expanded his domains into Gyula's territory. His immense wealth and Byzantium's powerful support, which at the time extended to the Danube, ensured that the king tolerated his activities – until 1028.

Thus, despite his father's legacy of centralisation, Stephen I was not absolute master of his lands at the time of his coronation, thought to have taken place in 1000 or 1001. He did enjoy the support of three successive Frankish emperors, all named Otto. Furthermore, Otto III transferred his seat to Rome during Stephen's reign and secured the election of a Frenchman, Gerbert d'Aurillac, to the throne of St Peter. The young Hungarian prince cultivated the support of this erudite pontiff, Sylvester II, requesting that he send a crown and legate to enthrone him as a consecrated king. Following his father's example, Stephen avoided vassal allegiance to the emperor as well as to the pope. Thus, the new kingdom's independence was established but at the same time firmly bound to Western Christianity. The crown itself, along with the sceptre and various insignias sent from Rome, together with other gifts from the emperor, have disappeared. Relics attributed to the coronation in fact date from a later period.

Conversion was pretty much completed during Stephen's forty-year

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Plate 2. Effigy of St Stephen on the royal coronation robe

reign, though not painlessly or without conflict, as has already been pointed out. The great lord Ajtony, left to enjoy his power as 'prince of the black Hungarians' for thirty years, was attacked and killed by the king in 1028, by which time the Church was well established. Two archbishoprics, eight bishoprics and numerous monasteries had been founded, endowed with large domains and the right to levy a tithe in the dioceses. Legendary among the first evangelists was Gerard, a Benedictine from Venice, Bishop of Csanád and tutor to the royal heir, Prince Imre (Emery). Both the latter, who was to die before his father, and Gerard, killed during one of the last pagan revolts, were later canonised along with Stephen.

Architectural remains from this period indicate generally modest dimensions of both new buildings and totally reconstructed ones, like the Benedictine abbey of Pannonhalma – but the spiritual and cultural

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Plate 3. St Stephen's tomb at Székesfehérvár

influence of the Church was crucial in what may legitimately be called a modernisation process. The first written documents appear in Latin – thanks to donations – and four out of twenty survive. Religious and legal texts were being written in the monasteries and even the king left a literary legacy, the remarkable *Exhortations*, addressed to his heir, Prince Imre.

The establishment of the Church, the consolidation of royal power and legal order in keeping with the spirit of the times, attracted many foreigners to the land: priests, knights and ordinary people in search of fortune and security. The passage from *Exhortations* that preaches tolerance towards foreigners is often cited in this regard. As for Stephen's laws, they were certainly severe, but nothing suggests a reign any more cruel than others of the time; rather, the laws protected property and provided a degree of security. Social organisation was no longer based upon the blood ties of the tribal system. Population distribution and settlement were now conducted according to territorial principles along county lines (*comitatus* in Latin). The Hungarian names of these counties in some way 'relate' their story. The word *vármegye* is made up of *vár*, meaning fort, or fortified place, and *megye* (county) and indicates the extent of the territory and the limits of the *comitatus* that was under the protection of the fortress. The king set about creating about forty counties attached to forts belonging to him. At the head of each of these, he placed a governor (*ispán*/*várispán*), a trusted figure given

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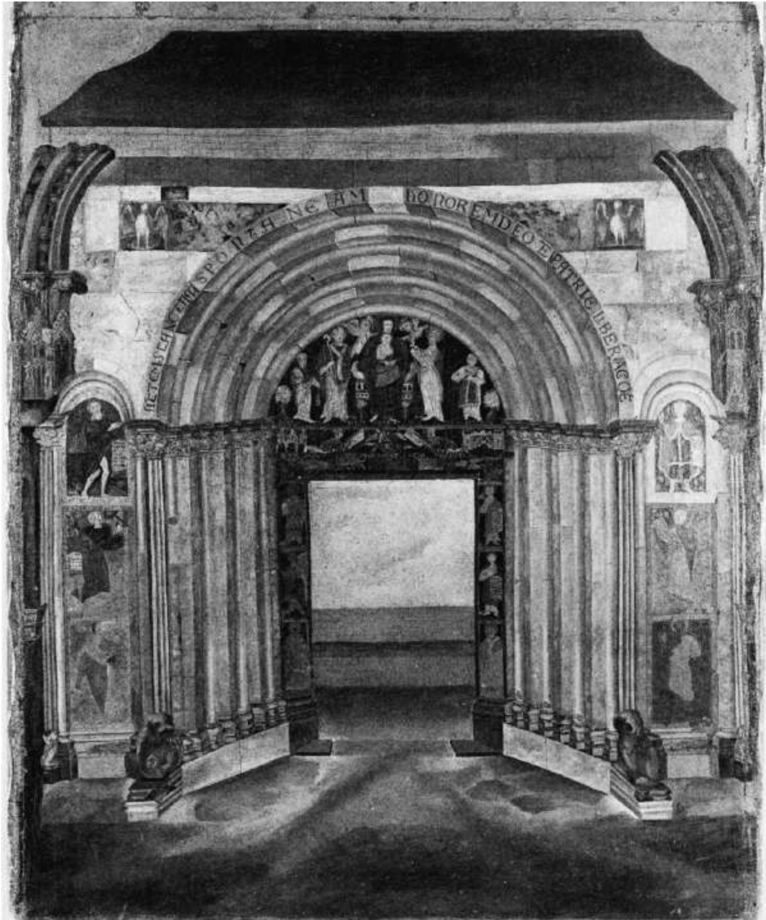

Plate 4. The portal of Esztergom Chapel (twelfth century)

charge of both the territory and its warriors, *jobbágy* and *várjobbágy*, the two elements constituting the military profession. The name *jobbágy* was not at this time associated in any way with serfs, bonded peasants who worked the lord's estates.

The king's forts and their surrounding lands did not cover the entire country. There were still large properties in the hands of more or less independent lords and vast domains belonged (*mainmorte*) to the Church. Bishoprics were also organised by the king, who divided the

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country into ten (later twelve) dioceses under the authority of the archbishop of Esztergom, who was later joined by a second archbishop at Kalocsa.

Changes that took place under Stephen were merely a beginning. Even so, they ushered in the notion of private property and social stratification according to power, status, wealth and distribution of labour. Beneath the ruling class (*úr*), a mixture of established lords, traditional chieftains and the recently promoted, stood the free warriors, and on the lowest rung, the common people. According to monastic data from a later period, 200 out of 1,100 families belonging to these domains enjoyed free warrior status; the rest were reduced to servitude. Records from a town not far from Lake Balaton, with the unpronounceable name Szentkirályszabadja (meaning 'the free-men of the holy king'), indicate how the freedom of the more fortunate or more deserving could be preserved.

The king levied no less than two thirds of the county's revenues, leaving one third at the disposal of his lieutenants. For the first time it is possible to speak of an administration in the real sense. It enabled the king to fulfil his three main domestic objectives: the creation of a state government, the establishment of the Church and, finally, regulation of the rights and duties of property owners. At the head of the state, the king reigned supreme, but his power was not absolute. He was surrounded by a senate and a council comprising, among others, the primate-Archbishop of Esztergom and the palatine (*nádor*). Though undoubtedly more rudimentary than the states emerging from the Carolingian Empire, this arrangement nonetheless secured integrity and relative peace for the kingdom.

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OF THE KINGDOM: GENGHIS'S MONGOL-TATAR INVASION

Following the death of Stephen I in 1038, a further twenty-two kings from the same house were to occupy the throne until the extinction of the dynasty in 1301. For nearly three centuries, Hungary held an important position on the European political chessboard, definitively integrated into Roman Christianity and representing its last bastion on the frontiers of Orthodox and pagan worlds. The schism of 1054 between

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the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches, fifteen years or so after Stephen's death, emphasised the importance of this choice without, however, severing the kingdom's links with a Byzantine Empire that would border the lower Danube for some time to come. Hungary's economy and culture had developed enough to have caught up with its Western neighbours, though a stubborn archaic element remained.

First and foremost, however, the kingdom still lacked political stability. Though not the only kingdom to be torn apart by princely rivalries, the ferocity of its struggles for succession were on the verge of compromising its independence from the two neigbouring empires. The Holy Roman Empire was undergoing rapid expansion at the time and Byzantium, though on the decline, maintained its positions in the Balkans. The rise of Boleslaw the Brave's Poland threatened from the north, Pechenegs and Cumans from the east. Without a direct heir following the death of his son, Stephen wanted to ensure the succession, but not for the dynasty's oldest prince, his cousin Vazul. The king therefore had Vazul's eyes gouged out, his ears filled with lead and his sons banished – a futile act indeed, since their descendants would later wear the crown for two-and-a-half centuries. To replace Vazul's line, Stephen sent for Peter Orseolo, his sister's Venetian son, and designated him heir. A son and grandson of doges, from an already splendid and powerful city, he had been driven out of Hungary after three years by Stephen's other nephew, Sámuel Aba. Despite enjoying the support of chieftains dissatisfied with the Venetian, Sámuel was no luckier. In 1044, Peter Orseolo deposed him and reclaimed the throne, with the far from disinterested assistance of Emperor Henry IV, to whom Peter swore allegiance; Peter Orseolo's second reign was not popular and ended in catastrophe; in 1046, the great lords of the realm called back the exiled sons of Vazul, the blinded prince; in 1047, the eldest András (Andrew) was placed on the throne and remained there for fourteen years. Instability nevertheless continued until 1077. These forty years of troubles – there would be others – reflected the fragility of Hungarian independence and that of the state.

Hungary did not have exclusive rights over fragility. At the time of Stephen's death, William the Conqueror was still far from the Battle of Hastings while Capetians, forty years on, reigned over their heartland, 'L'Ile de France'. Though the very notion of statehood has to be treated with caution, the Hungarian troubles of the eleventh century were

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distinctive in that their roots were archaic and stemmed from rather particular circumstances, which today would be called 'geopolitical'. In addition to being under pressure from two empires, the country's geographic situation rendered it isolated in a Slav environment of Czechs, Moravians, Poles, Russians, Bulgarians, Croatians, Slovenians, Serbians and others. In order to establish its authority in the region, Hungary conducted wars, particularly in Dalmatia and the Balkans, but also sought alliances and marriages. Six queens came from Slav princely families, others from German, French and Byzantine dynasties.

The archaic element probably owed its survival to the incomplete nature of the state. Even as the exiled princes were being called back from Poland, the last great pagan revolt was taking place, accompanied by the murders of bishops, priests and foreign knights. Prince András, recalled by the insurgents, turned against the rebels and executed the pagan chieftain, Vata, and yet he was unable to wipe out paganism and ancestral ways entirely. Nor was he able to stamp out fratricides that punctuated the century. Two brothers succeeded one another, after defeating their cousin Salamon, protégé of Emperor Henry IV. King Géza ruled from 1074 for the next three years, followed by his brother László I, the future St Ladislas, who reigned for nearly twenty years. He was in turn succeeded by his nephew Kálmán (Coloman) the Bibliophile who died in 1116.

The knight and the scholar

Although both kings were venerated, the first as the figurehead for chivalry and Christianity, the second as the ideal of the learned sovereign, neither was able to escape the spirit of the time. The future St Ladislas, a great legislator, promulgated a number of very harsh laws against theft: a stolen chicken, for example, could invoke the death penalty. His erudite successor would soften these – yet he himself did not hesitate to gouge out the eyes of a rebel brother and nephew, the future king Béla the Blind. The legislation's importance, however, lay not in the severity of the 250 or so laws passed by László and Kálmán – explainable by the sudden increase in poverty among members of certain social strata – nor in the cruelty of the punishments, which were common at the time and indeed are still practised today in certain countries. It was unique in its coherence and in its embrace of religious and civic life in all its

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Plate 5. Herm of St Ladislas (c. 1400)

aspects. Consolidating the spiritual and temporal power of the Church, it outlawed pagan rites 'near trees, springs and stones' and authorised the persecution of the *táltos* (the Hungarian name for shamans). A text declaring that ghouls 'did not exist' is often cited since other sorcerers were punishable by the Church. The 'non-recognition' of the category of ghoul (sorcerers who, by night, turned into vampires or other flying creatures) was in accordance with Church doctrine in these matters. Other dispositions laid down by Kálmán's laws included a mild punishment for adultery when committed by the husband and the death penalty for a woman caught *in flagrante delicto*, though in the case of error, the husband *was* obliged to compensate his wife's family. This could cost him as much as fifty bullocks.

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It is all too easy to extract these and other eccentricities from legislation over nine centuries old. Its importance lies in its concern to open the way to heaven for believers, and to ensure the security of life and property on earth. By fixing property boundaries and regulating dues, the legislator wanted above all to ensure the good and loyal service of the powerful as well as of the common people. The result was a more consolidated kingdom, at least until Kálmán's death in 1116. It was followed by a new period of decline during which six successive kings tried to preserve – more or less successfully – the Crown's achievements, particularly in the fields of culture and administration

Under the learned king, remarkable progress was made in both legal and literary culture. The use of writing spread to all areas to the point where jugglers were replaced by chroniclers, authors of *gestae* and codices who recounted the ancient history of Hungary and the tales of its kings through words and pictures. As well as the doings and exploits of its kings, most of all the canonised monarchs Stephen and László, charters of ennoblement and gifts formed central themes within these chronicles. They adopt the French style, learnt by Hungarian chroniclers at Paris University; István Hajnal's work discusses the influence they had on societal development. The tradition continued throughout the reigns of Kálmán's successors: around 50 charters survive from the time of Béla III, 350 from the early thirteenth century and more than 2,000 that were written during the following decades. Chivalric culture and the poetry of the troubadours were also flourishing. These were the days of Peire Vidal and Gaucelm Faidit. One of the first poems in the Hungarian language, the very beautiful *Lament of Mary,* was preserved in a codex.

Another lasting achievement was the maintenance of royal authority essentially intact, without succumbing to the 'feudal temptation' of fragmenting power.

Territorial expansion

As for external achievements, Hungary remained, through its high and low points, one of the largest and most respected kingdoms. László, the holy king–knight, successfully defended his country against invasion by Cumans, the Turkic-Kipchak people who had congregated on the

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eastern frontiers and a branch of which was to settle in Hungary as 'auxiliary people' in the next century. But the most important expeditions to be undertaken by László and Kálmán were towards the Balkans and Dalmatia. Following in the footsteps of his uncle László, a great warrior, Kálmán, despite being known as 'half-blind, a hunchback, crippled and a stutterer', succeeded not only in conquering Croatia-Slavonia (not to be confused with Slovenia or Slovakia) under the noses of Byzantium and Venice, but also Dalmatia. The entire coast, with its splendid towns of Spalato (Split), Zara and Ragusa (Dubrovnik), recognised his sovereignty with some relief. Among a dozen princely titles held by the Hungarian kings were Halics (Galicia) and Ladomeri (Volhinia) to the north, Croatia and Dalmatia to the south, not forgetting the phantom 'kingdoms' of the Cumans and Rama, in the centre of Bosnia. The latter was at the time homeland to the Bogomils (or Patarenes, a heretical sect originating from Milan). They were related to the Cathars, the Valdenses (*Vaudois*) and other Albigenses who marked history time and again over the centuries. Among the conquests, the incorporation of autonomous Croatia was perpetuated throughout centuries of historical Hungary. Apart from its capital Zagreb, elevated to the status of bishopric, the Hungarian Crown also dominated the future Serbian capital, Belgrade, called Nándorfehérvár. The equally long occupation of the Dalmatian coast ensured access to the sea. Hungarian ambitions in 'Russian' and Polish lands, on the other hand, turned out to be as ephemeral as they were futile.

While siding with the pope in his quarrel with the emperor, Hungary maintained its autonomy *vis-à-vis* the Holy See. A number of episodes illustrate this directly or indirectly, in particular the kingdom's attitude towards the Crusades. The best route to the Holy Land was via Hungary, used for centuries, but apart from a rather half-hearted crusade organised by András II in 1217–18, the Hungarian kings stayed on the margins of a movement that was as destructive as it was pious. King Kálmán welcomed Godefroi de Bouillon warmly on his entry into Hungary and provided him with a well-armed escort as far as his exit. As additional security, he kept Godefroi's brother Baudoin, future king of Jerusalem, guest–hostage at the palace.

The Árpád dynasty's princely status survived through to the twelfth century. Historians speak, if not of absolute royal power, of an almost unshakeable hegemony. The extent of royal wealth and revenue was a

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major factor, as was the prestige of its rank. Several less impressive successors of the scholar–king would certainly need the latter, as new wars hampered the country's development after his death.

During the latter part of the twelfth century, the only king to distinguish himself was Béla III (1172–96), not only by virtue of his height (1.90 metres) but also by his qualities as leader and organiser. The son of Géza II (1141–62) and a Russian princess, Béla III was brought up at the court of Manuel Comnene in Byzantium, where he became engaged to the emperor's daughter and saw himself as destined for the throne. Béla lost his position as heir when a son was born to Manuel but received instead the title of 'kaiser' and enjoyed considerable prestige. On his return to Hungary in 1172, Béla III remained allied to Manuel without renouncing Dalmatia and Sirmio, both coveted by Byzantium. Concerned more with stability than with military adventure, Béla conducted a policy which favoured the pope, maintaining friendly links with the Holy Roman Empire. During the Third Crusade, he and his second wife Margaret, daughter of Louis VII, received the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa at their court. During his father's reign, many scholars studied at Paris University so that writings, records and diplomas multiplied in his reorganised chancellery.

A country of contrasts

Mid-twelfth-century Hungary is described by travellers, such as Bishop Otto de Freysing, as an opulent but none too civilised country. This Cistercian did not find the people to his taste: according to him, they were ugly, small, in short, 'human monsters'. Some historians attribute these bad impressions to his itinerary: he probably only met Pechenegs. Apart from an unattractive physiognomy, his Hungarian contemporaries seem to have had enough to eat and enjoyed fairly wide common freedoms. Their dwellings, on the other hand, were shabby, half-sunk into the ground and covered in reeds or thatch. With the probable exception of bishoprics or towns inhabited by French, Walloon or German immigrants, market towns were no more developed than villages. Stone houses would begin to proliferate during the next century, after the reconstruction that followed the Tatar invasion of 1241–2.

We will return to this period to discuss the composition of the population but it ought to be mentioned at this point that Hungary already

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frequently welcomed settlers from the West, most of all from Germany, who were attracted by a land that was fertile and less densely populated than the lands to the west. Pechenegs, Cumans and other refugees from various steppe invasions (during which one nomadic people would drive out another) also arrived at this time. The majority of them were Muslims converted to Catholicism but others maintained their Muslim or pagan beliefs and at times suffered persecution. It was clearly a very colourful tableau of peoples and mores. The Hungarian village, meanwhile, was already a stable place. Its population lived from cattle-rearing, agriculture, fishing, viticulture and, of course, crafts. As Ilona Bolla argues in her book on the creation of the *jobbágy* class, legal and economic social levels in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries numbered at least a dozen, depending on whether one was noble, free, 'semi-free', native, host or from another group. Social stratification according to 'the three orders' (George Duby) came into being gradually and especially after the Tatar invasion, under pressure from the rich and the weight of necessity.

The Golden Bull: a 'Magna Carta'

At this time, the king was immensely wealthy due to the extent of his inherited properties, though it was impossible to distinguish between his 'private' fortune and domanial possessions. According to the historian Gyula Kristó, his patrimony represented 70 per cent of the kingdom; the rest belonged to the Church, to the descendants of ancient tribal and clan chieftains, to foreign knights and to the free warrior-peasants. Donations by the king to various beneficiaries, monasteries, bishoprics or individuals, had always existed in some form but increased sharply under András II (1202–35), described by more than one witness as a light-hearted and carefree monarch. Contemporaries and historians view his reign as marking the disintegration of St Stephen's old patrimonial order and the beginning of the seigniorial system.

Marxist historiography talks about feudalism in this regard – a subject which we will return to. For now, it need only be said that the widespread and generous distribution of property effected by András to his faithful servants was permanent and hereditary, not given in fief and therefore not tied to the vassal system. These donations were instrumental in the growth of a new class of great barons and middle digni-

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Plate 6. Effigy of András II on the Golden Bull 1222

taries, without reciprocal obligations towards either the royal donor or the people who became their dependants along with the land.

King András could not have been unaware of the impact of this veritable social earthquake. Documents refer to these changes as 'new institutions', and indeed they are, even at an administrative level. Numerous castles, and their surrounding villages, even entire counties, were bestowed upon the most deserving or the cleverest royal servants. Among these were German knights who arrived with Queen Gertrude of Meran. Gertrude was later murdered by a group of discontented conspirators during a Russian campaign led by the king, and there were other malcontents including high-ranking soldiers called the 'king's servants', who wanted their status and privileges guaranteed. The king also faced criticism for entrusting financial affairs to Jews and Ismaelites (Muslims). The malcontents formed a league and succeeded in extracting a charter of freedoms from King András II. The Golden Bull of 1222, like the English Magna Carta, enshrined the right to disobey the sovereign if the latter contravened this 'constitution of the nobility', before the term had been coined.

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András's successor, Béla IV, initially tried to backtrack in order to undertake more fundamental and considered reforms than his father's. The event that changed his mind was the Mongol-Tatar invasion.

After Genghis's death in 1227, his successor, the great Khan Ogoday, sent Batu, chief of the Golden Horde, to conquer Russia. The immense project achieved, Batu's army penetrated Poland and Hungary. In 1241, the Tatars defeated the Hungarians at Muhi, in the north-east of the country, near the River Sajó. The following year, they crossed the Danube. The king, along with a few faithful followers, set out for Dalmatia and established himself at Trau (Trogir) while he awaited 'Europe's' assistance. All he received were a few words of consolation from the emperor, the pope, Louis IX, the Saint and other Christian sovereigns.

It was at this point that the Mongol-Tatars, who had pursued the king as far as the Dalmatian coast, suddenly left the country – whether in response to the death of the great Khan Ogoday or for some unknown motive. Béla IV set off for home, through a desolate landscape. Chronicles recount unprecedented levels of destruction and cruelty, a country in ruins and a population decimated. According to Abbot Hermann, from a German monastery, 'Hungary had been wiped out' after 350 years of existence. Master Roger, an Italian who had somehow miraculously escaped, found only ruins, corpses and desolation in his path.

It was undoubtedly a severe catastrophe but a number of fortresses were able to resist and part of the population, hidden in the woods and marshes, survived: not more than 20 per cent according to old estimates, 50 per cent according to later sources. The final balance is even less pessimistic: latest research suggests that most of the population survived. The task that faced the king was nonetheless daunting and it was his reconstruction project that opened the way to a new era.

RECONSTRUCTION AND THE END OF THE HOUSE OF ÁRPÁD

Béla IV, who was thirty-six years old at the time, had twenty-eight years ahead of him and plenty of food for thought and action. The might of the Mongol Empire and Western Christianity's lukewarm response in the face of the Mongol threat made defeat the most likely outcome. The problem was not just military. As viceroy, then prince–governor of

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Transylvania, Béla had previously opposed his father's policies and defied him on a number of occasions. Above all, he had attempted to reappropriate many domains granted to the kingdom's grandees, and to re-establish the system of counties and fortresses dismantled by his father. Before his father's 'new institutions' reform, some seventy comitats (provincial administrative units) were ruled by the king, including a number of *castra* or strongholds whose accompanying lands were not as vast as that of the comitats. Yet there were many landowners, both large and small, who administered their properties independently. On what grounds? In his discussion about the village of Györ's elevation to the status of town, the historian Jenö Szücs writes about a population whose legal status was based upon six different criteria. The number of these criteria is equally impressive when it comes to the descendants of ancient lineage, knights of foreign origin, castle warriors (*jobbágy*), soldiers of the royal escort, and so on. Out of this mass of titled nobles and free men, rather curiously called 'quite noble', emerged the vast social class (*una eademque nobilitas*) that was the sprawling Hungarian nobility.

One fact remains nonetheless certain. The county, or comitat, became, in the words of the historian Gyula Kristó, the country's oldest and most enduring institution. Despite numerous changes, their number remained at around seventy for centuries and many of them retain their original names to this day.

But let us return to the king, galloping across a devastated land where few of the old administrative structures remained intact. Béla IV, who had to start from scratch, first reorganised his military capacity and then state administration. He created a Christian state not unlike that of St Stephen and his successors, though more political in the 'modern' thirteenth-century sense of the word; a so-called 'feudal' state, but with particularities to which we will return.

As a first measure, Béla, who had no intention of re-establishing quasi-absolute royal power based upon the old organisation of the counties, delegated significant discretionary power to loyal barons. All high governmental, legal, commanding and administrative offices in large territorial units were entrusted to the barons and bishops of his entourage. The result proved positive: thanks to this dedicated elite, material, economic and military reconstruction put the country back on its feet. Two or three generations later, descendants of these barons,

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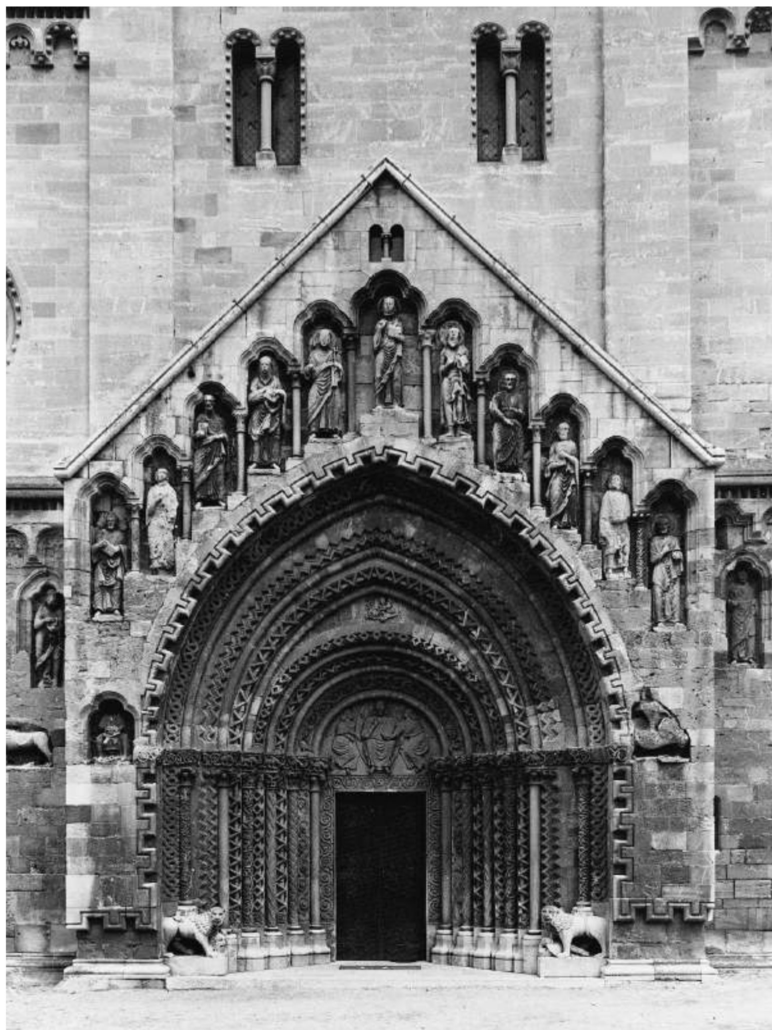

Plate 7. Church of the Benedictine Abbey of Ják (1256). Portal

like the famous Máté Csák (1260–1321), a veritable tyrant in his 'private kingdom', would contribute to the weakening of the state, but during this crucial period of renewal, Béla IV's trust proved well placed.

From his Fehérvár seat (Székesfehérvár, half-way to Buda) he began to reconstruct old fortified towns and to build new ones, combining military defence with urbanisation and the promotion of civic privileges.

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Fehérvár's new municipal statute became a model for urban development. Béla was also responsible for the foundation of Buda castle and town, with its fortified enclosure. He moved the population of Pest village, situated opposite, and turned Buda into the most important trade centre of the country. Another twenty or so towns were built, enjoying royal privileges, an ordered topology and enclosures. With their few hundreds or thousands of inhabitants these towns could not rival Venice or Paris, but the new churches, stone houses, markets, municipalities and their inhabitants – many of them foreigners and practising every conceivable trade – became pioneers of a civilisation far more developed than before. These towns generated new wealth both for their artisans and tradesmen and for the royal purse.

The king had a range of estates and royal revenues such as the mines, salt, taxes and tolls at his disposal in addition to support for the upkeep of his court. The 'king's table' was at the time estimated at 2,000 cattle, 3,000 quintals of wheat and 1,800 hectolitres of wine. These resources were not sufficient, however. What was needed was an increase in silver revenues in order to consolidate them. As elsewhere, these incomes came in part directly from the minting of coins. This reliable currency (coins with a high silver content) stimulated economic and commercial activities, and fiscal income via domestic taxes and duties. Hungary exported beef, wine and salt and imported cloth, silk and spices from Venice, Germany and Moravia. Taxes on around thirty articles were fixed at the market. Royalties from the mines (silver, gold, salt) were divided between the treasury, the new entrepreneurs – notably Germans – and the mining towns' burghers involved in their exploitation. These economic activities generated as much if not more revenue than the old taxes in kind. However, some regions still paid in weasel fur or cattle. As for the Jews, they paid collectively, in silver. Few were exempt.

The development of sparsely populated or unpopulated peripheral regions also revitalised the economy, in particular the vast, hitherto unused tracts of land to the north, in present-day Slovakia. Exploitation of forests, land and mines grew, and new towns and villages were founded. In this kingdom of 2 million inhabitants, larger than Great Britain or Italy, there was room for everybody. At the time, it included the whole Carpathian chain along with Croatia-Slavonia, Dalmatia and part of Bosnia. So much so that the origins of peoples 'collected' by King Béla were extremely diverse: Germans, Walloons and other Latins,

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'refugees' from the steppes, Pechenegs, Cumans, Iazigs, Jews and Ismaelites, 'Russian' peasants from Galicia, Romanians from the other side of the Carpathians, Poles, Moravians and other Slavs who had come to settle alongside native Slavs. Hungary, having already assimilated the ethnic groups who were settled there at the time of the conquest, became once more a mosaic of Christian, Muslim, Orthodox and pagan peoples. Thanks to the great migration, Hungarian peasants became mobile and freed from the landowners. One section of the free 'servants of the king', on the other hand, instead of rising like the others into a nobility in the making, lost their social position.

The importance of the Church was already considerable, comparable to its position in Western Europe. Since St Stephen, numerous laws and donations in the form of estates and other revenues such as the tithe had been bestowed upon the monasteries, bishoprics and chapters. In the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church owned only around 15 per cent of the entire country but, as the centuries passed, it became the single largest landed property owner. Bishops also took on civil governance over their estates and population, which included the ecclesiastical nobility, the 'predialists' and soldiers established on their land by the bishop. The bishops also had judiciary powers and sat on the Royal Council. King Béla IV respected tradition while maintaining control over nominations, retaining investiture for his faithful prelates. On more than one occasion he evoked the time of the invasion when the only payment he ever received from the pope was 'mere words'.

The person responsible for tarnishing both the life and work of Béla IV was his son, Stephen. Though he only reigned alone for two years, from 1270 to 1272, he had previously been immensely powerful firstly as prince–governor of Croatia when he was a child, then of Styria and Transylvania. In 1262, and again in 1265, Stephen turned his weapons against the king, his father, who was not much of a war leader. Stephen finally defeated him and proclaimed himself 'king-junior' over the eastern half of the country.

Who were those who sided with the impulsive king-junior against old Béla who had given Hungary back its life blood? Several sources suggest it was the Cumans. In order to understand this, one has to go back a bit. These Turko-Kipchak warriors, pagan and nomadic, had been granted entry into Hungary as military back-up against an imminent Mongol invasion. However, in the panic generated by the Mongol attack,

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rumour spread that these warriors were in fact in league with the assailants, so the people of the village of Pest killed their chief. Furious, the Cumans left Hungary to return two years later. In order to mollify these 40,000 or so Cumans – a considerable military force – King Béla settled them on the vast north-east territory and even betrothed his seven-year-old son, Stephen, to a Cuman princess. This marriage, and probably also the grievances held by the Cuman tribes against the government, explain why they rallied around the king-junior. Stephen could also rely on his own faithful Transylvanians and, furthermore, he excelled in the military arts. In contrast to his father, he successfully fought against Ottokar, the Czech king (whom Béla had won over as an ally), and against Bulgaria. He also contributed to the consolidation of the Hungarian dominion as far as the Adriatic coast.

The remaining three decades, however, were not happy ones for the House of Árpád. Stephen's son, László IV (1272–90) was ten when he succeeded his father. His reign was punctuated by baronial intrigue, murders and chronic instability. The great men of the realm pursued their private wars according to the rules of perfect feudal anarchy. Twenty or so among them seized vast tracks of land, spoils and positions according to their weapons and coalitions. The name of Máté Csák has already been mentioned as symbol of this rapacious and unscrupulous aristocracy, who carved out veritable kingdoms within the kingdom.

But let us return to the young king, son of King Stephen and his Cuman wife, and very much attached to his mother's people. This might have been a beautiful story of love and brotherhood between peoples if it had not turned into a drama – a melodrama, even. Destabilised in his childhood by the barons, then slandered for his 'pagan and revelling' lifestyle in the company of the Cumans, László (Ladislas) was nicknamed the 'Cuman king' and attracted the anger of Pope Nicholas III. The sovereign pontiff sent a legate, Bishop Philip de Fermo, to impose an anti-Cuman law. The king, who was not a stable man, began by acquiescing, then rebelled against the legate's demands and ended up being excommunicated – referred to as a 'Kulturkampf' in reverse by one historian. Be that as it may, the tribulations of the 'Cuman king' had begun once more and were to last over ten years. What had started as a love story turned into a soap opera punctuated by intrigue, wars, murders, betrayals and reversals. His reign had its fair

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Plate 8. Seal of the Esztergom 'Latins' (twelfth century)

share of scandals, too. Whether because of physical disgust, personality disorder or defiance, László refused to father an heir by his wife, Isabelle of Anjou. He rejected her while at the same time showing off with his Cuman mistresses. He is even said to have had intercourse with one of them in the middle of a state Council. As a last straw or irony of fate, László ended up being assassinated by two Cumans in the pay of a baron.

Thus, the twenty-third and last member of the House of Árpád came to the throne. Though his legitimacy was in doubt because of the supposed or real infidelity of his grandmother, an Este princess, András III was eventually crowned in 1290. Raised at the Morosini palace in Venice – his father having married Tomasina Morosini – Andrew 'the Venetian', in contrast to László 'the Cuman', did not lack either manners or intelligence. But the huge power of the barons proved impossible to break. With his death in 1301, the lights of the House of Árpád went out.

After the brief reigns of a Premyslid and a Wittelsbach, it was left to the Angevins of Naples to give Hungary back its power and its brilliance.

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2

Grandeur and decline: from the Angevin kings to the Battle of Mohács, 1301–1526

THE KING FROM NAPLES: AN ERA OF PROGRESS

When Charles-Robert of Anjou (1310–42) was crowned in 1310, following the reigns of a Czech king, Vencel (Wenceslas) Premyslid, and of Otto Wittelsbach of Bavaria, he had already considered himself king for a number of years by virtue of his link with the dynasty of Árpád via his grandmother. The latter, an Árpád princess, had married Charles II of Anjou, king of Naples. The first Hungarian Angevin, Charles-Robert, who was also called Carobert, was brought up in Naples at the Angevin court, his family having been driven from Sicily and replaced in 1282 by the House of Aragon, following the tragic 'Sicilian Vespers' massacre. Charles-Robert had been destined for the throne of Hungary since birth. He was crowned for the first time in 1301, aged thirteen, but was not to enjoy undisputed kingship until after his third coronation in 1310.

The young Angevin, then twenty-two years old, found his new kingdom in a state of political turmoil. The international situation, on the other hand, favoured his ambitions. The Byzantine Empire – in the period leading up to its final fall in 1453 – remained preoccupied with the affairs of the capital, Constantinople. The Holy Roman Empire had been in decline since the death of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen in 1250. Hungary's immediate neighbour, Austria (the dukedom of the Babenbergs until its annexation by Bohemia), had passed into the hands of the Habsburgs in 1278. However, the slow expansion of this dynasty did not yet represent a threat to the more powerful Hungarian kingdom.

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Western Europe was a distant world, fully occupied with its own conflicts, notably France's wars against the papacy and against England, with which it was embroiled in the Hundred Years' War (1339–1453). The Black Death (1346–53) wiped out a third of the population in the West and, in addition, Europe was undergoing a period of severe cold and rain which brought intermittent periods of famine. Hungary seems to have been less affected by these calamities. In the fourteenth century, under the Angevins, its population reached around 3 million while the rest of Europe, excluding Russia, probably amounted to some 80 million inhabitants before the great plague epidemics in mid-century, and to 56 million after that. Under these generally favourable conditions, the Angevins were able to consolidate their internal power and to conduct an active foreign policy.

However, the priority of the first Angevin king, the young Charles-Robert, was to put his own Hungarian house in order. Between 1301 and 1310, till the eve of his final coronation, about fifteen powerful magnates ruled over the territory as a whole. Only a single region in the centre of the country, a kind of 'Hungarian island', remained under the direct authority of the king. Among these barons were the margraves (*bán* in Hungarian) of the military marches (*bánság* in Hungarian) of the south, a region that is today part of Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia and Romania.

The situation that Charles-Robert found himself facing was exceptional only in its gravity. Erosion of the state and conflict between kings and feudal oligarchies characterised the history of all medieval countries, as did the emergence from the fourteenth century onwards of representative assemblies, whether in the form of 'states generals', parliaments or diets.

In France, the first states general was convened by Philip the Fair in 1302. In Hungary, where feudalism did not take the same forms or evolve in the same way as in the West, relations between royalty and subjects belonging to the three orders were organised differently. A pattern of equal rights for all the nobility, *una eademque nobilitas*, took shape instead. Thus, in principle, poorer nobles, later known as 'nobles with seven plum trees', and rich barons constituted a single order with a large membership, amounting to some 4 to 5 per cent of the population. In reality, many of them lived in modest circumstances and were economically dependent on the magnates, owners of large estates and valuable

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seigniorial rights. Members of the lesser nobility, descendants of 'royal servants', *jobbágy* and other free soldiers, generally made up the entourage of great lords and prelates, but swore allegiance only to the king . At the same time, as nobles, they shared the prerogatives of sovereignty with the king.

The lesser nobility's struggle for equality with the higher nobility had run as a constant theme through Hungary's history since the Golden Bull of 1222. Louis the Great would be the first king to confirm, in 1351, the 'constitution of the nobility'. This established that the inalienability of inherited property in principle applied as much to the poor noble's plot 'of seven plum trees' as it did to the tens of thousands of hectares belonging to the baron next door. All nobles were also given equal status at the 'comitat' assemblies and at the Diet.

The Angevin kings of the fourteenth century therefore faced, on the one hand, the enormous power of the prelates and the oligarchy and, on the other, the lesser and middle nobility, fighting for full recognition of their status, rights and privileges. Hungary was moving towards a society of orders and states dominated by the nobility. When Charles-Robert came to the throne he found, according to a contemporary document, 'practically the whole country against him' and had first to accommodate the oligarchies, whom he did not hesitate to fight soon afterwards.

The most powerful lord at the time was Máté Csák. His estates are said to have encompassed eighteen counties, around one fifth of the country. He led the life of a prince, with his own private army, his own chamberlain, squire, treasurer and judges. His father and his uncle had occupied the highest offices and received extremely generous grants in return for services rendered to the Crown after the Mongol invasion in the middle of the previous century. He had refashioned both wealth and power into a force capable of fracturing the state. The same transformation had occurred with other former royal followers, such as László Kán, first 'voïvode' of Transylvania. A few great barons like the Köszegi in Transdanubia (ancient Pannonia) and the Subic, ancestors of the legendary Zrinyi in Croatia-Dalmatia, even minted coins and conducted private wars abroad as well as at home. In this fragmented state, anarchy reached a point at which no less than four lords simultaneously claimed the title of palatine (*nádor* in Hungarian).

Charles-Robert had the sense to attack Csák, Kán and the Amadé

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Plate 9. Charles-Robert of Anjou in the illustrated chronicle (fourteenth century)

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and Subic barons separately, one after the other. Sometimes luck was on his side: the Kassa bourgeois disposed of the Amadé head, whereas Csák and Kán granted him the enormous favour of dying unassisted. In most cases, the kings of neighbouring countries preferred not to intervene. Charles-Robert even succeeded in setting up a triple alliance between the Polish, Czech and Hungarian kings – a Piast, a Luxemburg and an Angevin – at Visegrád in 1335. This event was to be repeated 650 years later when the heads of state of the same countries, by then freed of Communism, met at the same place.

Territorial conditions

Among Angevin assets, the initial support of the pope and of the Hungarian clergy was particularly important. It was not easily won, since restoration of order affected certain Church interests, notably the expansion of a civil administration at the expense of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In addition, the king, taking advantage of the weakening of papal authority, which had been transferred to Avignon, was expropriating papal taxes. The growing authority of the Crown over that of the Church can be measured by the grievances expressed by the latter. In 1338, the clergy sent the pope a thick volume of grievances protesting against the suppression of numerous privileges. Most significantly, Charles-Robert assumed the right to bestow titles and ecclesiastical prebends upon his own supporters, to the point of designating his illegitimate son, Kálmán, Bishop of Györ.

Charles-Robert's reign, which lasted more than three decades, was not particularly marked by violence. He was a king who was able to forgive, except for one rather confused episode which is worth recounting. A wealthy noble called Zah (or Zács) burst into the royal dining-room at the palace of Visegrád brandishing his sword and mortally wounded Queen Elisabeth before being overwhelmed and cut down. The motive for this act remains obscure: momentary madness, political motivation or act of revenge for the rape of his daughter, supposedly perpetrated by the queen's brother? We do not know. Whatever the motive, Charles-Robert's revenge was terrible: every relative of the regicide was sentenced to death and Zah's unfortunate daughter was horribly mutilated and put on public display. Lastly, the family wealth was confiscated 'to the seventh degree of lineage'.

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Though Charles-Robert may not have been particularly greedy, like his Hungarian predecessors and other European monarchs he confiscated the possessions of deposed oligarchs – several of whom had taken refuge abroad – on a massive scale. The Angevins – for his son Lajos (Louis) pursued the same course – thus recovered many of the estates lost to or ransacked by brigand magnates; they also retrieved about 150 fortified settlements (towns and castles), around half of the total, and some 20 per cent of the land with, of course, their associated taxes and revenues. In addition, the Angevins, who already had a huge personal fortune, had discovered an unexpected Ali Baba's cave in this land, the recently discovered gold mines in the north along with silver, copper and salt mines. These mines constituted a quite extraordinary source of wealth, which, due to the prevailing situation at their accession to the throne, was to prove extremely useful.

Because of the weakening of royal power and the considerable increase in personal property held by the magnates (but also because of the Mongol-Tatar invasion of 1241–2), royal revenues had been diminishing for over a century. According to a contemporary inventory of ecclesiastical and royal revenues, Béla III (1172–92) disposed of the annual equivalent of 31,000 kilogrammes of pure silver. After revision, this sum has been reduced by historians to the more modest figure of 23,000 kilogrammes (when all revenues have been converted into pure silver). Nonetheless, revenues on this scale were considerable by contemporary standards: they exceeded those of the French king Philippe-Auguste (estimated at some 17,000 kilogrammes), and were double the receipts of the English Crown. But this level of wealth was short-lived: at the time, two thirds of the estates belonged to the king of Hungary; a century later they would be reduced to one third.

Thus the Angevins had started out with very little. In 1320, Charles-Robert possessed only 15,000 kilogrammes of pure silver. In comparison, Charles IV of France (1322–8), a contemporary of the young Angevin, had the equivalent of 40,000 kilogrammes of pure silver.

This did not discourage increasing exploitation of the gold mines in the north and in Transylvania, which continued into the middle of the century (into the reign of Louis, son of Charles-Robert), when Hungarian gold accounted for three-quarters of the entire output of European mines. Coins minted in gold from the Körmöc mines were in circulation all over the continent, at a time when high demand increased

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its price. Since the content of refined gold remained stable at 23.75 carats, Hungarian florins could compete with Florentine and English gold pieces; indeed, they flooded Italy, where they were spent generously in pursuit of the Hungarian Angevins' political ambitions. But designs on Italy did not mature until the reign of Louis, and whereas Charles-Robert never lost sight of his Italian ambitions, he concerned himself primarily, and with tenacious pragmatism, with the consolidation of his country and his power.

During the Angevin period as a whole, the area of the kingdom was probably by the strictest criteria – in other words, leaving out temporary conquests and vassal dependencies – 300,000 square kilometres, while the population is estimated at around 3 million people. There were also 49 free royal towns, 638 market towns and smaller towns which enjoyed chartered privileges, and around 21,000 villages. These figures (Hóman) are certainly open to debate, since the Hungarian town of the day rarely merited the name, and the average village seldom had more than 100 to 120 residents. The vast majority of peasants were free; only some 360–480,000, perhaps, would have been tied to serfdom, a practice that was on the way out (Engel). These ratios would soon change during the following centuries, but they indicate that the Angevin peasantry experienced relatively comfortable living standards with the more able and fortunate enjoying economic and social mobility.

Among the larger and medium-sized estates, freeholds were far more widespread than in the medieval West and employed a primitive subsistence farming system. Nevertheless, both large estates and the more primitive tenanted holdings were starting to produce marketable surpluses within a rapidly developing economic framework.

The increasing exploitation of the mines was matched at ground level as agriculture, livestock farming, forestry and trade underwent significant growth. There was no shortage of exploitable land in the time of the Angevins. On the contrary, with 3 million inhabitants distributed over a territory of around 300,000 square kilometres (the size of Italy today), population density was far lower than in Europe's more developed countries. The kingdom was therefore able to absorb, as ever, large numbers of immigrants. Its peripheral regions attracted Romanians, Moravians, Poles and Russians (Ruthenians). Among the Germans who would later swell the ranks of ethnic groups already well rooted in

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several regions, Saxons had established themselves in Transylvania as early as the twelfth century.

Although urban development was under way, the number of towns and their level of social organisation remained inferior to that of Western Europe. A Hungarian town historian, György Granasztói, quotes a French Dominican monk, who in 1308 – that is, before the Angevin period – mentions ten genuinely urbanised towns, including Buda, Esztergom and Györ. Yet the monk adds that despite the existence of these and many other market towns, forts and castles, 'the kingdom looked empty'. It was a vast expanse dotted with very few urban settlements, accounting for only 3 per cent of the population (against three times that figure in France) and the very low level of urban development. Generous legal privileges, especially for mining and commercial towns, could not compensate for the lack of urban development which was mainly restricted to ecclesiastical and military buildings, or to a simple fortified wall. In essence, the medieval Hungarian town, with the exception of the future Budapest, offered little more than military security and population control.

Buda underwent significant development during the Angevin century. As the royal seat, next to Visegrád, it attracted increasing numbers of artisans and rich German merchants who proceeded to rise to the top of municipal circles. With the exception of Buda, one or two mining towns and settlements close to the main trading routes, urban Hungary was unable to play a role comparable to that of the great Italian, French or Dutch centres. Around 1400, Buda and Pest together contained 15,000 inhabitants while 4,000 people lived in Sopron, close to the Austrian border; the two large market towns of Debrecen and Szeged housed as many if not more. Pozsony and the mining towns of Upper Hungary and Transylvania were also growing. During the same period, despite the depopulation of numerous towns due to the Black Death, Europe numbered over two hundred towns of more than 10,000 inhabitants as well as metropolises of 100,000 souls or more. Nonetheless, on balance it would be fair to see the Angevins' overall contribution to the development of towns, urban civilisation and commerce as substantial. The first Angevin king, Charles-Robert, inherited a land in the grip of anarchy and left behind an ordered, flourishing and well-governed state.

Most people benefited from the consolidation of royal power and from social stability. Merchants and businessmen, as well as the simple

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taxpayer, profited from financial stability (there were no fewer than thirty-five currencies in circulation before the Angevin reforms), safe travel by road and a coherent household tax which replaced an inconsistent and labyrinthine system. Administrative reforms went hand in hand with a stable royal government, and with social change. Local 'comitats' increasingly turned into autonomous administrative units, managed by the nobility and its representatives (dietines), in other words by 'the states'. Accordingly, half-way between the traditional patrimonial system based upon blood ties and a very partially adopted Western feudal model, a 'states and orders' system developed, based upon a particular concept of civil rights. According to these principles, the kingdom became the property of the Crown, an abstract moral entity, while real political power was regulated by 'contract' between the king and the noble estates.

The Neapolitan imbroglio

Restrained by internal problems, Charles-Robert can be counted among those monarchs who had few expansionist tendencies. Through his fourth wife, Elisabeth Lokietek, he maintained good relations with Poland. Bohemia, too, was part of the 'triple alliance' of Visegrád (1335) and Charles-Robert also formed ties with Austria. In the south of the country, he succeeded in maintaining Hungarian predominance over the Slav banates and over the Adriatic coast, in spite of Venetian ambitions. At last, the long-cherished dream of the Hungarian Angevins, to regain a foothold in Naples, seemed to be close to fulfilment when in 1343 Charles-Robert's youngest son, András, married Jeanne, heiress to King Robert of Naples. But by then Charles-Robert was dead and events failed to unfold in the way he had hoped and planned. Even though Jeanne and András had been betrothed at the age of six, and had consummated their marriage at the age of fifteen, the 'Neapolitan dream' turned to farce soon after the honeymoon, if indeed there had ever been any honey.

András was accepted only as prince consort, despite the mountains of gold dealt out by his mother, the very ambitious Elisabeth Lokietek-Piast (1300–80). Pope Clement VI did not want András to ascend to the throne of Naples; Jeanne was even less enthusiastic. Furthermore, she was hardly a model of virtue or marital tenderness. In 1345 she had

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András (the first of her four husbands) assassinated, thus triggering a prolonged war of vendetta and reconquest against King Louis of Hungary, the unfortunate András's elder brother.

LOUIS THE GREAT: A PERIOD OF EXPANSION (1342–1382)

Following the death of his father in 1342, it fell to the future Louis the Great to lead the Hungarian side in policy towards Naples and wars with it, among others. His forty-year reign is far more difficult to evaluate than that of his father. This Angevin's greatness was undoubtedly due to the unprecedented expansion of his kingdoms which, by the end of his reign, encompassed a vast territory stretching from Poland to the Adriatic. The legendary Macedonian conqueror, Alexander the Great, and the chivalrous Hungarian, St Ladislas, were Louis's chosen role models. Some of his subjects recognised his greatness: those citizens admitted to the judicial process, the prosperous bourgeois, members of the middle nobility, all felt their views were now being taken into account, as did those barons who shared his external ambitions. However, his contribution to developments within his own borders cannot be compared with that of Charles-Robert. True, climatic conditions in mid-century had deteriorated and Hungary did not entirely escape the Black Death, the plague; be that as it may, living standards improved little under Louis the Great.

Art and culture flourished at the court, which resided in three sumptuous palaces; and yet even the royal towns of Buda and Visegrád did not measure up to Charles IV's Prague. A few great works of art have survived, those of the sculptors the Kolozsvári brothers, for example. Louis founded the first Hungarian university in Pécs, as well as several churches and monasteries, but no cathedrals or grand stately castles were built during his reign. There remained a wide cultural divide between the kingdom of Hungary and those of Italy, France and Flanders.

Balkan and Adriatic wars

After numerous twists and turns and despite two costly campaigns (1347–8 and 1350), Louis's Neapolitan adventures reached an impasse. Although Louis had twice conquered Naples, the pope refused to

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Plate 10. Console with woman's head, 1365

depose Jeanne. Louis finally renounced the throne, not without some slight consolation: his relative Charles the Younger, prince of Durazzo (Durres, Albania), became master of the much-coveted kingdom and in 1382, with the support of the Roman Pope Urban VI and a significant Hungarian army, had Jeanne, the old enemy, strangled. After forty years of continuous conflict, Louis I finally tasted the bitter satisfaction of revenge on his deathbed.

Another conflict, closer to Hungarian interests, ran through Louis's reign. Venice's designs on Dalmatia had resulted in three long wars against Hungary (1356–8, 1373 and 1378–81) as well as conflicts in the Balkans, partly connected to the two warring parties, with a third

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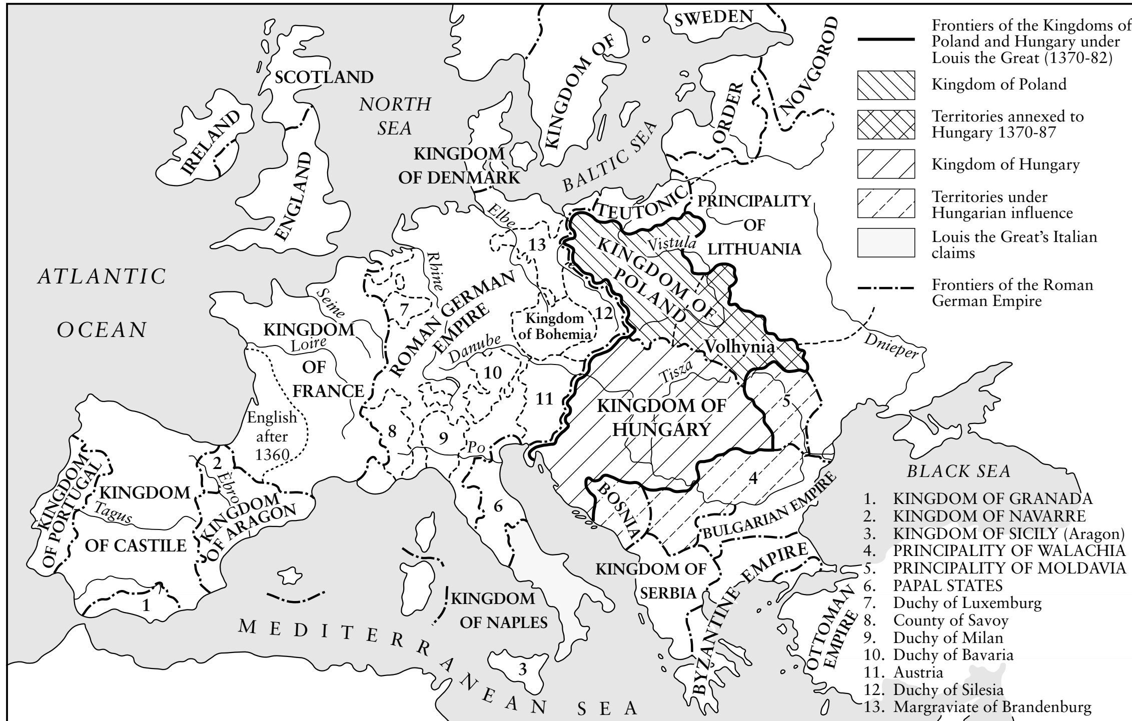

Map 3. Europe at the time of Louis the Great

power, Genoa, joining in. The Serbian kingdom was also indirectly involved, but Stephen Douchan's 'great Serbia' ended by fragmenting into several petty despotisms and then falling under Turkish rule after the famous Battle of Kosovo (1389).

By then, King Louis was dead, but he had conducted an active policy throughout the Balkan region, bitterly opposed by numerous ephemeral principalities which came and went during the course of the fourteenth century. The Bulgarian 'second empire' disintegrated, too. Between 1353 and 1391 a brief regional Bosnian hegemony emerged under Stephen Tvartko I.

Relations between the king of Hungary and Bosnia, several times severed and re-established, also depended upon his marriage to the Bosnian, Elisabeth Kotromanic, and were inscribed within a policy whose overall aim was to preserve Hungarian influence from the Balkans to the Adriatic coast. Holding on to Croatia and Dalmatia in face of both Serbian and Venetian opposition was crucial. Even six hundred years after these events, Western Europe, a distant observer, has found the complexities of this region impossible to understand. King Louis managed to profit from the situation, but perhaps he could not foresee, in the second half of the fourteenth century, the scale of the Ottoman threat. Several historians have emphasised Louis's piety and proselytising activities among the partially pagan populations of neighbouring regions where he waged war. Non-Catholics in his own country, particularly the Orthodox Romanians called Wallachians, were also the object of his aggressive proselytising. They grew to despise the 'Magyar religion'.

From the perspective of Venice's history, the stakes involved in the conflict seem less formidable than when seen through the eyes of the Hungarian king. The merchant republic's only interest in the Dalmatian roads and hinterland was in terms of securing the Adriatic islands and ports frequented by its galleons. Of greater importance was the need for a land-based hinterland on the Italian peninsula, since there Venice had powerful rivals, notably Genoa.

European trade routes did not cross Hungary but went through Germany instead, reaching Basle, Strasbourg, Bruges and the markets of Champagne. According to René Guerdan, Venice regarded the conflict with Hungary as little more than a 'spice war', whereas for the Hungarian king, it was part of his war for influence in the Balkans and

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Italy, as far as distant Naples. He set off to war practically every year but though his sovereignty over Dalmatia was maintained, success could only ever be limited. Hungarian domination in Dalmatia, as well as in the ephemeral banates of Serbia, in Bulgaria, in Bosnia, advances in Wallachia – and even for a brief moment, Moldavia – was unsustainable except in the short term. On the coast, a state without a real fleet to speak of had no chance against the maritime power of Venice, despite an alliance with Genoa. In the end, it was the Ottoman Turks, in full expansion, who were able to benefit most.

On the Polish throne

Louis the Great is chiefly renowned for having acquired a second crown, more prestigious than those of a handful of petty despotisms. In 1370, Louis seized the Crown of Poland, succeeding Kasimir III the Great, his uncle Lokietek-Piast, whom he had assisted on a number of occasions against a powerful and expansionist pagan Lithuania. After Louis of Anjou, the Jagiellons who originated in Lithuania occupied the throne for two centuries. The Hungarian–Polish interlude, under Louis the Great, lasted a mere twelve years with in addition a few during which his daughter Hedwige (Jadwiga) was elected king in 1384 and married a Jagiellon, Vladislas. The Hungarian–Polish union was in actual fact a personal rather than a state union. The fiction of a Hungary that included Poland exists only in the nationalist Hungarian imagination, as does the myth that accompanies it, that of the 'three Hungarian seas'. Poland, before its union with Lithuania, had no more access to the Baltic than Hungary did to the Black Sea, apart from a brief incursion into Moldavia. The only coast to remain under Hungarian rule was Adriatic Dalmatia, and that, too, was eventually lost during the next century.

The country was plunged into yet another turbulent period of succession when, in 1382, Louis died without a direct male heir. One of the three daughters born of his marriage to Elisabeth Kotromanic of Bosnia, Mária (Mary), who was to marry Sigismund of Luxemburg, had an eventful destiny. In 1386, aged 11, she was crowned in Hungary. Despite fierce opposition, her mother governed in her stead with the support of the Garai clan. In 1385, Mary married her fiancé Sigismund (Zsigmond) but, meanwhile, one of the factions had called Charles the

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Younger of Naples to the throne. The latter, a distant cousin of Louis, was in turn deposed by another faction and assassinated after a reign of thirty-nine days. Mary was on the throne once again, but not for long. In 1386, Mary and her mother were made prisoners by one of the clans, barons from the south of the country. The queen mother, whose hands were tainted by Charles the Younger's assassination, was in turn strangled and her daughter kept prisoner in Dalmatia. The unfortunate young woman was freed one year later thanks to the intervention of the Venetian fleet, but by then, her husband Sigismund, second son of Charles IV of Luxemburg, German emperor and Czech king, legendary builder of Prague, had already occupied the Hungarian throne. Mary had to make do with the role of queen consort. Throughout these years, Sigismund's life was also filled with incident and reversals of fortune.

HALF A CENTURY UNDER SIGISMUND, KING AND EMPEROR

Everything in the life of this prince was complicated and controversial. He ruled Hungary for no less than half a century, from 1387 to 1437. He was to go down in history for his numerous princely titles, the many setbacks that punctuated his reign and also for being the executioner of Jan Huss, the heretic prelate condemned to the stake by Constance's council in 1415, despite having been assured safe conduct by the emperor himself. In spite of his connection to Jean XXIII, the anti-pope of Pisa, Sigismund played an important part in the work of the council which ended the great western schism and led to the retirement or deposition of three out of four popes, and the election of the remaining one, Martin V. But these events took place at the height of the emperor's power. For most of his career, he was more often than not an anti-hero. Deposed from the Hungarian throne, he was refused access to the Bohemian one, imprisoned by Hungarian barons and so deep in debt that he wagered everything from entire counties and towns down to the silverware from his own table. Furthermore, in order to accede to the Hungarian throne, Sigismund had to borrow the enormous sum of 565,263 gold florins from his family. He paid back this debt through a series of financial operations which eventually led to the sale-transfer of his Brandenburg margraviate to Frederick Hohenzollern. This act in recognition of services rendered by the latter, and which included the

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title of elector, was an important one as it was the beginning of the future Prussian power.

Sigismund was no more fortunate in his marriages. He loathed his first wife, Queen Mary, and his second, Borbála (Barbara) Cillei, who had a colossal fortune, had very little to do with him, leading her own life instead. And yet Sigismund was a good-looking man, did not lack talent and had a taste for ambitious projects.

Politically, Sigismund inherited a situation dominated by the oligarchy. The barons crushed by the Angevins had been replaced by a new aristocracy: the Lackfi, the Garai, the Cillei and others. These barons, internally divided, turned out to be as hard to please with regard to weak rulers like Mary and Sigismund as they had been submissive to the strong ones, Charles-Robert and Louis. Although Sigismund succeeded in being crowned in 1387, he soon found himself hostage to the oligarchies who had formed a league. Despite internal divisions, the latter had assumed all powers, including predominance in the Diet and tutelage over the sovereign.

This state of dependence was to last, with its ups and downs, for fifteen years. Heading the league, supported and kept by them, were two men: János Kanizsai, a cunning and cultured prelate who had qualified at Padua University, a bishop, who would subsequently become archbishop of Esztergom and chief chancellor, with, by his side, for a time at least, István Lackfi. Sigismund's unfortunate expedition against the Turks and his defeat in 1396 in the Battle of Nikápoly (Nicapolis) – of which more later – reignited the flames of insurrection. Ladislas of Naples and his party, supported by the Slavonian rebels, undertook once more to depose Sigismund. This time, Lackfi himself was at the head of the conspiracy, but the plot was foiled by the Garai–Kanizsai league. Lackfi, his nephew and supporters perished, leaving the victors, the Kanizsai clan, to pursue their goal which was none other than to subjugate the king. When, in 1401, Sigismund refused the league's demand to dismiss his foreign advisors, he was thrown into prison. For the first time in the history of the country, rebel barons did not content themselves with deposing the king, but went further and seized power – in the name of a symbol, the Holy Crown, a public legal entity, the impersonal sovereign of the kingdom. Kanizsai made himself chancellor of the Crown. The king was subsequently freed but, in 1402, the clan went further still and for the fifth time, they called upon the Angevin

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King of Naples. In 1403, however, the venture failed yet again. The tenacious Sigismund was not so easy to get rid of, despite the support his adversaries enjoyed from the Holy See.

The plot was thwarted by the barons who had remained faithful to Sigismund of Luxemburg, led by the Garai. Between 1404 and 1408, royal power was consolidated, despite the king's numerous absences abroad, during which the palatine Miklós Garai, son of the old palatine of the same name, exercised practically total power. He played a crucial role in all political events as well as in legislation drawn up from 1405 onwards. Among numerous innovations introduced during this period were the convocation of an assembly gathering together a hundred or so autonomous municipalities; confirmation of their jurisdiction; promulgation of peasants' freedom of movement; unification of taxation; strengthening of security and protection of persons. A number of economic measures favoured freedom of commerce. All this served the interests of the lower classes and contributed to redressing the economic situation. While not improving the financial affairs of the king, these innovations helped consolidate his political authority.

Until then, the oligarchy had been forever underlining the fragility of Sigismund's claims to sovereignty. After all, the latter had gained recognition and the crown only by virtue of his marriage to Queen Mary so his legitimacy, purely contractual, was based upon the agreements drawn up when he was elected in 1387. On several occasions, Sigismund had ostensibly broken his pledges and carried out cruel acts of revenge upon his opponents, to the extent that it was only the support of the Garai, the Cillei from Styria, the Stibor of Polish origin, the Maróti, the Kanizsai – until their disgrace – and a dozen other barons that kept him on a faltering throne. Nonetheless, after being freed from captivity, in 1403–4, thanks largely to Miklós Garai, Sigismund succeeded in shaking off the cumbersome tutelage of the league. From then on he governed as sovereign.

In addition, in 1408 Sigismund created his own league, entitled the Order of the Dragon, a kind of state council consisting of twenty-four members, all loyal barons. The Order of the Dragon was an instrument of power for Sigismund. Through patience and a sprinkling of opportunism, not to mention family connections, Zsigmond-Sigismund became a prestigious emperor and a Hungarian king of calibre. Known as the 'Czech swine' by his enemies in Hungary, he was detested by

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Czechs and Moravians and his reputation in Germany also left much to be desired. And yet, he ruled over five kingdoms. He remains the most important sovereign of his era.

Where the economic situation was concerned, circumstances were far from favourable; not that the king lacked financial acumen, but royal patrimony was definitely a thing of the past and was being superseded by a new order, based upon commercial production. His revenues were never enough. On the other hand, being unscrupulous in financial matters, he nearly always managed to come through. He sold, bought, resold, confiscated and redistributed the most unlikely things: an unprecedented number of towns, estates and strongholds were pawned and leased. On one occasion, returning from England laden with expensive gifts given to him by King Henry V and with the Order of the Garter, he sent Windecke, his man of business, to Bruges the moment he reached Calais, in order to pawn the lot. Nothing was ever kept in the royal treasury: jewellery, horses, *objets d'art* . . . Sigismund was always short of money and would either sell or pawn them. If there was money to be made, he would make it, selling amnesties to the guilty and the innocent victims they had robbed. Pipo Ozorai, his Florentine 'minister' of finance, governor of Temesvár and an efficient war chief, was a great help to him. At the same time, Queen Barbara, born a Cillei, had her fair share of business sense and strong family loyalties. Not only was her father, Hermann, the king's right hand man, but she managed to secure her family the title of prince of the empire and in 1414 succeeded in being crowned queen of Germany. Her ambitious and adventurous life earned her the nickname 'Loose Woman'; apart from a considerable collection of lovers, she also amassed a sizeable fortune with which she came to her husband's rescue in his moments of crisis, thus earning his forgiveness.

Among the many achievements historiography has attributed to Sigismund are: the professionalism of his administration, organised to the detriment of the barons, the instigation of levying soldiers and the creation of units called battalions. He encouraged trade and towns thrived under his rule. Meanwhile, however, new large fortunes were being accumulated and power was becoming concentrated into the hands of the future titled aristocracy, separate from the ordinary nobility.

Faced with the Ottoman threat, Sigismund enjoyed a reprieve thanks

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to Tamerlane (1370–1405), the legendary great emir who beat the Ottomans and captured Sultan Bayezid. The pace of Turkish advance slowed down as a result, leaving Sigismund to pursue his grand German and imperial policy, without having to worry too much about the Hungarian borders. He spent long periods of time abroad, in various European countries, leaving Hungary in the hands of Garai, Eberhard and other lords of the Order of the Dragon, which continued to expand since Sigismund began to recruit knights from the middle and lower nobility. The latter therefore owed him their promotion, upheld his authority and, like the lords, carried the title of 'magnificus', more or less equivalent to 'his excellency'.

A not very glorious war leader

The majority of Sigismund's military endeavours took place in the outer reaches of Hungary. While many were unnecessary and unprofitable and carried out solely in pursuit of glory, equally frequent were exploits that were necessary but brought no glory. Whether in Croatia, Dalmatia, the Balkans or against the Hussites, the number of battles lost far outweighed the victories. Descriptions of Sigismund as an incompetent and cowardly war leader, a ferocious beast and a clown are probably exaggerated. Even a figure more stable than this gifted if lightweight man would have attracted a few pejorative adjectives during the course of a fifty-year-long reign over five kingdoms. The same can be said for his defeats in the face of such formidable enemies: the Hussites driven by faith and fanaticism; Venice, queen of the seas; and the unpredictable, seemingly inexhaustible, Ottoman power.

Venice, as ever, continued to dispute Dalmatia. After several attempts at resistance, Hungary finally gave it up, this time for good and similarly its sovereignty over Bosnia. Elsewhere, Sigismund met Hussite attacks from Bohemia. The spiritual heirs of those that Sigismund left to burn on Constance's stakes were in no way beaten. The Hussite movement set the region ablaze.

It is difficult to ascertain Sigismund's feelings towards the Hussites. Unlike Louis d'Anjou, Sigismund was not especially attached to his role as Christian sovereign. His fight against the Hussites had a political and military motivation rather than a spiritual one. For years he fought against Jan Žižka (d.1424) and Prokop's 'Taborite' Hussites.

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This energetic movement, originating in the country's 'backwaters', found in Žižka a war leader of genius (he invented light armoured wagons, precursors of tanks), and did not give up easily. The end of the Hussite wars in 1434 came about not through any military defeat but because of internal conflicts between two camps, the radical Taborites and the more moderate Hussites of the 'chalice'.

The Turks in the Balkans

The Ottomans continued to advance in the Balkans. Sigismund, determined to stop them, retaliated. In 1396 at Nikápoly (Nicapolis, Bulgaria), at the head of an army consisting among others of French knights led by Fearless John, heir of Burgundy, Sigismund confronted the Turks. As has already been said, catastrophe ensued and was not to be the last either. Sigismund had other conflicts to contend with elsewhere and, in addition, the military organisation of the Ottoman Empire was far more efficient than that of European armies. The king did win a few battles; Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade) was saved provisionally, as was Jajce in Bosnia, though not for long. Then, in 1428, Sigismund was again defeated, this time seriously, at Galambóc (Golubac, Serbia), thus putting a definitive end to Hungary's hegemony in the Balkans.

THE RISE OF THE OTTOMAN THREAT

Once more, the country entered a period of turmoil, punctuated by struggles for the throne and social conflict. Problems had already begun during Sigismund's lifetime, with a peasant insurrection in Transylvania under the leadership of the nobleman Antal Budai Nagy. The rebels obtained a few short-lived concessions. After the death of the 'Czech swine', the noble order took over and was only willing to elect Albert of Habsburg, the first of his successors, on condition that the reforms be annulled.

Between 1437, the year of Sigismund's death, and 1457 three kings ruled the country. Albert Habsburg, prince of Austria and husband of Sigismund's daughter, bore the crown for less than three years. At his death, Ulászló I (Vladislas), a Jagiellon, became king (1440–4) but Albert's posthumous son, László, crowned before he was weaned, also

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carried the royal title and had the support of the Garai and Cillei as well as of Jan Jiskra, a new and important figure, a Czech *condottiere* of sorts who controlled all of Upper Hungary – currently Slovakia – and parts of Czech and Moravian lands.

Thus, partisans of the Polish alliance did not wait for the birth of the king's heir. Instead, they put the sixteen-year-old king of Poland, Ulászló–Vladislas Jagiellon, on the throne. From 1440, therefore, Hungary had two kings: Vladislas, the Jagiellon, until his premature death in 1444 and the Habsburg, Ladislas–László, until 1457. Yet another fight for succession between opposing clans followed. Though the Habsburgs and the king's mother continued to fight for their cause, the Habsburg infant's chances were slighter than the Jagiellon's. Vladislas was older and, according to his contemporaries, had a bright future. Moreover, he was elected by the nobility, for whom an elected royalty was important. The nobility's right to freely elect a 'competent' sovereign, in other words a king to their liking, was connected to an evolving concept of public ownership, known as the doctrine of the Holy Crown. It posited the country as belonging to the nation, embodied by the nobility and represented by the Crown as symbol rather than physical object. The king exercised his powers purely through the latter. Both mystical and legal, the doctrine stipulated the representational nature of royal power and placed the source of sovereignty within the body of the nation's nobility.

Its *raison d'être* is not hard to guess. Most barons and nobles understood that the fight against the Ottoman threat was a priority and were looking for a sovereign who could rise to the challenge. The young Jagiellon did not disappoint them. Accompanied by János Hunyadi, his most famous general, he went on to conduct numerous campaigns.

Hunyadi's career as war leader spanned three reigns: those of Sigismund, Vladislas Jagiellon and Ladislas–László of Habsburg. Hunyadi was one of a number of leaders in the middle of the fifteenth century who was of humble birth. His family came from Wallachia, probably of Romanian or Slav descent, had settled in Transylvania and put down roots there. The first known document, dated 1409, witnesses the giving of Hunyad castle (Hunedoara in Romania) to Vajk, János Hunyadi's father. Another document, dated 1434, already refers to 'Vajk, beacon of Hunyad' and to his son 'János the Wallachian'. As an aside: the document was a recognition of a loan of 1,200 gold florins

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that the aforementioned János had made to the king, short of cash as usual, and who had put up a rather handsome property as security. Other loans were made to the king and thus further properties passed through the hands of the Hunyadis, whose fortune grew steadily.

János Hunyadi, born around 1407, became a valiant soldier under Sigismund. He accompanied him to Italy and then Bohemia, participated in the Czech wars and led the campaign against the Turks. By the time of Sigismund's death in 1437, he was not just an unknown noble from Wallachia, but neither was he in the oligarchy of large and extremely rich families. Though he occupied a high military rank under Sigismund, his rise to the top of the state took place afterwards, during the reign of Vladislas Jagiellon and then under the rule of Ladislas of Habsburg, the child king.

Hunyadi's professional qualities as statesman and military leader, along with his personal attributes, played a determining role in his career. His wealth was also a contributing factor: Hunyadi became the richest property-owner in Hungary. He owned close to 2.3 million hectares of land, 28 fortresses, 57 towns and 1,000 villages, according to the historian Bálint Hóman, although recent research has reduced these figures – 22 fortresses rather than 28, for example. Even these more modest estimates indicate a sizeable fortune. In addition, Hunyadi could count on the support of numerous lords faithful to his cause and an incalculable number of friends among the ordinary noble ranks. The lands owned by Hunyadi and his allies are said to have represented half of the national patrimony, well in excess of royal property.

His multiple roles conferred upon him exceptional powers. Head of a single banate to begin with, Hunyadi was named voïvode of Transylvania in 1441 and then acceded to the role of governor between 1446 and 1452, while László–Ladislas V was still under age. He gave up this title when the king came of age and was named captain general and captain of Nándorfehérvár and then count of Temes. Each of these titles instantly placed him among the 'baron ministers', called the 'true barons', then the 'banneret lords' – and he was in possession of at least half a dozen of them.

Hungarian patriotic historiography has perhaps a tendency to overemphasise his virtues, but it is true that Hunyadi was not known to have committed any acts of cruelty or to have been involved in any scandals. His courage as a soldier was legendary and he was undoubtedly guided

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as much by his vision of himself as servant of the state as he was by personal interest – no small claim.

Hunyadi's leadership qualities took on historic dimensions in the wars against the Ottoman Empire, in Hungary's and indeed Europe's buttress, the Balkans. Hunyadi had already fought a number of battles in the 1440s against the Sultan Murad. However, for a number of reasons, it is his 'long campaign' of 1442–4 that is best known. The king – still Vladislas Jagiellon at this point – and Hunyadi won several battles, enough to reignite the hope of driving back the Turks. Even the future Pope Pius II, the very pessimistic Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, expressed his confidence in success. But although his confidence was justified, the adverse winter conditions – and the mountains – proved too challenging in the end. The army turned around and went back to Belgrade, its departure point. It was not the victory they had hoped for. They would have to start out again.

Nevertheless, the Turks were busy suppressing the revolt of the Karaman emirate in Asia Minor and so, following the 1442–4 defeats, Murad was keen to make peace in the Balkans and with Hungary. The young Jagiellon king began by accepting and signing the agreement. But in the summer of 1444, he changed his mind, went back on his word and set out for war and towards his death. Going back on one's word given to an infidel was not considered a betrayal. In addition, Cardinal Julian Cesarini, the pope's legatee, had assured the king of the papal navy's support and that of several powers.

Apart from the risk involved in any battle, there was also the Balkan countries' reluctance to exchange a relatively secure peace for an uncertain war which, in the case of defeat, could lead to the loss of the rest of their territory. For Georges Brankovic, Serbia's despot since 1427, it was a persuasive argument. The events that followed proved that his fears were well founded. The Christian fleet was too weak to block the straits from the Ottoman armies. In addition, Genoa's galleons were in the service of the sultan while Brankovic's Serbia abstained. Murad had united an army superior to the Christian forces and fate played against the latter: on 10 November 1444 at Varna, the impetuous young king launched a premature attack against the janissary and was killed. The battle became an exodus.

Hunyadi's role in the venture is unclear, but his authority suffered little from the defeat. Upon his return to Hungary, on the other hand,

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he was faced with the conflicts, intrigues and disorders that characterised difficult periods of succession. The division between those loyal to the child Ladislas V and to Vladislas Jagiellon lost political fuel after the death of the latter, but underlying private interests remained. Each clan wanted to take advantage of the power vacuum. Though Hunyadi, until then a 'Jagiellonian', chose Ladislas V – a choice dictated by common sense – he had to keep an eye on the manoeuvres of the Cillei–Garai clan and the machinations of Emperor Frederick III, the child's tutor. In the end, Ladislas did not become king until 1452, eight years after the Jagiellon's death.

Despite the intrigues of some great lords, it would be unfair to shower the ruling class with the usual accusations of selfishness and petty quarrels. Many of the great barons supported Hunyadi in his efforts to consolidate the internal situation and to concentrate the country's resources against the Turkish invasion. The same spirit dominated the increasingly frequent meetings of the Diet, which, with the added participation of town delegates, came to resemble states general. These assemblies demanded their part in state legislation and government as a counterbalance to the prerogative of the king and the Council of barons. The reservations put forward by the historian Zsuzsa Teke are undoubtedly true: the great lords' noble 'friends' represented their own interests and the townsmen, those of their respective towns, though the latter did not carry much weight in these deliberations. Nonetheless, during these years of a vacant throne, the Diets did their best to re-establish order, stability and military power in the kingdom and to reorganise the judiciary system in favour of the nobility and urban dwellers.

This same spirit of order and equity presided over the nomination of six, then seven, captains entrusted with interim government and the election in 1446 of Hunyadi as governor. Hunyadi's prerogatives remained inferior to those of a 'lord protector', but the eastern part of the kingdom remained his and, through his wealth and authority, he put the country back on its feet so that preparations for a new war on the Turkish front could begin. He was also able to secure the nomination of his candidate, János Vitéz, to the bishopric of Várad. Future archbishop of Esztergom and chancellor, János Vitéz was a precocious Renaissance man, a refined scholar typical of the 'urban class' of his time.

Hunyadi found a faithful and invaluable ally in the famous Albanian

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hero George Castriota, called Skanderbeg (1405–68) and, with encouragement from the Holy See and European promises, chances for another campaign against the Ottoman Empire seemed promising. In 1448, Hunyadi decided to go into battle against Murad II. The latter forced him into a confrontation at Kosovo, where, in 1389, the Serbian kingdom had been annihilated by Murad I. Kosovo, the Field of Blackbirds, was to be once more fatal to the Christian armies. Skanderbeg was unable to reach his ally. Hunyadi was beaten and imprisoned by the Serbian despot, Georges Brankovic, who proceeded to demand a 100,000-florin ransom, the restitution of his confiscated lands in Hungary and finally the engagement of the governor's eldest son and his daughter.

Hunyadi had to deal with another formidable man, Jan Jiskra, one of the seven captains and a real 'warlord' in the north-east. He also managed to get rid of Vlad Dracula, the unmanageable Wallachian voïvode, and to get on with the fickle Serbian despot and with the Bosnian king. These diplomatic successes helped create conditions conducive to another military campaign. Meanwhile, Pope Nicholas V announced a crusade.

The fall of Constantinople on 29 May 1453 undoubtedly contributed to spiritual mobilisation, though less so to the loosening of the purse strings. It incited the pope to declare the Crusade, but his promise of 20,000 men on the warpath was to be a nuisance to his successor, the Borgia Calixtus III (1455–8). As for Charles VII, king of France, he was more concerned with the battle he was fighting against the English at Castillon, which was to put an end to the Hundred Years' War, than with the fall of Constantinople. The Diet of the German Empire was certainly moved and promised to supply 10,000 horsemen and 32,000 foot soldiers, but time passed: the Crusade was put off until the summer of 1456. This delay proved useful as it gave the pope time to harangue Christian forces more energetically and to mobilise the Franciscans into inflaming the crowds. A young under-age monk, the fervent John Capestrano, would arouse enthusiasm for the Crusades but that was some time later. Preparations continued apace both in the Italian states and in the faraway duchy of Burgundy, where Philip the Good was getting ready to participate in the war, as were Serbia and other neighbouring countries.

To return to the preparations being made in Hungary, both initiator

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of and decisive factor in the campaign. The 1454 Diet had ratified the law reorganising the military system, which had become outdated and was falling apart. Hunyadi had to create a united and efficient military structure out of these assorted troops, scattered between the battalions of the barons, bishops, comitats and local ethnic groups. Among others, he recruited a fair number of mercenaries, especially from the old Taborites, and borrowed both their mobile tactics and their famous assault 'proto-tanks'. His other main concern was the financing of an army of 100,000 men. Four times the king of Hungary's annual revenue, 1,140,000 gold florins, were needed at once. So as an exception, the Diet voted for extremely heavy war taxes.

While not all promises were kept, Hunyadi's army nonetheless constituted a formidable force. Allied troops made it to the rendezvous and the fleet, though late, sailed up the Danube. At midday – as every day since – the bells rang out, reminding each Christian of his duty to fight the 'infidel'. For once, despite everything, Europe was ready to fight.

In July 1456, war was in full swing. Sultan Mohamed II carried out the siege of Nándorfehérvár with an army estimated at 150,000 men, 300 canons and 200 ships on the Danube. The fortress was defended by Mihály Szilágyi (Hunyadi's brother-in-law) along with 7,000 soldiers. The great captain himself arrived under the walls to rescue the besieged town with 40–45,000 men and the crusaders of Capestrano–Kapisztrán, the Franciscan. The latter were peasants but among them were also 600 students from Vienna. Though the balance of power is probably impossible to quantify exactly, due to the usual exaggerations of the day, the Turkish forces are more than likely to have been superior, both in terms of numbers and technical quality of their artillery. And yet they lost this huge battle. The pope, the emperor, Venice, the whole of Europe joined together to honour the victors, who were keen to pursue the campaign as far as Constantinople. But the two heroes, the architects of victory, Hunyadi and Capestrano, died one after the other, probably taken by an epidemic. Constantinople–Istanbul remained Turkish. The defeat may have left a deep impression upon the Ottoman Empire but its expansion continued regardless. The invasion of Hungary was nonetheless postponed for another seventy years.

With János Hunyadi gone, Hungary, now leaderless and governed by a young unstable king who was to die a year later, faced fresh trials. It was to be a year ravaged by disastrous events. László, Hunyadi's ambitious

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son, had Ulrik Cillei, their old enemy, assassinated . One year later, by a reversal of fortune, he was in turn captured along with his brother by the opposing party and held in Buda. Ladislas V condemned and beheaded László, taking Mátyás with him to Prague. Hunyadi's party nonetheless continued to enjoy enormous popularity. After the execution of László, a rebellion broke out led by János Hunyadi's widow and his brother-in-law Mihály Szilágyi. What was at stake now for the young Mátyás Hunyadi was St Stephen's Crown.

MATTHIAS REX (1458–1490)

In 1458, after a dozen Premyslids, Angevins and other Jagiellons, Mátyás became, as Matthias, the first national king since the extinction of the House of Árpád in 1301; a Hungarian king elected according to the wishes of the nobility. Matthias was seventeen or eighteen years old. He was still detained in Prague by order of Ladislas V, who had just died, at the house of the governor Georg Poděbrady, his future father-in-law. In the eyes of the oligarchy in power, Matthias seemed the ideal ruler – under Poděbrady's tutelage. Everything was arranged between Poděbrady, János Hunyadi's widow, the magnates and the nobles led by old Szilágyi, uncle of the future king. It is estimated that around 40,000 nobles gathered in Buda to elect Matthias. And while the high council was deliberating in his favour, he was already being proclaimed the new king by the crowds gathered outside on the ice of the frozen Danube.

Upon his return from Prague, Matthias was immediately put on the throne without being crowned, as the crown was still in the hands of the Emperor Frederick, eternal pretender to the throne. But the hour of the Habsburgs had not yet arrived. In his inaugural oath, Matthias promised to satisfy everyone: barons, prelates, nobles and even town-dwellers. The Diet named Szilágyi as governor; Garai kept his rank of palatine. There were no upheavals and everyone felt vindicated. But, as elsewhere in Europe at the close of the Middle Ages, equilibrium between royalty and oligarchy depended not so much on the laws voted in at the diets or the promises solemnly proclaimed by the king, but on the ratio of power. One of the factors in the equation resided in the personality of the sovereign who, in this case, was called upon to play a dominant role throughout his thirty-two-year reign.

Intelligent, cultivated, energetic and willing, Matthias was certainly

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well equipped to achieve his ambitions. Apart from his determination to impose his royal authority, he had a broad vision and an appetite for conquest – Bohemia, Austria and even the imperial crown figured on his horizon.

'And why not?', the historian Gyula Szekfü writes in this regard. While admitting that such a choice of direction relegated war against the Ottoman Empire to second place, Szekfü considers it in keeping with the situation and Matthias's personality. The king may well have reasoned that Hungary alone had no hope of success, while a king wearing several crowns opened up possibilities. Did Matthias really adopt this line of thinking? It is difficult to answer, since interpretations by various court biographers on generous stipends, like Antonio Bonfini or Marzio Galeotto, tended to mingle facts with anecdotes and stories. It is also pointless to judge the policies of all the kings of Hungary solely in relation to the Ottoman threat. The danger was certainly there, but invasion seemed no more imminent than a hundred years previously.

Why should Matthias not have pursued his ambitions? Apart from his personal qualities, he was after all sovereign of the largest kingdom in Europe, alongside Louis XI's France, Charles de Téméraire's Burgundy, the Habsburg emperor without an empire and the Jagiellons' Poland–Lithuania. Most importantly, was he not made of the stuff of a great Renaissance prince, educated from a tender age by humanist tutors?

But to return to the seventeen-year-old Matthias. Having delivered his sermon in Buda's Notre-Dame Church, which would thereafter carry his name, his first concern was to get rid of his cumbersome tutors, with the exception of his mother. He instantly decided to marry Catherine, the daughter of Poděbrady, rather than the daughter of one of his brother's murderers, the palatine Garai, soon dismissed from his functions along with other barons from his clan. He even discharged his own uncle Szilágyi, who, rebuffed, joined the Garai–Ujlaki clan's plot. These twenty or so barons had elected Emperor Frederick as king but their conspiracy failed when Matthias sent thirty-six barons and twelve prelates to overpower them.

Matthias's other major asset was his own roots in the country. The Hunyadis were solidly entrenched on both sides of the 'political class': the barons and the simple nobility. János Hunyadi's extensive properties and high titles placed his son within the aristocracy but his modest

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Plate 11. Effigy of King Matthias Hunyadi on tiled stove

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origins and his political outlook were those of the lower nobility. The bulk of the clergy was also behind him. Thus, on top of being a Hungarian king, he enjoyed a solid social base. So much so that from the early years of his reign he was able to assert himself within the country and establish amicable relationships abroad. The emperor returned the Crown along with a few occupied towns – although he asked for 80,000 florins in exchange. Jiskra, Czech captain of the mercenaries, submitted to his authority – for 40,000 florins and an annual allowance. Finally, his marriage to Catherine Poděbrady normalised his relationship with Bohemia, though not for long.

Towards 1464–5, Hungarian policy in the Balkans took a number of different turns, whether voluntary or due to circumstances. In 1463, an Ottoman army attacked Bosnia, took Jajce and beheaded Prince Tomasevic, thus opening up the route to Croatia, Friule and the region of Venice. Aided by Pope Pius II Piccolomini – poet, historian and energetic defender of the Christian faith – Matthias rushed to Belgrade, seized Bosnia and pushed back the Turks. Soon after, under the aegis of the pope, a grand alliance was formed comprising the empire, Venice, Philip the Good's Burgundy and Hungary. The Crusade was to be led by Pius II himself – but it never took place. In 1464, the pope died at Ancona. Hungary, now alone, would not go into battle again during Matthias's lifetime. Its fortified frontiers seemed secure, especially since the Turks were now directing their expansionist energies towards Asia Minor and the Crimea.

The other political turnabout occurred with regard to Bohemia. In 1465, Queen Catherine died. The king had already been planning to oust her father, Georg Poděbrady, who had been crowned in Prague but who had since fallen foul of the Holy See for being a 'Hussite' heretic. The anti-Poděbrady campaign had not begun yet. In the meantime, Matthias, supporting the veteran leader of the Hussite war, Jiskra, attacked the 'Hussite Brothers' of Upper Hungary. The Brothers were defeated and 150 of them ended up on the gallows. The king profited further from this 'pacification' exercise: following his father's example, he took into his service his old enemies. These mercenaries became the nub of the Hungarian army, the future 'black army'. With its 20,000 men, including a powerful cavalry, it became the most efficient military force of its time.

The Bohemian throne was occupied by Georg Poděbrady, Matthias's

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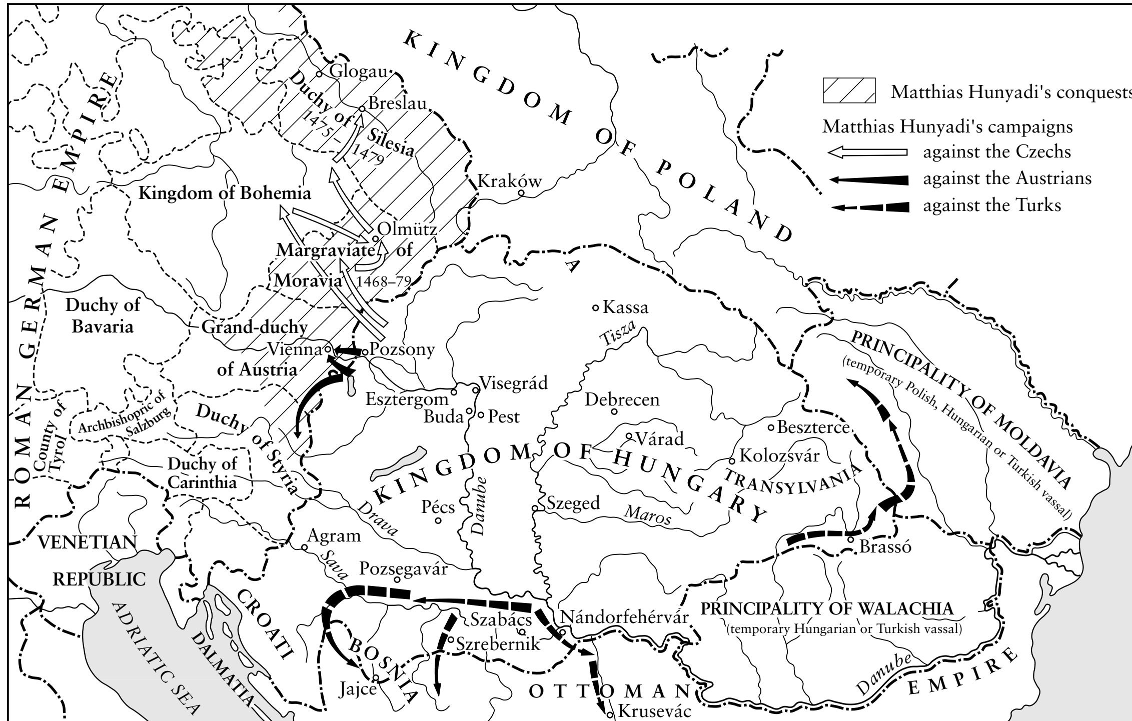

Map 4. Hungary at the time of King Matthias Hunyadi

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jailor, rival, enemy then father-in-law and ally in turn. A number of similarities have been drawn between the two men. The Czech historian, Josef Macek, talks of a 'national monarchy' with regard to Poděbrady's reign – just as Hungarian historians describe that of Matthias. Under both these kings, political, economic and cultural life began to flourish. The Bohemian 'spring' would continue after the deaths of both Poděbrady in 1471 and the other principal artisan of the reforms, Jan Rokycana, archbishop of Prague (who died just before him). As for the Hungarian renaissance, it would be crushed twenty years later.

In some respects, then, the two neighbouring 'national monarchies' (the label should not be treated as historically accurate) did present certain similarities and matured at the same time, although unlike Hungary, Bohemia belonged to the Holy Roman Empire and its burghers played a more important role. A difference which was to have more serious consequences was that while in Hungary religious minorities were of little consequence against an all-pervasive Roman Catholic Church, Bohemia–Moravia–Silesia–Lusatia were, since Jan Huss (burned in 1415) in the grip of internal and external religious wars. Poděbrady, together with Rokycana, other bishops and lords, skilfully succeeded in ending the conflicts between moderate Hussites and Caliztains-Utraquistes on the one hand and the radical old Taborites on the other. Reconciliation with Catholics faithful to the mother church of Rome – a majority in Silesia and considerable in other provinces too – proved more difficult. In particular, the Utraquist compromise (consisting in communion being offered in both), did nothing to appease Rome.

Thus, in attacking his father-in-law Poděbrady and then his successor Vladislas, the king of Hungary had the support of Rome as well as that of the Bohemian and Silesian Catholics. Ironically, he also had to rely on the loyalty of his army, which consisted almost entirely of mercenary Hussites. He eventually conquered Moravia, Silesia and Lusatia and was crowned king of Bohemia, leaving Vladislas Czech Bohemia's lands and Crown. Thus, two Czech kings shared the kingdom's territory.

Czech and Austrian wars were to occupy Matthias for two decades and at regular intervals, punctuated by a few moments of crisis. During the 1470s, he was faced with a powerful coalition put together by Emperor Frederick and led onto the battlefield by Kasimir and

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Vladislas, Jagiellon father and son. Though the Polish army was far superior in numbers, it was bitterly defeated at Breslau. Matthias's 'black army', composed of disciplined mercenaries well versed in military art, proved its superiority over the disparate noble battalions.

The Treaty of Olomuc of 1479 sanctioned the Breslau victory and enabled Matthias to intensify his struggle for the possession of Austria. This other interminable war was unique in that Austria did not in fact exist. At the time, it consisted of a conglomeration of provinces (Tyrol, Styria, Lower Austria and others) ruled by Habsburg princes under the high authority of Emperor Frederick. It was only under Frederick's son, Maximilian, that the House of Austria formed a united state. In addition, Austrian territory was riddled with independent fiefdoms and bishoprics. The war consequently moved from one castle to another and consisted of a series of sieges, battles and voluntary surrenders. In 1485, Matthias seized Vienna. With its 25,000 inhabitants, the town was nothing like the Vienna of the *grande époque*. The emperor let it go. Matthias was left master of the house in Lower Austria and there his conquests ended. He died in Vienna in 1490 without having completed his mission.

In the meantime, he had to fight against Turkish incursions and against Venice, eating away at Hungarian positions in Dalmatia. But Matthias was above all a diplomat and he deployed all his talent and diplomatic wiles. For example, he managed to neutralise the Swiss with the aid of allowances paid to a few mayors and other 'landammans'. Those of Zurich and Lucerne went as far as to demand what was due to them from Matthias's successor.

Hungarian diplomats were no longer great lords or prelates. From Matthias's time, they came from among scholars, of modest backgrounds. Literary men or lawyers, mainly trained at Italian universities, they formed the first, dare one say, professional diplomatic corps. The most important transactions were conducted by the king himself, in particular those with the emperor, his great adversary, and Maximilian, his son. In 1476, Matthias married for a second time. His bride-to-be, Beatrice, daughter of Ferdinand of Aragon, king of Naples, was received with grand pomp along with her retinue, firstly at the d'Este palace in Ferrara, then at Matthias's splendid court. According to the chronicler Hans Seybolt, Beatrice was 'swept off her feet' by her ardent

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33-year-old husband straight after the wedding celebrations and their relationship remained intimate long afterwards.

As was customary, the queen had her own court and retinue, received vast properties and had great influence over the king. Through her efforts, her seven-year-old nephew, Hyppolite d'Este, was appointed to the Esztergom bishopric. For Matthias, the marriage fuelled his designs on Italy, Milan especially, behind Venice. The repercussions of Beatrice's arrival in Hungary, however, were cultural rather than political.

It is difficult and in a sense pointless to try and draw up a balance of Matthias's foreign policy. One historian refers to wars and to 'inextricable' diplomacy and analyses his actions, adopting a rather vague 'psychological' approach reserved for 'great men'. According to him, Matthias was a great Renaissance man, the greatest, even, of his time, his qualities a more satisfactory way of explaining his rationale than an appraisal of his deeds or their long-term legacy. In short, he is a monument. Viewed from this height, the goal of the sovereign's policies was to fulfil his desire for glory, as was the case with so many other princes of his time. But if this grandeur, steeped in the Renaissance, had no other goal than that of royal glory, could the king still be said to rule a 'national monarchy'? It would be fairly reasonable to assume not. If one compares Matthias Rex with the French model of the time (Louis XI was king between 1461 and 1483), the argument falters. Comparing him to the Habsburg power does not seem very pertinent either. The Hunyadis' House of Hungary was too flawed for them to have got the better of the House of Austria. European concepts and actions attributed to Matthias can only be defended at a regional level and perhaps Hungary's failure to become a major power derives from its weakness on the Balkan fronts.

But in order to appreciate this undoubtedly brilliant monarch, it is probably better to evaluate his domestic policy. The historian cited above has described him as brilliant and intelligent, 'Machiavellian before Machiavelli'. The author *of The Prince* wrote his works after Matthias's death, but the latter had as inspiration Lorenzo the Magnificent, Sforza or other princes, who were also Machiavellian before the term was coined. He achieved this without the need to employ hitmen or poisoners. In addition to the art of trickery, pretence and diplomatic doublespeak, his mind had been trained by masters of

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humanist thought, many having found their way to his court, as well as by lawyers and scholars, capable of reforming the state machinery.

As we have seen, the first stage of the reform aimed at manipulating the powers of opposition, as befitted any sovereign wishing to keep hold of the reins of power. Matthias also filled command posts in the banates, bishoprics, army and counties with new men. He nominated ecclesiastics loyal to him, thus depriving the Holy See of this right. Among the first were the learned János Vitéz and his poet nephew, Janus Pannonius. But the real innovation introduced by Matthias was, relatively speaking, the professionalisation of diplomacy and administration. Archbishop Vitéz was nominated chief chancellor, until his disgrace in 1472 when the mentor, dissatisfied with his pupil's Czech policy, became involved in a conspiracy. Having put down the rebellion, Matthias did not hesitate to throw him into prison. Professionalisation also extended to the less prestigious offices of the administration. Chancellery secretaries and competent graduates took over affairs of state from the barons and prelates. The number of people gravitating around the king has been estimated at three to four hundred. Tamás (Thomas) Bakócz, of modest background, is often cited as an example of these new careerists. Initially personal secretary to the king, he was appointed archbishop then cardinal and even rose to be Leo II de Medici's rival for the pontifical crown.

The territorial government also underwent restructuring. The 'comitats' (states general) were transformed into administrative units headed by county chiefs, prefects of a kind, chosen for the most part from among the captains of castles (*comes castri*). Many of them had been nominated for life with the title of count, a title which was now hereditary. The result of these changes was that seigniorial power no longer went hand in hand with administrative powers and serving the state became independent of the wealthy barons.

These reforms and their effects on society should nonetheless be put into perspective. As with all his predecessors since the end of the patrimonial kingdom, Matthias tried everything to rein in the magnates and yet at the same time he could not do without them. Despite the king's large family fortune, at least half the national patrimony was in the hands of the great barons. True, these calculations are based solely on the castles and their adjacent properties, manors of sorts, but then all the power and wealth were concentrated precisely in these 360 or so

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Plate 12. Buda at the time of King Matthias Hunyadi. Wood engraving. Hartmann Schedel's Chronicle, 1493

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castles. By the time of Matthias's death in 1490, the king, queen and the heir-apparent owned far less than under Sigismund, despite the latter's reputation for being weak and 'destitute'. Indeed, 67 castles belonged to them, fewer than 20 per cent. The distribution of towns was more favourable to the king. Along with the queen and Prince János Corvin, he was lord of 68 out of the 138 important towns and market towns, the equivalent of close to 50 per cent, against the 30 per cent owned by the barons, 17 per cent by the Church and 3 per cent by foreigners.

'Matthias the Just'

It is not known when 'Matthias the Just' entered into popular legend. According to Gáspár Heltai, a Protestant chronicler writing about him in 1577, he was cursed during his lifetime but 'as soon as he was dead, everybody down there started to praise him, to the extent of saying that if he could only live again', they would be willing to pay taxes seven times a year. During Matthias's reign, the country enjoyed a security it had never known before and has never known since. His reforms, coupled with the stamping out of private violence of the strong against the weak, put an end to the arbitrariness and insecurity that had dominated until then and to the practice of 'dispossession' carried out to the detriment of a neighbour or a defenceless relative. 'Dispossession' was in actual fact a form of banditry, the only difference being that it could be practised under 'legal' pretexts, as for example in contesting an inheritance. Under Matthias, a better-structured legal system was put in place through the establishment of tribunals of the states general at the local level. At a higher level, an appeal court, the Royal Table, and a cassation court, the Curie, were created. These high courts were placed under a magistrate, a 'procurator' and deliberations carried out with permanent judges and legally trained clerks. Finally, individual towns gained in legal autonomy, retaining flexibility according to different judicial systems, for example, the German one.

The state was far from being a constitutional monarchy but at least its institutions were more organised. Could it be this effort to favour the protection of the individual that earned the king the name 'Matthias the Just' which was to go down in the annals of history? Or was it a desire to honour a sovereign who had granted justice to the poor and the humble? Then again, perhaps exalting the last 'national king' was a

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posthumous expression of a nostalgia for better times. Opinions diverge. Some historians – and popular legend – portray Matthias as a kind of Harun Al-Rachid from *A Thousand and One Nights*, wandering around the hamlets in disguise, protecting widows and orphans. Others see him as an implacable prince, oppressing his subjects whether they be peasants, town-dwellers, Jews or other *misera plebs contribuens*.

What is certain is that Matthias's revenues were high, but he always needed more to finance his wars and sustain his sumptuous court. Estimates vary between 600,000 and 900,000 florins, in other words, nearly a million a year. This is a considerable sum but undoubtedly less than the French and English kings' revenues. Louis XI had a revenue of 5 million pounds. Matthias imposed 'exceptional-subsidiary' taxes, thus adding to the burden shouldered by the Hungarian population. Some say that this additional tax brought overall taxes to six times those paid out under Sigismund, but this seems an unlikely claim.

A little more is known about the general conditions of the peasantry. The majority of labourers still enjoyed the liberties they had either inherited from their status as free men or had acquired in the previous century. They were the *jobbágy*, in the ancient meaning of the term. The proportion of bonded serfs (the *inquilini*) was smaller than before, in some places barely 10 per cent of labourers. The standard of living was reputedly decent or sufficient, according to written sources, however no other details or comparisons are given. On the other hand, evidence of a political commitment to protecting peasants from abuse is clear: numerous judgements were passed in favour of 'fugitives' or peasants forcibly bonded to the land.

Matthias and the Hungarian Renaissance

Today the art lover finds neither fine churches nor sumptuous castles of the Renaissance style in Hungary. The vestiges of splendour at Visegrád Castle, the great halls of Gothic buildings or the frescoes, ceramics and ornaments are all the more impressive. Renaissance humanism and art had already entered Hungary before Matthias and then during his childhood, notably at Várad (Nagyvárad, or Oradea, its Romanian name), the bishopric of János Vitéz. The king followed an existing tradition which was then given new life by his marriage to Beatrice of

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Aragon. The royal courts, both at Buda and Visegrád, attracted scholars, historians and celebrated artists, such as Antonio Bonfini and Marzio Galeotto, even if severe judgement could deem them to be 'second order'. The neo-platonic school of Florence also entered the court through the work of the brilliant Marsilius Ficinus. The king was probably quite partial to provocative minds, having little truck himself with pieties, and was doubtless receptive to the irreverence and licentiousness of the sophisticated scholars at his court. Combining the splendour of Italian style with contemporary wit, Matthias's court was unquestionably among the most brilliant in Europe. All the arts were practised and the great writers of antiquity and the contemporary era were read. A Hungarian bishop waiting in the antechamber would be busy reading Cicero while in the workshops other texts from antiquity, destined for the royal library, were being worked on.

The Bibliotheca Corviniana was certainly Renaissance Hungary's prize jewel. The name derives from the latinised version of the king's name. In effect, Matthias Rex, son of János Hunyadi from Walachia, had graciously agreed to the fabrication of a mythical genealogy according to which he descended from the Roman Valerius Corvinus, who himself in turn was born of the seed of Jupiter. This artificial grandiosity perhaps encouraged the king to give himself more fully to his passion for patronage and particularly to his library. Numerous copyists and miniaturists worked for him in Italy and Hungary. In Buda alone, around thirty men were involved in the production of the Corviniana in the scriptoria of the palace. The library contained close to 2,500 manuscript volumes, artistic masterpieces. There were not many incunabula, despite a printing house already functioning in Buda (belonging to András Hess) which produced, among others, the first printed Hungarian chronicle, *Chronica Hungarorum*, in 1473.

In the town of Pozsony the humanist prelate Vitéz founded a university, the Academia Istropolitana, which did not last much beyond his lifetime. His nephew János Csezmicei, the celebrated humanist called Janus Pannonius, on the other hand, was to enjoy eternal glory. He was and remains one of the greatest neo-Latin poets. Hungarian culture at the time was essentially Latin. Nearly a century would pass before the emergence of a literature in the Hungarian language.

For some, the Hungarian Renaissance was a bright star and Matthias, its truly Renaissance king. For others, this Corvinian culture

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was a mere 'greenhouse plant' and a 'chancery humanism' – artificial, limited to the court and with no long-term prospects. These judgements are both true and false. During the five centuries that preceded Matthias, Hungarian culture had created artistic treasures and adopted others. But its heritage could not rival the creators of cathedrals, castles and towns, nor the art and literature of the great European civilisations. Despite repeated attempts to catch up with what was most up to date in culture, law, urban development, habits and customs, a certain gap remained. The cultural explosion of a precocious Hungarian Renaissance never succeeded in bridging that gap. As for a possible future for this culture, it faced two obstacles at least. Firstly, there were few lords rich and receptive enough to carry it through and, secondly, external circumstances were hardly favourable, with the kingdom soon plummeting under Ottoman attack. Caught between insufficient past resources and imminent catastrophe, the Hungarian Renaissance was doomed to being no more than a splendid interlude.

FROM THE DECLINE OF THE KINGDOM TO THE MOHÁCS CATASTROPHE IN 1526

After the death of Matthias, the fight for the Crown between all the interested parties broke out once more. Matthias did his utmost to pass it to John Corvin, his son, a love-child born in 1473, but the designated heir was not recognised as such. His mother, daughter of a Breslau burgher, whose name, Barbara Edelpöck, is all we have, led an inconspicuous life at the palace, though envied by Queen Beatrice who was never able to conceive. With no heir apparent, the queen herself coveted the throne and fiercely opposed the election of the dead king's illegitimate son. Other pretenders to the throne entered the fray, among them the future Emperor Maximilian of Habsburg and two sons of the Polish House of Jagiellon. In the end it was one of them, Vladislas II (1490–1516), who won the day. Maximilian was thwarted by the anti-Habsburg element among the nobility. John Corvin, on the other hand, while relatively popular with the middle nobility, was far less so among the barons. In Vladislas, the oligarchy had found the weak king they wanted.

So Vladislas Jagiellon was duly elected king of Hungary by the Diet. Described as a handsome young man, a womaniser of mild temperament, the new monarch was totally indifferent to state affairs in his

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Czech and Hungarian kingdoms. The nickname 'Dobze', 'Yes, All Right', was bestowed upon him, as he approved of anything suggested by the barons who had hoisted him on the throne. Vladislas II Dobze seems to have spent twenty-six years saying 'Yes, yes' to unbelievable waste and to impoverishment of the state, not to mention decay in his own court. An anecdotal but revelatory fact: in 1503, during the carnival, Queen Anne de Candale from the House of Count Foix descended to her lower courtyard to find that there were only eight chickens with which to treat her guests. Sometimes, the royal couple had to rely upon the goodwill of the great lords even for their daily meals and without financial contributions from the Holy See and from Venice, the Hungarian state would have been unable to pay the soldiers on the military frontiers exposed to Turkish attack. The celebrated 'black army', now unpaid, were driven to exactions. Pál Kinizsi, the great commander, had had enough and the destruction of the glorious army ensued. Perhaps, too, this army posed a threat to the oligarchs.

Thus the oligarchical phenomenon re-emerged, if under different names. The country was once more under the rule of *potentats*, lay and ecclesiastical lords. So it was that the poverty-stricken population, now without a protector and at the mercy of the lords, great and small, temporal and ecclesiastical, began to venerate the memory of Matthias the Just. For the lords all agreed on one point: the burden of public contributions was to be wholly discharged onto the shoulders of the peasants and burghers – accompanied by an increase in dues of all kinds. Being tied to the land became common practice. Peasants who had enjoyed liberties in the past found themselves driven back into serfdom, into the new or 'second' servitude. Pressure was applied more or less indiscriminately on the whole of the non-noble population: serfs, emancipated, free peasants and even townspeople and burghers, who until then had enjoyed royal privileges. Social classes that had begun to rise found themselves sinking back, and the whole country sank with them.

Archbishop Thomas Bakócz, Báthory, Kinizsi, Szápolyai are but a few names among the hundred or so influential lords and prelates of the day. Their seizure of power led to the destabilisation of the political order. A necessary though not sufficient explanation for this is that since power had been shared by king and noble until then, the arrival of the weak and ineffectual Vladislas II was bound to create an imbalance. But there is also a connection, which is not yet clearly understood,

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between industrial and commercial development in Western Europe in the 1500s and the regression of the other Europe, agricultural producers like Poland and Hungary. As Hungarian historian Pál Zsigmond Pach points out, in the wake of the discovery of America and new currents in world commerce, producers who were suppliers of basic commodities had benefited in various ways but, in terms of modernisation, had remained unchanged. Since cattle-rearing was a lucrative trade for the rich – and even the less rich – landowners, the spirit of innovation did not feature on the Magyar horizon. During the centuries that followed, the gap continued to widen.

In 1514, Hungary witnessed a peasant revolt unprecedented in size. Vladislas II 'Yes, All Right' was still on the throne but decisions were now, more than ever, being taken by the thirty-nine barons of the Royal Council. The ordinary nobles, meanwhile, were trying, without much success, to organise themselves into a kind of national party under the very popular leader, János Szápolyai, destined to become 'national king'. The immediate cause for the revolt, however, was elsewhere. In 1513, Pope Leo X issued an edict calling for a crusade and Archbishop Thomas Bakócz was entrusted with organising it. In April 1514, 40,000 peasants assembled, mainly in Pest, to depart to war. Others were to join them in Transylvania. A leader emerged, one György Dózsa, with the Franciscan priest Lörinc by his side. Their conflicts with the nobles began to look like a peasant war, similar to those that would occur in Germany. Retaliation was not long in coming. Led by the voïvode Szápolyai, an army of 20,000 men descended upon the bulk of Dózsa's army on the walls of Temesvár.

Exhausted, the crusaders laid down their arms. Dózsa was captured and the repression that ensued was merciless, though the number of rebels put to death did not exceed 'reasonable' limits for the simple reason that the landowners needed their labour. The main deterrent, an event that was to become legendary, was the execution of Dózsa, just as in Germany, ten years later, Thomas Münzer's similar fate would go down in history. Not without reason: the victors placed a crown of iron heated until it was white on the head of the rebel, then forced his comrades in misfortune to mutilate and eat his flesh while he was still alive.

The historian Ferenc Szakály points out that, despite the extent of the revolt, 1514 was not a turning point in Hungary's history. The peasantry from the boroughs and villages, who made up the majority of the rebels,

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was subdued. Urban-dwellers instantly distanced themselves. Peace descended once more upon the country. The October Diet implemented retaliatory measures.

One of the principal architects of the Diet's decisions was the lawyer István Werböczi, future palatine. That year, he put together a body of laws intended to encompass all political and social spheres, a code called *Tripartitum*. Werböczi published it in Vienna, three years later: though it was never promulgated, the impact of *Tripartitum* was considerable. Cornerstone and yardstick of a particular image of the feudal nobility's Hungary, it became the charter of common law for three centuries. Experts and public opinion are very divided in their appreciation of the *Tripartitum*. Even after the fall of Communism, there have been as many attempts at condemning Werböczi as there have been at rehabilitating him. In the 1930s, Gyula Szekfü, despite being a conservative historian, recognised his undoubted qualities but was on the whole severely critical. Szekfü considered that the *Tripartitum,* in its common-law section, sealed the unity of national community by elaborating the doctrine of the Holy Crown, merging the Crown, the sovereign's person and the nobility into one and indivisible whole. He added that the effects were long-lasting and withstood the trend towards attrition. However, while it held the political nation together, it tore the population in two. Szekfü's judgement on this point is crucial and radical. The *Tripartitum* erected an 'iron curtain' between Hungarians and Hungarians, until 1848 – the revolution which abolished serfdom. Up to that point, the historian argues, serfs were subject to a ruthless yoke, a state of total lack of liberty. In his opinion, nothing and nobody had ever had such a dramatic effect on the life of the nation.

'The three Europes'

'After 1500, a new dividing line appears in Europe in terms of economic and social structure. The eastern part, by far the largest, was the territory of the "second serfdom" and indeed this line reproduced with astounding accuracy the frontier of 800 formed by the Elbe and the Lajta.' This is one of the most quoted statements from Jenö Szücs's minor classic on the 'three Europes'. The author adds that '500 years later, Europe was to be divided into two "camps" along a line that was almost identical, as though Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt had, on

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what was the 1130th anniversary of the emperor's death, carefully studied the status quo during the Charlemagne period'.

The primary import of this thesis (only the most visible part of the immense erudition of its author) cannot be overestimated. It highlights the line of demarcation separating the history and civilisation of Western Europe on the one hand and that of Eastern Europe on the other and then marks the other split, this time to the east, separating 'East–Central Europe' from the Russian and Orthodox world. Europe remains Europe, but within it, 'these three universes hold their positions and reinforce each other, approaching one another and then moving apart, defining themselves against one another' writes Fernand Braudel in his preface to the French edition. And, he adds, while the West opened towards the immensity of the Atlantic (it 'got' America), Russia turned towards the immensity of Asia. Between the two, 'middle Europe' took shape.

It is important to bear in mind this distinction when trying to understand the particularities of this 'middle' region's historical development. There have already been a number of examples pertaining to Hungary: its particular brand of feudalism; its relationships with 'the distant West'; the fact that Hungary was never a part of the Holy Roman Empire; its socio-economic structures; and finally, urban underdevelopment coupled with an 'overdeveloped' nobility. Though the plebeian town-dwellers had not lost their privileges entirely, civil society became rigid and from then on the country moved inexorably towards the 'second serfdom'. Somewhere around 1500, what Szücs rightly calls a 'regression' began to take place.

The year 1526

Upon the death of Vladislas II, his son aged ten, Lajos (Louis) II, acceded to the Czech and Hungarian thrones (1516–26). Surrounded by two crowned tutors, Emperor Maximilian and King Sigismund of Poland, and the most influential barons, the young king did not have a voice in the assembly until he came of age in 1521. In the same year, two strategic fortified towns, Sabac on the River Sava and Belgrade (former Nándorfehérvár), fell. The young king was not blind to the fact that now the country was open to invaders by both land and river. Instead of building up the defences of the fortified castles, the Hungarian Diet was

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busy building what the apostolic nuncio called 'castles in the air'. Fortresses surrendered one after the other.

Nonetheless, in 1526 in an extreme situation – Hungary was under attack from Suleiman the Magnificent's army – a defence *was* organised. Pál Tomori, archbishop of Kalocsa and grand commander of Lower Hungary, took charge, aided by János Szápolyai, voïvode of Transylvania, in his absence represented by his nephew. In August after a good deal of procrastination, an army of 25,000 men was assembled. A smaller army, led by Szápolyai, failed to reach the royal army. Despite the disorder, disagreements and illnesses, a spirit of triumphalism reigned over the Hungarian camp. Tomori, the soul of the struggle, seemed to be right when he said to the king: 'No one reigns here any longer but the emperor. The devil take him!' But Suleiman the Magnificent had not come to meet the devil. We now know fairly accurately that his army, though numerically superior, was not more than double the size of the Hungarian army: 50,000 men against 25,000. Had the Hungarian armies got together, they would have been an equal match. But, contrary to the boasts of numerous Hungarian dignitaries, the sultan's army was also technically and strategically superior. As for Europe, it was more or less absent from the battlefield. Emperor Charles V was building the foundations of his world empire between the Pavia battle against Francis I and the sack of Rome. Hungary had been left to its own devices.

After a number of preliminary skirmishes, the decisive battle took place on the field of Mohács, not far from the Danube, on what is a frontier of the much-reduced Hungary of today. It was 29 August 1526. Despite Tomori's initial successes, luck was with the Ottoman army. Within the space of two hours the Hungarian army had been dislodged and then annihilated. Among the dead were 28 barons, 7 prelates – Pál Tomori was one of them, the only leader to have risen above the rest. King Louis II also perished, drowned in a river.

The Battle of Mohács has gone down in history as Hungary's greatest national tragedy. It was without a doubt one of them. For the following 150 years, Hungary was divided into three. The Ottoman Empire occupied the Great Plain in the middle, a part of Transdanubia and the capital Buda. Transylvania became a vassal principality of the Sublime Porte (the Turkish government), though it maintained a degree of autonomy. Meanwhile, in the north and in western Transdanubia, the kingdom lived on under the Habsburg Crown.

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The causes of defeat have been the subject of animated debate and historical controversy right up until the present day. Communist historiography has favoured the social explanation, in other words, the ruthless suppression of the peasant revolt in 1514 along with the blind and egotistical behaviour of the ruling class. While this argument is well founded, it is rather inadequate and so in the preceding pages we have preferred to add other explanatory factors. A short conclusion is appropriate here.

Though on the occasion of this or that battle, the Hungarian barons and war chiefs certainly underestimated the Ottoman strength – or overestimated their own – they were nonetheless fully aware of the danger. A sense of the precarious situation of the kingdom had been widespread for some time. It went hand in hand with the desire to place the country's destiny into the hands of a national king capable of staving off the Ottoman Empire. The Hunyadis had undoubtedly met this need and in effect had stabilised the southern front along the Sava and Danube lines as far as Belgrade. But this had been a mere respite from Ottoman expansion. Hungary, which in the past had dominated the region, was already on the defensive faced with this stronger adversary that was pushing forward inexorably towards its frontiers, having seized the Balkan 'buffer states'. The Hungarian state, still strong after King Matthias, had even gone through an economically prosperous phase. But it had neither the size, the resources nor a national leader nor even the European aid needed to tackle the situation. Weak kings and a new unscrupulous oligarchy had only exacerbated the malaise. By the time of the confrontation with Suleiman's empire at Mohács, a conjunction of unfavourable factors had left the country more vulnerable than ever. Hungary lost more than a battle: the state disintegrated and lost its capacity for action.

In order to tell the story of the 150 years after Mohács, the vicissitudes of the division and particular evolution of each of the three parts will have to be examined.

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3

A country under three crowns, 1526–1711

AFTER MOHÁCS

Suleiman I the Magnificent (1520–66), victor on the battlefield of Mohács, did not immediately set about exploiting his victory. During his long reign he extended his empire in the East, in Algeria and in Tripolitania. He was also a great legislator. His imperial ambitions focused on Austria and Europe as well as on Hungary but he conducted his wars according to flexible policies and concepts and spread them out in time and space. His successors, Selim II (1566–74) and Murad III (1574–95) would follow suit.

After Mohács, Suleiman went to Buda, then left the capital, and in October left Hungary, but kept a firm hold on strategic forts in the south. The capital had surrendered without resistance. It was a dead city, empty, abandoned. According to György Szerémi, a priest–chronicler, the only people left were 'the poor, the crippled, the blind and the simpletons'. He soon joined the German burghers fleeing the pillaging Magyars, taking St János's golden urn with him.

Far from the battlefield, the palatine, Báthori, was in his turn busy pillaging the royal treasury, while the commander of Esztergom – seat of the bishopric – aided by his men, plundered the queen's boats and her ladies in waiting. Queen Marie of Habsburg, meanwhile, in fear of the Magyars – whose first reaction appears to have been to celebrate having rid themselves of the royal couple rather than to mourn Mohács – fled to Pozsony and then on towards the lands of her brother, the emperor.

János Szápolyai's star seemed to be on the rise. He had remained far

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from Mohács, his Transylvanian army intact, and now it seemed his old dream was about to come true. On 11 November 1526, János I Szápolyai (1526–40) was elected king by his numerous loyal followers at the Székesfehérvár Diet. Shortly after, in December, a handful of barons met at the Pozsony Diet and elected a second king to the throne, Ferdinand I, King of Bohemia and Hungary (1526–64), Emperor Charles V's younger brother, in accordance with the dynastic agreement which the Habsburgs considered the foundation of their legitimacy in Hungary.

After Mohács and the death of Lajos II Jagiellon, therefore, the Hungarians had two rival kings: János, a national king, and Ferdinand, a German king – and there was the sultan, too. The former had wealth and popularity in his favour – and a country adrift, ravaged here, there and everywhere. The latter was backed by his brother the emperor, king of Spain, master of half of America and numerous towns and counties. Charles V passed the Austrian provinces to his younger brother Ferdinand, and upon retiring to a convent in 1556, gave him the imperial crown too, putting his son Phillip II on the Spanish throne. In 1526, however, the Habsburgs still had some way to go. True, Ferdinand held all the trump cards and wielded enormous power compared with the national king. But this power was only potential; he did not have access to Charles V's huge resources and Austria occupied a marginal place both in Europe and in the empire, with its centre at Toledo. In these circumstances, Turkish support accorded to King János–John I and, later, to his successors in Transylvania, counterbalanced any advantages the Habsburgs might have had for a long time to come.

Two rival kings, 1526–1540

We must return now to the mainstream of events, beginning with the fifteen-year period that followed Mohács and ending with the death of János I in 1540 and the Turkish occupation of Buda in 1541. Some historians do not consider the Mohács catastrophe as the end of the Hungarian state and of hopes for its reunification. In effect these hopes, kept alive under the sceptre of the two rival kings, proved to be illusory. True, Suleiman had left the country, but he occupied its approaches – in other words, forts along the Sava, Drava and lower Danube. The seizure of Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade) in 1521 had already secured him

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the strategic key to Hungary. After Mohács, Suleiman was thus able to carry out a number of devastating campaigns and, in 1529 and 1532, to cross the country in order to seize Vienna – unsuccessfully.

As regards the kingdom of John I, on the other hand, Suleiman adopted what was at the very least a strategy of 'patience'. His support enabled John, thrust aside by Ferdinand and forced to flee to Poland, to take back Buda in 1529. The all-powerful minister in John's kingdom was one of the Porte's liegemen, the Venetian Lodovico Gritti, an adventurer assassinated in 1534. Militarily and politically, the Great Turk was present with all his weight and would remain so for 150 years. In addition, by 1528, John had already become the sultan's ally. The following year, even before he had repossessed Buda, he presented his humble tribute to the padishah at the very place of the Mohács defeat of 1526. He also lost his financial independence: the fabulous wealth of the Szápolyai was sinking fast as his properties fell into the hands of his Habsburg rival. Was he simply a Turkish government vassal just like numerous Balkan voïvodes, or merely their 'protégé' who maintained some independence in his internal affairs? The question remains open. What is certain is that he was dependent whilst enjoying autonomy within his kingdom. Instead of occupying the country, the Porte protected this part of the kingdom – soon to be reduced to the principality of Transylvania – against the Habsburgs.

John I Szápolyai, an indecisive man torn between dependence on the Turkish Empire and a desire to reunite a country in shreds, nonetheless attempted a volte-face on a number of occasions and sought an arrangement with Ferdinand. In 1535, he offered peace based upon partition and in 1538, by the secret treaty of Várad, he pledged the transfer of his titles and possessions after his death, in return for certain compensations in favour of his eventual successor. The future heir, John II, later called John Sigismund (1540–71), was born of Szápolyai's marriage to Isabelle Jagiellon, daughter of the king of Poland. John immediately forgot the secret treaty with Ferdinand and turned to Istanbul for recognition of the infant's right to succession.

Meanwhile, after a number of attempts, Ferdinand also sought an agreement with the sultan. John I Szápolyai had by then only ten days left to live, but his plan succeeded. By the logic of his policy, Suleiman refused to favour the Habsburgs and took the widow and her son under his protection instead. By this time, Szápolyai's affairs were already in

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Map 5. Hungary until 1541.

the hands of a man of modest origins from Croatia, György (Georges) Fráter Utiesenic, mistakenly called Martinuzzi (1482–1551). His name will come up again, but in the 1540 succession affair, János I the father, played the decisive role.

The fall of Buda

To return to matters in hand, however: widow and orphan now resided in Buda along with the entire government, including the jurist István Werböczi as chancellor. The immediate enemy was in Vienna and on the Austrian border. In spring 1541, Ferdinand entrusted General Wilhelm von Roggendorff to take Buda. The general proceeded to besiege the capital but the Turkish armies came to the rescue and Roggendorff was defeated. On 29 August, fifteen years to the day after the Battle of Mohács (the sultan was very attached to the symbolic significance of this date), Suleiman staged a dramatic turn of events, which would be immortalised in the Hungarian imagination by the saying: 'There's still black soup left to drink', in other words, coffee, as it was to be known a hundred years later, by which time the Hungarians were familiar with the brew. The event was the abduction of military chiefs who had travelled all the way from Buda to the sumptuous tent of the padishah for the purpose of negotiations. 'Black soup' was their arrest.

Suleiman thus succeeded in taking Buda without bloodshed and once the capital became the first Turkish *vilaïet* in Hungary – a kind of general lieutenancy placed under a pasha – proceeded to lay down its laws. The sultan took other steps; the most important concerned the king and his mother, who were sent back to Transylvania with György Fráter. Partition was complete. Ferdinand reigned in the west, Suleiman in the centre and the Szápolyai child, with his mother, in the future principality of Transylvania. The tripartite structure was not yet set in stone but its outlines were drawn. For ten years the child king (John II still carried the royal title) and his mother, Isabelle, stayed in Transylvania, governed by the bishop–governor–chancellor Fráter, then he abdicated in favour of Ferdinand, left for Silesia and went on to Poland, the kingdom of Isabelle's father Sigismund Jagiellon. He returned in 1556 under circumstances which will be revealed later.

As for the mid-sixteenth-century partition, Ferdinand's Hungarian kingdom numbered as many states general as John Sigismund's, the rest

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having been transformed into Turkish administrative units. The latter would become larger, but for the moment, the two royal parts, more or less equal, together comprised an area of 250,000 square kilometres, the size of the present-day United Kingdom. It was quite a vast area, with two of everything: two kings, two capitals (Ferdinand's Pozsony, John Sigismund's Gyulafehérvár), two courts, two palatines or chancellors, two armies, two fiscal administrations – and none of it was permanent. Numerous about-turns and much confusion ensued. Magnates and Hungarian soldiers fought one another; rifts widened, partly because of personal interests, but also because it was often difficult to determine just where these interests lay – and remained so for some time. How could the battle be fought on two fronts, against two empires? Would it be best to seek the protection of the Ottoman Empire or to rely on the Habsburgs to drive out the Turks? It was a case of trying to square a circle.

Ferdinand attempted to recapture Buda in 1542, but his army, despite being 55,000 strong, suffered a 'shameful' defeat, according to Ferdinand himself. Another ten years were to pass before he relaunched the offensive – this time with General Giovanni Castaldo's army – to conquer Transylvania. With the great sultan occupied in the East at the time, the moment was right. Isabelle handed the Crown over to Ferdinand's general and is supposed to have left for Poland. A series of conflicts and repeated ups and downs involving all the political protagonists – the queen, the lords torn between the Habsburgs and the Sublime Porte, and György Fráter himself – went on behind this seemingly clear and straightforward sequence of events.

Fráter at the time favoured the Habsburg solution and secretly opened a route for Ferdinand's army while at the same time sending the annual tribute to Istanbul in return for its protection. One of Ferdinand's condottieri wrote the following comment to Vienna: 'Rest assured, Majesty, that even a superhuman mind would be incapable of scrutinising the character of this man. He laughs and cries, promises reforms and refuses them in the same breath.' He was, of course, talking about György Fráter.

The year was 1551. Transylvania was now 'nearly' reintegrated into the kingdom. But that year it had to contend with the Porte's reaction and with a dramatic event: the assassination of György Fráter by General Castaldo's hired assassins at the order of King Ferdinand.

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Political assassinations were far from rare and in this century of Borgias and other Medicis, hardly a regional phenomenon. And yet, the death of this influential man of state sent shock-waves as far as the Vatican. The murder was all the more perplexing as Fráter had just been made cardinal and had received the title of voïvode of Transylvania from the same royal hand that gave the order to kill him. Why the titles? As a reward for his policies which had enabled Ferdinand to incorporate (very briefly) the kingdom of John II Szápolyai into his own? Why the murder? Because of his dealings with the Ottoman pashas?

Whatever the reason, these events symbolise the ambivalence of his policies (Fráter was nearly seventy when he died). *Eminence grise* or official minister, he remained at the centre of the action for half a century. Accused of duplicity by some and hailed as a genius by others, György Fráter's political abilities, though no doubt dictated by the necessity, in an inextricable situation, of finding the lesser evil, were exceptional. Without the Habsburgs, the idea of some day pushing the Great Turk over the borders was but a pipe-dream. Without the support of the Porte, John I's kingdom and that of his son would not have lasted more than a day.

Indeed, in 1556, after five years in semi-voluntary exile in Poland, Queen Isabelle and John Sigismund returned to Transylvania, according to the express wishes of Suleiman (stated in his Aleppo edict dated 1554) and thanks to the Transylvanian Diet's support. The latter had already notified Ferdinand of its position: either he defended it against the sultan or Transylvania would no longer be part of his kingdom. And so it was. With John Sigismund, first prince of Transylvania (he would later renounce his royal title over Hungary), a new page in the country's history began.

ON THE RAMPARTS OF CHRISTIAN EUROPE

In the middle of the sixteenth century, in the eyes of Europe, Transylvania was just a distant, unknown province and Hungary, a country adrift. Up until then, Charles V had been busy building his empire, upon which 'the sun never set'. He occupied his part of America, divided by the Holy See between Spain and Portugal. True, he fought Ottoman encroachment in the Mediterranean (Tunisia, Algeria) but he never gave his brother the wherewithall to achieve his ambitions

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of conquering the country at the foot of the Carpathians – Hungary. In addition, in 1547 the Habsburgs signed a five-year peace treaty with the Porte – just at a time when the Persian wars (1548–50 and 1554) had slowed his expansion into Hungary. In France, Francis I's successors had worn themselves out warring against the Habsburgs and England as well as in the religious wars. Indeed, the whole of Europe had concerns other than that of uniting their forces to halt Ottoman expansion, which was instead accepted as a *fait accompli*. In 1453, Constantinople fell; in 1521, it was Belgrade's turn; in 1526, Hungary was defeated at Mohács – not to mention the hundreds of other Ottoman conquests over two centuries. There was, it seems, some consternation in Christian Europe when Buda fell in 1541, but no action came of it.

The neglect of the Hungarian–Turkish front can be partly explained by indifference on the part of the other powers. Poland, at its apogee during the last Jagiellons, Sigismund I (1506–48) and Sigismund II (1548–72), had been expanding continuously and had ignored the Turkish wars, which it could have easily contained. Fused with Lithuania, it was the greatest of the Eastern European powers and was already looking towards Russia. Muscovy was undergoing the beginnings of expansion at the time and was more or less untouched by the Ottoman Empire. Ivan IV had taken the title of tsar and by conquering the Khaganat Tatars, had laid down the foundations of future Greater Russia.

On the other side of Europe, a great world power was being born. Henry VIII (1509–47) founded the Church of England and beheaded his fifth wife, Catherine Howard, as the Muslim Empire was installing itself in Hungary. His daughter Elizabeth followed, inaugurating what was to be a prestigious reign.

To return to the European landscape in the middle of the century, at the time of the fall of Buda: John Calvin moved to Geneva where he would base his reformed religion, while in 1541, in Rome, Michelangelo finished *The Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel.

One could list *ad infinitum* the political events and cultural symbols marking the distance between Renaissance Europe, on one hand, with its scientific, political and trade revolutions and Hungary, on the other, becoming increasingly marginalised. The gulf was to grow ever wider throughout the sixteenth century. Isolated instances already mentioned hide more long-term historical processes which divided the two sides

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even more. Fernand Braudel's great work *The Material Civilisation of the Economy and of Capitalism, from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* is a good example. Braudel dedicates twenty times more space to Holland than to Hungary, Bohemia and Poland put together. Observations about Hungary, when not reduced to the export of cattle or the production of barley, underline the growing distance between Europe and its peripheral regions beyond the Elbe.

In the West, 'the structures of daily life' and 'bartering' were shaping modernity. In Hungary and neighbouring countries, meanwhile, the peasant's lot, trade and urban life were steadily deteriorating, if not in the sixteenth century then certainly in the seventeenth.

The fact that the price of bread was progressively lower as one moved from England towards Hungary certainly saved many from famine, but it was hardly a mark of progress – more a sign of underdevelopment, in fact. On the periphery, 'Hungary was pretty much at the bottom of the ladder', unless one went further, as the Hungarian Martin Szepsi Csombor did in 1618, to Tobolsk in Siberia. But to return, with Braudel, to Central Europe, he observes that whereas in 1500 bonded labour was insignificant, it increased to two days a week and by 1600, had risen to three or more, thus holding back development of a more profitable agriculture.

In order to hold out, Hungary had to adopt a 'survival strategy', which consisted in fighting incessantly on its borders, adjusting its economy to the circumstances and being receptive in terms of religion and culture. Only an approximation of conditions during that century and a half is possible, starting with the balance of losses and gains.

PARTITION, POPULATION AND SOCIETY

The demographic balance-sheet of two centuries of devastation remains open to debate. Most historians talk of catastrophic depopulation: basically, the net loss of 1 million inhabitants. However, other estimates produce a zero balance: according to these calculations, the population at the end of the fifteenth century was between 3.5 and 4 million and was the same by the end of the seventeenth century. Loss of human life was compensated by immigration. Though evidence is slight, even according to the more optimistic estimates, the deficit remains enormous, especially for a period marked by strong demographic growth. According to

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Bairoch, Europe, without Russia, had around 76 million inhabitants in 1500, 102 million in 1700: an increase of a third. At that rate, Hungary's population could have risen to 5 million – the population of England in 1688.

Apart from war, epidemics, the plague and possibly a 'mini ice age' in the sixteenth century had a severe impact on a population labouring under constant harassment and deprivation, so that Hungary emerged from a long period of adversity with a diminished population. Literature would later call this period 'the withering of the Magyars'. Though immigration in itself was cause for celebration, its consequences were momentous; while compensating for losses to some extent, it also profoundly changed the ethnic composition of the country. The Turks installed Serbs in the territories they occupied. As for the other two parts of the country, scarce demographic data makes it difficult to ascertain the impact of both spontaneous immigration that took place during the wars and subsequent colonisation controlled by Vienna to fill the gaps. Large numbers of different ethnic groups – Slavs, Romanians and others – probably came in search of more secure and favourable places like Transylvania and Transdanubian Hungary. This was not a new phenomenon; Hungary had always been a country of immigration, welcoming numerous waves of migrants or ethnic groups fleeing invaders, and assimilation had been more or less unproblematic. This was to change. The Magyar population formed during preceding centuries was now in a minority.

The disintegration of the kingdom was accompanied by inevitable fragmentation of power at all levels and in all domains. At the top, royal authority had already lost much of its prestige and power and the schism compounded its erosion, particularly in John Szápolyai's case: from wealthiest lord, John I became a poor king. His son John Sigismund succeeded in consolidating power in Transylvania. As for Ferdinand, he had neither family nor personal estates, so frontiers between the two sovereigns changed frequently, not only according to the fortunes of war and Turkish encroachment, but also according to the whim of large numbers of rallying and dissenting magnates. Mining and trading towns of the north, meanwhile, belonged to the Habsburg kingdom – but on paper only, and the arrangement was short-lived: indeed, in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Upper Hungary even became the site of anti-Habsburg insurrections.

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Throughout these decades, the states general, dominated by the high nobility, both lay and ecclesiastical, demonstrated their power, in particular at the dozens of diets that met at various places. Some historians refer to these events as a return to government by estates and orders. Royal prestige and authority were certainly contested, but the nature of the counter-authority of the nobility should not be overstated; confusion would be a more apt description of the country during this period.

A society dammed: the power of the noble estates

The most widespread social trend during these centuries was the increasing enslavement of the peasantry. The gulf between the 'nation of nobles' and the *jobbágy* was ever widening – to the extent that the latter became known as the 'second serfdom' and the term *jobbágy* became synonymous with serf. The supremacy of the nobility manifested itself in politics and in the turbulent relationship between the estates and the king. This phenomenon – of states and orders, referred to earlier – was not new: conflicts between royalty and the nobility were a recurring feature throughout feudal Europe. Beyond the Elbe, however, the society that was emerging was increasingly different from that of Western countries: from the sixteenth century onwards, a kind of 'late feudalism' was being created, or, to quote the historian Jenö Szücs, a type of intermediate society, somewhere between the Western and Eastern 'models'. A more detailed look at the role of the higher, ordinary, ecclesiastical and lay nobility is needed in order to describe this particular society.

The repercussions of the existence of a large nobility class had already arisen in Hungary and Poland in previous centuries. It appeared very early in the case of Hungary – in the thirteenth century – under András II of the House of Árpád, coinciding with the weakening and impoverishment of the king. Since then, interrupted by short-lived recoveries, royal authority had been in decline and the oligarchy had acquired substantial and often preponderant political, economic and military power. The power of the great lords was further bolstered by the support of the noble's 'retainers' (not always from the nobility), their retinue of soldiers, palace servants and owners of small and medium-sized estates attached to the main seigniory.

Ties between the seigniorial baron and his retainers varied according

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to period and circumstance. They were often established by force, through the small being dispossessed by the large or by the need of the weak for personal protection and security of their possessions. It should be stressed that these ties were based on private agreements and did not entail the vassal ties of Western feudalism. Ties were made and broken, always leaving the noble a free man. And yet, after the Middle Ages, the common nobility's economic dependency increased. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the *latifundia* grew steadily, swallowing up a large proportion of noble property, including people and possessions. Economic decay among the lesser nobility was also caused by the accession rights of *aviticitas,* which kept ancestral land within the clan while ensuring that the inheritance was divided among all legitimate descendants. This led to basic possessions being divided up and absorbed. In the fifteenth century, according to sources, there were 540 landowners in the county of Baranya; by the eighteenth century, there were only six large estates (four of which were Church-owned) and eighteen medium-sized properties. This explains why many lesser nobles became artisans – cobblers, blacksmiths – or tutors and, increasingly, civil servants.

These 'gentlemen in sandals' (squireens), however, had not lost their patent of nobility or their political importance. The traditional legal principle of *una eademque nobilitas* endured the passage of time, the hegemony of the magnates and economic constraints. Though poor, the nobles proliferated; their presence was felt both at a national level and even more so at the level of the county dietines. While in Western Europe the nobility was crumbling and shrinking, in Central Europe the proportion of nobles was on the increase, reaching 4 to 5 per cent of the population in Poland and Hungary and 8 per cent in Transylvania.

This was partly due to the proliferation of traditional titles acquired by descendants of free warriors and other servants of the king and the Church – ennobling ordinary soldiers and emancipated peasants in reward for more recent merits and services. The vast majority of this class lived under economic conditions that were barely above those of the peasants – the 'nobles with seven plum trees' have already been mentioned. Their social status, on the other hand, remained stable. Once acquired, writes the historian Maksay, the coats of arms were never lost, even if the parchment remained a gentleman's only property. Unlike in England or France, the established nobility did not reject the poor or those who practised a trade considered below a nobleman's dignity. A

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permanent state of war is certainly one explanation as was the higher and lesser nobility's shared common interest, that of constituting a counter-power against royal prerogative.

While elsewhere in Europe, royal absolutism was in the ascendancy, here the very complicated relationship between the nation of nobles and the sovereign seated at the Hofburg of Vienna and the particular nature of the 'system of states and orders', was to last throughout almost four centuries of Austrian rule and was probably one of the key factors – if not the factor – which led to a weak middle class. The German word *Standestaat*, a 'State of states', approximately corresponds to the Hungarian expression *rendá állam* or *rendiség*, used in historiography as shorthand for this particularity, designating either the supremacy of the noble estates over the sovereign or the duality of the two.

This was not without social repercussions, which compounded the already complex relationship between the nobility exalted as nation and the crowned king. While under the great European monarchies Western society was heading towards a nascent capitalism and a middle-class society, Hungary was stuck in a 'system of states' which perpetuated the dominance of the nobility and led to what has been called 'late feudalism', or 'second serfdom'. Social conditions that could only obstruct the development of capitalism were exacerbated by the fact that a large proportion of the very small middle class was foreign, mainly German.

The power of the nobility, therefore, as expressed through a system of states, comprised two distinctive yet interdependent facets, one social and the other political. A class of half a million privileged dominated the 8 or 9 millions condemned to servitude – an eternal servitude, according to the famous legal statute, *Tripartitum*, dating from the early fourteenth century – and claimed to be the sole embodiment of nation and Crown. But although socially and economically backward, the system proved to be a political force *vis-à-vis* Habsburg absolutism. In effect, the eternal disagreement between king and Diet took the form of resistance against foreign domination and the defence of public rights of the Hungarian state, its uniqueness and 'personality', so to speak. Thus the historic role of a dominant nobility was inherently ambivalent: by defending its privileges, the nobility also sustained Hungarian identity. The dominant classes and their particular institutions maintained the status quo up until the nineteenth century and yet, by preserving the nation, they also hampered its progress.

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As society became increasingly polarised between nobility and peasant serfs and as these relationships became fixed, the development of a middle class slowed down, which in turn impacted strongly on urbanisation. Trading and artisanal towns existed – Pest and Buda – but they were inferior both numerically and in terms of urbanisation levels compared with their Western European counterparts. In 1700, there were a mere dozen towns of 5,000 inhabitants in the entire country, against 800 in Europe. Only Buda and Pest together (though not united) numbered more than 20,000 inhabitants, compared with 130 equivalent-sized towns in the West. Metropolises of 100,000 inhabitants or more just did not exist.

The Turkish war and dilapidated social structures, as well as the shift in international trade towards the Atlantic, explain this situation. In addition, the influx of industrial products from Western countries had a detrimental effect on agrarian economies. These 'poor relations' of the new prosperity, on the other hand, benefited from the favourable circumstances as suppliers of mining products and foodstuffs in high demand. Fernand Braudel's examples suggest that the ratio between agricultural prices and industrial goods was being turned on its head: imported industrial products like textiles or ironware were cheaper, while in the East, landowners who were in a position to sell for export, especially peasant stockbreeders and cattle merchants, could get good prices in European markets. Hence the development of flourishing agricultural market towns, so much so that in the sixteenth century, in the middle of a war, Hungary was the major world exporter of meat: 200,000 cattle in 1580. Skins, leather, wine and cereals were also exported in considerable quantities. The Fifteen Years' War at the end of the century, and the worsening situation in the following century, put a stop to this relative prosperity which in any case only deepened the abyss between Hungary and a trading, manufacturing Europe.

A COUNTRY DIVIDED

The kingdom of Hungary covered some 283,000 square kilometres, with Croatia, 325,000 (excluding its medieval possessions in the Balkans). Despite frontier changes – due to Turkish conquests, some re-conquests and wars between the principality of Transylvania and the kingdom – each crown owned more or less one third of national territories.

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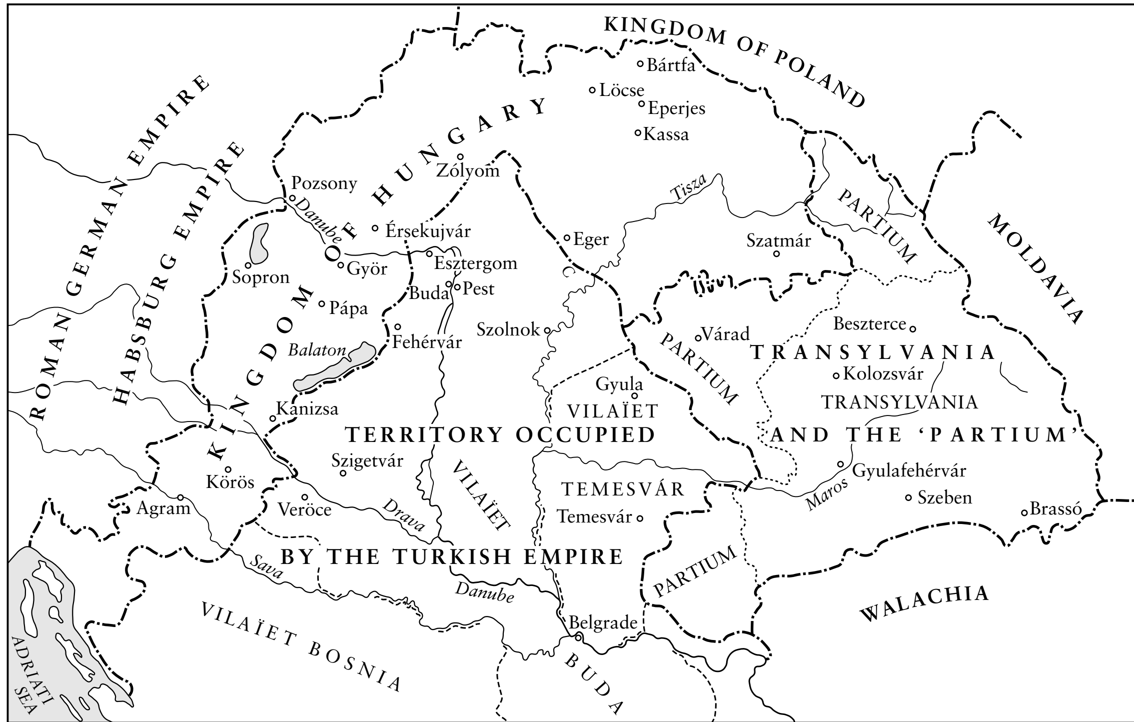

Map 6. Hungary divided (late sixteenth century)

According to this map, the kingdom under the Habsburg Crown curved like a crescent, from Dalmatia and Western Croatia to present-day Slovakia and the Subcarpathian, cutting ancient Pannonia, Transdanubia, in a diagonal line passing near Lake Balaton. Turkish *vilaïets* occupied the Great Plain in the centre of the country comprising a part of Transylvania and Buda along with some of the eastern and south-eastern states general. Beyond these were Transylvania and adjoining counties, the *Partium*.

Population distribution (between 3,500,000 and 4,000,000 inhabitants) was as follows: 1,500,000 in the Kingdom of Hungary; just under 1,000,000 in Transylvania; about the same number under Turkish occupation; and over 500,000 'floaters'. The latter were 'displaced' people who had left their homes or, conversely, found themselves – at times together with the entire population of a county – under one administration and then under another.

The Ottomans introduced a fairly ordered administration, so that in the sixteenth century, damage was still limited. Nonetheless, 'the century of Magyar decay' – as the great commander–writer Miklós Zrinyi (1620–64), great grandson of the Szigetvár hero, called it – had well and truly begun. The largest expansion of occupied territory took place a century later, in 1664. It was divided into five *vilaïets*, in turn divided into *sandjaks*. This 'Turkish world in Hungary', to quote a nineteenth-century novel, is primarily synonymous with war, pillage, kidnap (captured children were 're-educated' and became the famous janissaries) and abandoned lands. As for the depopulation of thousands of villages and hamlets – a Western European phenomenon as well – this came about most obviously through war but also through a number of economic adjustments. Pastureland was extended in order to develop cattle-rearing, more profitable than the cultivation of cereals. As villages were abandoned, new rural agglomerations appeared; thriving trading and market towns, on their way to becoming urbanised centres, multiplied and became a common feature of the country and its landscape. The effects of these changes were double-edged: conversion of previously cultivated land to wild pasture certainly benefited animal husbandry but nevertheless hindered development. The frontier of civilisation continued to recede.

It was not in the Porte's interests to pursue a policy based solely on plunder. Hungary, in the sultan's overall plan, was a base from which to

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expand towards Europe. Istanbul envisaged a great Muslim Euro-Afro-Asiatic empire. It was a dream broken by the Hungarian kingdom's and the Transylvanian principality's defence lines comprising 100 fortifications. The line was certainly pushed back considerably but it was never broken down to the point of opening the door to the invasion of Europe. The ramparts of Christianity held fast and paid the usual price of endemic warfare.

The conquering Turks, therefore, had no interest in destroying their most advanced province in Europe; it was a matter of profiting from it as much as possible. This objective is one explanation for the Turks' religious tolerance. The same is true for their administrative methods: they had to be flexible to ensure co-operation from the population while being efficient enough to exploit its economic capacity to the limit – but no further. Essentially, this consisted in the exaction of taxes, tributes, and ransoms. Besides the pashas – commander–administrators and supreme judges – it was the tax collectors, civil servants of the office of the *defter* (office of finances – at times compared with a tax inspectorate), who held the most important positions.

The word 'condominium' is often used when referring to the Turkish occupation, under which serfs were subjected to taxation by two lords, one Ottoman, the other Hungarian. In practice, the Turks governed the conquered lands, no longer under Hungarian state authority, but did not totally overturn habits and customs.

For the taxpayer – peasant, craftsman, tradesman, landlord – life had to go on. Indeed, towns and market towns maintained municipal autonomy. Justice was administered by Hungarian judges – initially in conjunction with Turkish *kadi* but eventually the functions of the *kadi* were confined to the Ottoman administration – and priests carried out their ministry without discrimination. This explains why the Reformation spread far more easily under Turkish rule – indifferent to Christian denominational factions – than under the Habsburg Catholic kingdom. The Turkish government did not proselytise its Muslim beliefs and, therefore, renegades of Hungarian origin were few. In contrast to certain Balkan countries, not many peasants converted to Islam in Bosnia. The Porte did not pursue colonisation policies either. Some *agha* and *spahi* received in usufruct a number of properties in order to maintain the army of occupation – estimated at between 30,000 and 50,000 men in peacetime – but not as personal estates. Istanbul often

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recalled its high government officials: during a century and a half, 99 holders of the office of *begler-bey* passed through Buda. De facto, the Hungarian lords retained rights over their serfs, at times even over Turkish-controlled municipalities, giving rise to the concept of 'condominium' found in history books. The victim of this state of affairs was, of course, the *misera plebs ontribuens* who paid taxes to the Turks, the Hungarians and sometimes even to Transylvanian landlords.

The occupied territory seems to have been barely integrated into the Ottoman Empire. For Istanbul, it was simply a field of military operations and a country to fleece. Destruction was enormous, while the Turkish contribution consisted mainly of foodstuffs such as rice, and maize cultures, tobacco, perhaps paprika (their traces can also be found in Hungarian folklore). A few pasha–governors became distinguished by virtue of their work, like Sokoli Mustapha at the *vilaïet* of Buda who left four *djamira*s (great mosques), six mosques, two schools and sixteen baths, but the overall balance is indisputably disastrous. The suggestion sometimes put forward, that 150 years of Turkish occupation was a 'stroke of luck', saving Hungary from the grip of the Habsburgs, is entirely unfounded.

The most densely populated and richest part of Hungary, the northwest, was under the Habsburg Crown. Ferdinand, who in 1556 acceded to the imperial throne, was fairly scrupulous in his respect for constitutional rights of the Hungarian orders and, in any case, avoided confrontation. This was in keeping with his character – he was considered fair but also indecisive. Six princes from his family succeeded him during the century and a half of Turkish wars: his son Maximilian I (1564–76), then Rudolph I (1576–1608), who was mentally ill and had to abdicate in favour of his brother Matthias II (1608–19), followed by Ferdinand II (1619–37), Ferdinand III (1637–57) and Leopold I (1657–1705). Under these kings – with the exception of Ferdinand III – the government adopted an increasingly absolutist and intolerant attitude towards Protestants. This trend had its limits but the turn of the century nonetheless marked a watershed. It was determined not solely by a genetic whim of the Habsburgs but also by military, political and denominational changes that took place in the seventeenth century.

In the previous century, several factors had contributed to a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect. The king and emperor had not imposed Viennese administration nor had he challenged the independence of St Stephen's Crown. The Habsburgs wore it as kings elected according to

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Hungarian public law and by virtue of their succession rights – in the Habsburgs' interpretation – but not in any sense as an absolute divine right. Hungary did not belong to them but to the Holy Crown. Most of the time, the country was governed by diets. Vienna, however, bore the bulk of military expenses. Maintenance of the 20,000 or so soldiers guarding in the region of a hundred fortifications along the length and breadth of the military frontiers cost at least 2–3 million florins and this was paid by Vienna with the assistance of the diets of the empire; Hungarian contributions represented a mere tenth. It was therefore in the interests of the nobility, jealous guardians of their privileges, particularly fiscal ones, to maintain the political status quo. The historian Ferenc Szakály points out that it would be wrong to refer to anti-Habsburg movements during this period.

As protector of a fledgling principality and its prince, the young John Sigismund, the sultan had already imposed his political will in the 1550s through his armies in Transylvania. Meanwhile, he continued to extend his conquests and in 1566, undertook a new campaign on a grand scale – the seventh and last that he conducted as sultan. Suleiman the Magnificent died during the siege of Szigetvár, the fortified castle defended by the legendary Miklós Zrinyi and his soldiers, who fought to the last man. He was not the first commander, nor the last, to become a legend: there was István Dobó, who held off the besiegers of his Eger citadel, György Szondi and others. Dozens of fortresses nonetheless fell during the campaigns carried out by Suleiman and his successors. Then, in 1593, after two decades of relative calm following the 1568 peace treaty signed by Maximilian and Selim II, war broke out once again and lasted fifteen years. It was started by the Sultan Murad III (1574–95), but the emperor and Habsburg king, Rudolph II, seized the opportunity to launch a counter-attack. Pope Clement VIII (1592–1605) succeeded in creating a Christian Holy League. Significantly, the previously cautious Transylvania, but by then increasingly concerned with freeing itself from its semi-vassal state, joined the Holy League, under the leadership of Prince Sigismund Báthori, nephew of István Báthori, elected king of Poland. Other participants were the Romanian voïvodes, Aron and Stefan of Moldavia, and the celebrated Mihai Viteazul of Walachia. The Christian armies won a number of battles. The retaking of Györ in 1598 was hailed as a great victory: the 'gateway' to Vienna had just been barred against the Turks.

The military balance of the long and arduous Fifteen Years' War was

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by no means wholly positive: the Holy League collapsed and the Ottoman conquest continued. Nonetheless, confidence was restored: the Turks were not invincible after all! Even though it was to take another century before they were thrown out altogether, their great momentum seemed to have been broken. In 1571, the Ottoman Empire had already undergone a serious naval defeat at Lepanto, followed by setbacks in Persia, where Shah Abbas I won the war in 1603. It was the beginning of a slow Ottoman decline.

Two major events plunged the entire country into turmoil. The first was the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, bringing significant cultural benefits. The second, equally consequential, was the beginning of the prolonged struggle against Habsburg domination. In both cases, Transylvania was to play a key role. The broad outlines of this entangled history can only be understood by going back to the onset of the Reformation and the development of the principality.

'UNDER THE SIGN OF THE REFORMATION'

The Reformation had made its mark in Hungary long before the escalation of religious wars, that is, in middle of the sixteenth century. Despite occupation, division and destruction, its political and cultural repercussions were profound. The country witnessed a rebirth of humanism and the Renaissance, was exposed to the spirit of Erasmus and the teachings of the great German and Helvetic reformers, participated in the great debates of ideas, and, last but not least, experienced the blossoming of literature. *Under the Sign of the Reformation*, a history of literature written by János Horváth, and which has become a classic, lists over 300 authors of different denominations who surfaced during the space of half a century.

Protestant ideas had found a wide audience as early as 1525. They were mainly popular among the German-speaking urban population and in the court of Queen Marie (a Habsburg), wife of Louis II (a Jagiellon). Among Hungarians, on the other hand, these ideas were divisive. Some magnates adopted them while others fought against them. In Transylvania, it was mainly Germans, called Saxons, who adopted the Augsburg Creed.

From the 1540s, Magyars from all walks of life – magnates, nobles, peasants, itinerants and the non-noble middle class of the market towns

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– began to follow Helvetic Protestantism. In addition to the Geneva version disseminated by Theodore Beza, Calvinism was propagated in another form, by one Ulrich Zwingli and his successor Heinrich Bullinger, from Zurich. Helvetic Protestantism was adapted to the Hungarian context and fashioned by preachers of varying temperaments: Mátyás Dévai Biró, who had previously been a Franciscan monk, János Sylvester, András Szhárosi Horváth and Mihály Szkhátosi, also ex-Franciscans, Márton Kálmánscehi Sánta, István Szegedi Kis, the great poet and translator of psalms, Albert Szenczi Molnár, and finally Péter Melius Juhász, who turned Debrecen into a 'Calvinist Rome'. All of them developed their calling amidst the flames of religious disputes. Theological disputes pertained to the Trinity and transubstantiation, liturgy and morality as well as ecclesiastical organisation. The education of each of these men was determined by the university they attended, Wittenberg, Geneva or elsewhere, but practically everyone was subject to influences from other horizons and added their own personal touch.

The Reformation eventually won over the vast majority of Hungarians. Most schools, print works and publications were either Lutheran or Calvinist.

As everywhere in Europe where the Reformation had taken hold, the purge of the Church, corrupted by its prelates, its wealth, the sale of the famous letters of indulgence, all made a strong impression in Hungary. So did the 'purge', in a material sense, of places of worship. Despite the vandalous nature of the destruction of works of art, these 'purges' responded to a spiritual need for greater simplicity. The clergy was also seduced by the abolition of the law forbidding priests to marry and by the new ecclesiastical organisations which abolished hierarchical systems and did away with submission to Rome. The adoption of the mother tongue for prayer, the translations of the Bible and the psalms, the theological debates and publications in Hungarian were also hugely significant. It was not only churchmen who participated enthusiastically in these debates but the lay public, too. The strongest impact of Protestantism's social message, however, was on the market towns of the ordinary middle classes.

Preachers primarily targeted the sins of the 'papists' but also extolled hopes for deliverance from the Turkish yoke – through a purified 'true Christian faith'. The Protestants' God had to deliver His Hungarian

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people just as He had done the Jews held captive in Babylon and Egypt. The Ottoman authorities continued to manifest a spirit of tolerance according to their general policy – sometimes the *bey* even presided personally over disputes.

One reason for the staggering success of the new religions is to be found in the material decadence of the Catholic Church, dating back well before the Turkish occupation. The powerful and wealthy Church of the Middle Ages was a thing of the past. Several sovereigns had divested it of properties and traditional sources of revenue. Though there had been no 'Investiture disputes' as such, a good many kings and lords disposed of Church funds pretty much as they pleased, distributing them among their servants or simply expropriating the lot. The aftermath of Mohács – where the vast majority of the prelates perished – and of Turkish occupation had left most bishoprics empty. King Ferdinand of Habsburg, together with a number of magnates, was quick to take advantage of the situation and appropriated them. A number of monasteries and opulent chapters also fell into lay hands – or into the hands of improvised 'prelates' who quickly donned the cassock, like one Mezölaki, nominated superior of an abbey, who then transformed it into a brigand's den, robbing tradesmen and exacting ransoms from the peasants. The Reformation aggravated the situation. Church treasures worth hundreds of thousands of florins were stolen or destroyed. To illustrate the scale of the disaster, before 1526 there were seventy Franciscan monasteries numbering 1,500 monks; by 1600, there were only five left, with thirty monks (though some had been lost through conversion to Protestantism).

Reformed churches proliferated throughout large towns and market towns, among diligent and industrious people. The magnates and nobles who had converted either to the Augsburg creed or to the Reformed Church – both in their respective 'Hungarianised' and 'mixed' versions – nonetheless played an important role. These squires are said to have used – and abused – their rights and powers, dragging with them along their new road to salvation their entire entourage: relatives, towndwellers and peasants. Vast estates and, by proxy, their neighbours, along with entire regions, thus switched over *en masse* to the Reformation, according to a practice called *cujus regio, ejus religio* – 'the religion of the prince is the religion of the country' – in its Hungarian version. Unlike in Germany, Hungary had no territorial princes as such and so the practice was adapted to the squires.

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The triumph of free choice in matters of faith in reality seemed to apply only to the powerful, but the wind of liberation was nonetheless both strong and fruitful. Disputes and conflicts did engender violence and sometimes bloodshed, along with language outrageous in its vehemence. Some Protestant preachers did not refrain from pouring biblical curses upon their adversaries, calling them 'damned papists' and 'the pope's monkeys', accusing them of unspeakable crimes, of adoring idols, of stinking like 'carrion, farts, mud'. Often the same voices would damn both the Catholic Church and the Turks; the pope's followers, the Germans and the Turks would be condemned in the same breath. According to them, the only true champions of Christ were the Hungarian Protestants.

The violence did not cause excessively irreparable damage, however, and the spirit of tolerance survived. People had to learn to live together for better or worse – the absolute domination of a single state Church was no longer possible in Hungary. Religious freedom had indeed taken a giant's step forward in this second half of a century that was marked by the night of St Bartholomew (1572), the assassination of Henry III, Duke Albe's terror in the Low Countries, the Inquisition and persecutions.

Catholicism, in a position of weakness up until the Council of Trent, inaugurated in 1542 and activated after 1562, remained on the defensive until the end of the sixteenth century. The Catholic Church threw itself into the Counter-Reformation in Hungary with the arrival on the scene of Péter Pázmány (1570–1637), future cardinal and archbishop of Esztergom and great writer of his century. The wrath of the Protestant preachers had meanwhile found a new enemy: the anti-Trinity Unitarians established in Transylvania.

This controversy originates in the period between 1556 and 1571, under János Szápolyai and János Zsigmond, early on in the life of the principality resulting from the division of the kingdom. The episode, though brief, was a significant one. The young prince had converted to Protestantism in its most radical form, the Unitarian Church, in other words, founded by a Hungarian preacher, of Saxon origins, Ferenc Dávid, in turn inspired by the doctrine of the Spaniard Michel Servet, who was burnt at the stake by Calvin in Geneva in 1553. The prince's other spiritual guide was a doctor, like Servet, by the name of George Blandrata. He was originally from Piedmont and had arrived at the court of the prince in 1563, having been driven out of Poland for his anti-Trinitarian radicalism.

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Transylvania and the Gyulafehérvár court of the time were crossroads of languages, cultures and innovative ideas. The Sozzini brothers, Leo and Fausto, were among its numerous scholars and by the end of the century no fewer than 2,850 students had studied at foreign universities. Dávid, the founder of the Unitarian Church, studied at Wittenberg, adopted the religion of Luther and Melanchthon before becoming a Calvinist and finally an anti-Trinitarian in 1556. 'God is One', Dávid preached. Thanks to his teachings and to the prince, the majority of Transylvanian Hungarians adopted the new religion. When István Báthori, future king of Poland, ascended to the throne, the Unitarians found themselves under pressure from a new Catholic prince. Dávid was persecuted and died in prison.

The legacy of the Unitarian interlude was an extraordinary event for the period. In 1568, the Diet of Torda decreed religious freedom; every preacher could 'preach the Gospel according to his own understanding'. This freedom was limited to the four recognised religions: Catholic, Evangelical–Lutheran, Reformed Calvinist and Unitarian. The large numbers of Orthodox Romanians were excluded as were the handful of Jews and an even smaller number of Muslims. It is also worth mentioning that the preachers were chosen by the local administration and so one cannot speak of individual liberty in the modern sense. Nevertheless, the Diet's act was unprecedented.

Tolerance was the keynote for that entire century in Central Europe. According to the British historian, R. J. W. Evans, author of *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1550–1570* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979), the Catholic Church had disintegrated in Austria and Bohemia, the court failed to uphold the Counter-Reformation of the papacy, and lived out the spirit of humanism and the Renaissance. 'Renaissance and Reformation combined in Central Europe to produce a reasonably tolerant and uniform cultural climate' (39).

A flourishing literature

With the Reformed Churches, numbers of schools and publishing houses increased. The Catholic Church, which had somewhat lost its momentum, underwent a revival in the seventeenth century. Meanwhile, Protestant colleges were set up in Transylvania, both in Saxon and Hungarian areas, at Debrecen, Sárospatak and a dozen other towns.

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Elementary schools flourished all over the place – there were almost 200 of them. In the sixteenth century, dozens of publishing houses produced 894 publications in just seventy years: translations of the Bible (the first complete edition was by Gáspár Károlyi in 1590), prayers, psalms and an extremely lively literature of polemics.

Secular writings made up around 40 per cent of literary output. As for language, besides publications in Latin, books were now appearing in Hungarian, either to propagate religious renewal or to instruct and entertain. It was a literature marked by the Reformation but it showed the first buds of a truly national literature. In some works by authors like Gáspár Heltai or Péter Bornemissza, any attempt to separate the religious aspect from the secular one is to do injustice to what was a integrated artistic whole, both in terms of language and richness of expression.

New literary genres were emerging alongside philosophical essays, psalms of poignant beauty or flowery love poems. Among these new forms was the recital of historic narrative poems, linked to the old tradition of medieval verse chronicles. Péter Ilosvai Selymes recounted the life story of a popular hero called Toldi, distinguished for his courage and strength at the time of the Angevins; Sebestyén Tinódi, called the Lutist, told Bible stories and heroic chronicles about warriors' struggles against the Turkish invader. Péter Bornemissza is one name that has become a part of national literary history for his dramatic works, among others, the virtuoso translation–adaptation of one of Sophocles' masterpieces. With its new title, *Magyar Electra*, the ancient tragedy was transformed into a genuinely 'Hungarian' tragedy of the day. The language used in these works is astoundingly modern as is that used by an anonymous writer who related the adventures of one Balássi, a squire–brigand who was responsible for nine betrayals.

A fully fledged lyrical poeticism, however, can be found in the work of the brigand's nephew, Bálint Balássi (1554–94), a bit of a brigand himself. Hungarian poetry already had a well-established tradition dating back seven centuries and there were major talents both among Balássi's predecessors and his contemporaries; but his work stands out nonetheless. Balássi was a poet in the full sense of the word. He wrote of love, of the valiant knight in border fortresses, of nature and of God. A kind of Villon a hundred years after the French poet, Balássi was in fact a contemporary of Ronsard and Malherbe. The unprecedented intensity of feeling that flowed from his poems, the perfection of both

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form and language, a language that remains vibrantly alive to this day, heralded future golden ages of national literature.

The seventeenth century lived up to these promises: its literature is marked by the epic poetry of István Gyöngyösi and the more forceful Miklós Zrinyi (1620–64) of which more will be said later. The turn of the century had also seen the first encyclopaedia to be written in Hungarian, by János Apáczai Csere. Lastly, this was the era of Archbishop Péter Pázmány (1570–1637), the most important author of the Counter-Reformation and of pro-Habsburg tendencies, who opposed the policies of the Transylvanian princes. Among his most important works is an apologist treatise of the Catholic faith. Pázmány wrote both in Latin and Hungarian; the clarity and the style of his writing place him among the great writers of Hungarian literature.

TRANSYLVANIA'S CENTURY OF GREATNESS

In the middle of the sixteenth century, Transylvania, the third region of a now fragmented country – which included the borderland counties called Partium – became a recognised state, distinct from the other two regions. Administrative and cultural structures that emerged under Prince János Zsigmond, continued to evolve during the reign of István Báthori and his proxies, who governed the principality while he ruled over Poland. After his death, the country experienced a series of internal troubles under Zsigmond Báthori, who abdicated five times only to reclaim the throne each time. His frequent waverings were mirrored by external mishaps. In 1598, the imperial general, Giorgio Basta, entered Transylvania and instigated a reign of terror until 1604.

These events led to a key historical turning point, in the form of a long series of religious and anti-Habsburg wars. The leader of the first of these wars in 1604 was István Bocskai. He began by forming an army of free soldiers, called *hajdu* (haïduks), in the north-east of the country and was then joined by Transylvania's 'three nations'. What followed will be described later. Meanwhile, what were the resources and structures of this small principality, called upon to play a historic role that far exceeded its capacity?

Wars, famine and natural calamities at the turn of the century had caused demographic and economic disaster in the kingdom and the situation in Transylvania was not much better. Half of the population is

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said to have disappeared and 90 per cent of property is thought to have been damaged. These figures may seem exaggerated, but indicate the extreme gravity of the situation. The country soon recovered, however. Indeed, the seventeenth century came to be seen as its 'Golden Age'. By 1660, the population had reached its end-of-century level, 955,000 being the most accurate estimate. In reality, this figure comprised not three, but six main nationalities (and several small ones). Magyars and Szeklers constituted the majority (500,000), followed by the Romanians – or Walachians (280,000), the Saxon people (90,000), Serbians – or Rácz – Ukranians and others (85,000). Five languages were spoken and six religions practised, excluding the Jewish faith and sects such as the Sabbatarians or Abrahamites.

Magyar settlement dates back to the time of the conquest, when the indigenous Slavs and a host of other populations had been submerged. The bulk of the new conquerors left Transylvania in search of more fertile land and pasture on the plain, but the region remained under their military control. During the following centuries, it was resettled by Hungarians and Szeklers. There were no Germans or Romanians at the time in Transylvania, as evidenced by the exclusively Slav and Hungarian inscriptions in the cemeteries.

The Szeklers – who arrived with the conquerors in 895, probably as army auxiliaries – spoke Hungarian and are thought to be of Magyar or Turkish origin. They initially settled in western Hungary and then moved into Transylvania. Deployed to guard the eastern frontiers, western and central Transylvania had, by the thirteenth century, become their homeland and remains so to this day. The Szeklers constitute a homogeneous and tightly knit community which has preserved its own social and cultural characteristics. Traditionally, Szeklers were free and equal men – there were neither servants nor nobles, and their military leaders were chieftains. By the sixteenth century, the old military and social structures were eroding but it was still a closed society, fiercely protective of its freedoms, as proved by numerous uprisings. They allied themselves with the two other Transylvanian nations, the Magyars and the Saxons. Together, the three made up the Diet of Transylvanian States which seized its independence from the Hungarian Diet of the royal territory.

The origins of the Saxons in Transylvania date back to the early centuries of the conquest. The first wave of German settlers in the twelfth

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century, who came by invitation of King Géza III, was followed by many others. There were very few 'real Saxons' among them – they were as likely to come from Flanders, the Rhine region and Wallonia. Their first royal privilege dates back to 1224 as does their independent administrative and judiciary system. These settlers were highly civilised people who brought with them advanced agricultural techniques and artisanship and founded thriving urban centres such as Brassó (Kronstadt; Brasov, in Romania), Beszterce (Bistritz; Bistrita), and Szeben (Hermannstadt; Sibiu). They adopted the Lutheran and Melanchton evangelical faiths as preached by the scholar Johannes Honterus. Saxon churches and other Gothic buildings in towns and fortified villages are among the country's most beautiful monuments. Hardworking and commercially prosperous, Saxons provided the economic base for the seventeenth-century princes' 'golden age' .

The Romanian people, more significant in numbers, did not enjoy the same rights as the 'three nations', nor did their churches. The Orthodox religion was tolerated but not recognised to the same extent as Catholicism and Protestantism. Most Romanians, with the exception of the village chiefs (*kenéz*) and the boyars, who were assimilated into the Hungarian nobility, were serfs. Among the boyars was the Hunyadi family and, in the sixteenth century, one of Hungarian culture's most brilliant minds: Miklós Oláh, writer, humanist, historian and Archbishop of Esztergom.

Romanian settlements certainly existed in Transylvania around the same time as the Szeklers and Saxons, but there is no evidence to suggest any prior to the twelfth century. The issue divides Hungarian and Romanian historians, reflecting national ideological differences and seems likely to remain disputed for some time to come. What is at stake is scientific, political and ideological. The thesis sustained by the Romanian historians is not so much concerned with Romanian migrations during the Middle Ages and subsequent centuries, which are undisputed, but with a supposed unbroken 'Dacian-Roman' presence in the region since the retreat of the Roman Empire in Dacia. The thesis, while certainly of scientific interest, is clearly also political. It supports a kind of 'pre-emptive right' over Transylvanian lands, declared ancestral home of the Romanian people.

Evidence to support this claim is as fragile as the pieces of 'Dacian-Roman' pottery to be found scattered throughout eight centuries. It may be that vestiges of a population existing in Roman and post-

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Roman times have survived the centuries, but there is no trace in history of an actual Dacian-Roman people. Over the course of this vast stretch of time, possible survivors would have been assimilated with Slavs, settled to the north of the Danube from the seventh century, and with subsequent German and Turkish invaders. While a Slav presence is supported by numerous archaeological and linguistic discoveries, through the study of place names, as well as written sources, there are no Romanian place names, settlements or Dacian-Roman hills or rivers to be found.

The controversy nonetheless points up important historical issues: a henceforth large Romanian presence, deprived of political and religious rights enjoyed by the constitutionally recognised nations, carried the seeds of future ethnic conflicts, which would prove detrimental to the dominant Hungarian-speaking population.

One of the statues surrounding Calvin, Beza, Farel and Knox on the memorial to the Reformation in Geneva is that of Count István Bocskai, a great commander in the service of the versatile Prince Zsigmond Báthori. Born in 1557, Bocskai fought the Turks during the Fifteen Years' War and then turned on the Habsburgs. Between 1604 and 1606, he conducted a successful campaign against Rudolph II's army, and reached the gates of Vienna. But a reversal of fortune followed almost immediately. Bocskai was forced to retreat and enter into peace negotiations, leading to the Treaty of Vienna (1606), which guaranteed Transylvania's independence and religious freedom. The treaty was followed by a twenty-year tripartite peace treaty with the sultan. Bocskai died that same year.

However he may be judged, his brief era was a historical turning point. It ushered in a century of anti-Habsburg struggles, mainly led by Transylvanian princes. Their objective was always the same: to unify the country that had been torn apart under Hungarian sovereignty. The dilemma, too, was the same: how to drive both Turks and Habsburgs out of Hungary. Though weakened as a result of the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), the Habsburgs still had an empire behind them. As for the Ottoman Empire, it numbered 30 million subjects and possessed an army that was reputedly invincible. Faced with these two giants, Transylvania with its 1 million inhabitants and limited resources, was not up to the confrontation, even though it did succeed more than once in rallying the Habsburg kings' Hungarian subjects.

Despite all this, a particularly happy period began for Transylvania.

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Plate 13. View of Kassa in 1617

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Plate 14. Prince István Bocskai among his haïduks, 1605. Etching by Wilhelm Peter Zimmermann

'The Golden Age'

After some seven years of instability, the country found its brightest star in Gábor Bethlen (1613–29). At thirty-three, Bethlen was no political or military novice. He had played an important role under Bocskai and in the struggles over succession. He initially supported the young Gábor Báthori, but once the latter had succeeded in antagonising practically everyone through his excesses, Bethlen distanced himself, seeking instead the sultan's assistance. In October 1613 he was elected prince in particularly humiliating circumstances. The Diet was convened by the Turkish commander and was ordered to elect Bethlen. In return for Ottoman support, Bethlen had to suffer an additional humiliation: Istanbul wanted the retrocession of Lippa (Lipova, Romania), a fortress of great strategic importance. Bethlen was forced to besiege his own castle, defended by his own soldiers, clear it out and hand it over to the Turks. The incident did little to enhance his reputation, earning him the nickname 'Gábor, the Musulman'.

Thus the Golden Age got off to a bad start under his rule. He also made a number of internal mistakes and blunders, notably against the Saxon town Szeben, which he occupied by force; he later retracted his hasty actions, adopting a wiser and more considered position. He realised that the prosperity of his subjects was better for the treasury than despoilment or irregular and unpredictable fiscal policies. His economic policy proved fruitful; regulated foreign trade brought in revenues which in turn flowed back into the economy, and everyone profited in the end. The principality, though poorer than the kingdom, enjoyed prosperity. Thanks to the outstanding intelligence of the sober, flexible and tenacious Bethlen, for this small, rather backward and not very wealthy country, it was truly a 'Golden Age'. Urban centres developed apace; Renaissance buildings sprung up, public education reached unprecedented levels. Prince of the most easterly Protestant country – back to back with the Habsburgs – he was soon drawn in to the Thirty Years' War, which began with a conflict between Czech orders and Emperor Ferdinand II (1619–37), an implacable Counter-Reformer. Bethlen, called upon by the Protestant barons, joined the Czechs and crossed the entire territory of Upper Hungary, as far as the gates of Vienna. In 1620, during his triumphant march, the Hungarian Diet offered him the Crown, but the catastrophic Czech defeat at the Battle

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of the White Mountain cut him short. Nonetheless, the emperor was in a perilous position and Bethlen was quick to take advantage of this, negotiating a very favourable compromise. Under the Treaty of Nikolsburg (1621), he renounced the royal crown but maintained control of seven counties in Upper Hungary. His sovereignty over Transylvania was never questioned.

The prince attempted to launch his anti-Habsburg policy on two occasions. During the 'Danish period' (1625–9) of the Thirty Years' War, he found himself up against the legendary imperial general, Albrecht Wenzel Wallenstein. Though the general was driven out of Hungary, Bethlen failed to achieve his goal, which was unification. The 'equation' remained the same: the Habsburgs could only be driven out with the support of the Ottoman Empire. But in order to get rid of the latter, Bethlen would have to call upon the Habsburgs. In the end, enthusiasm waned. Transylvanian orders were unwilling to mobilise in support of a policy perceived as Bethlen's personal ambition, while the kingdom's orders wanted to curb powers conferred upon him by his elevation to royal status, which Bethlen had in any case turned down. He was unwilling to submit to a 'noble republic', a Hungarian version of the Polish Rzeczpospolita.

At a time when absolutism was taking hold in the well-rooted dynasties of Europe, the authority of the Transylvanian princes was of a more personal nature. None of them could claim birth status equal to the Bourbon Capetians, their contemporaries, or to the Tudors and Stuarts, any more than to the Habsburgs. Nor could they claim dynastic continuity. Gábor Bethlen and his brother István came from a Transylvanian noble family; they had been preceded by princes from the Báthori family, and would be followed by the Rákóczi family.

Several famous princes came from the two branches of the very old Báthori family. One of them, István, had been king of Poland. The family was extremely wealthy and left its mark on history. Some of its members succeeded in being the subjects of lively gossip: Zsigmond, who ascended to and subsequently lost the throne five times, was vilified for his infidelities; the young and seductive Gábor was renowned for his indiscretions. Their distant cousin Erzsébet (Elisabeth) Báthori, on the other hand, caused a genuine scandal and her story reflects the morals of the time in more ways than one. The handsome forty-year-old widow of a great squire and war leader, Ferenc Nádasdy, she was arrested, tried

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Plate 15. Gábor Bethlen, prince of Transylvania, 1620

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and convicted of torturing and murdering several of her servants. Legend goes further: she is then said to have bathed in the blood of her numerous victims. She was related to, and allied to, half the individuals figuring in the 'Gotha' Almanac – who between them possessed half the wealth of the 'two Hungarys'. Maximilian, the emperor and king of Hungary, personally attended her marriage in 1575. Thirty-five years later, the then bride was convicted of unspeakable crimes and incarcerated, walled up in a room in her castle, where she died a few years later, having gone completely mad.

The incident was enough for the accused to go down in history as the monster of the century and to become the object of countless epistolary exchanges, documents, risqué books and, finally, 'erotic' films which are still being made to this day. Two aspects of the trial, however, relate to other domains, one political and the other economic. The trial was 'instructed' – if one can use the term for this procedure – by the palatine Thurzó himself. If Elisabeth had been found guilty and sentenced to capital punishment, her enormous wealth, which would have been confiscated as a result, could have gone to a number of powerful barons. In the event, the sentence did not go the whole way: the 'ogress' was locked up and the family kept the fortune. On the other hand – perhaps coincidentally – the trial compromised Gábor Bethlen, the Transylvanian prince with royal aspirations, at the very time when Palatine Thurzó had designs himself on the Transylvanian throne . . . These intrigues shed light on the political and sexual morals of the day; Elisabeth Báthori may well have committed the crimes she was accused of – there is no real proof either way. Whatever came out of the so-called trial – during which witnesses were horribly tortured, others terrorised, and the accused deprived of the opportunity to defend herself – it was certainly not the truth of what really happened. What the mass of jumbled depositions and scripts *do* show is people's fertile imagination: Elisabeth was, according to various accounts, sadistic and lecherous, a pervert and a lesbian; as for her deceased husband, he was said to be homosexual, despite the couple having brought five children into the world.

With Gábor Bethlen's rise to power, the Báthori star faded and another family, the Rákóczi, came to preside over the principality's destiny. In the sixteenth century, the family had risen from the ranks of the common nobility thanks to Zsigmond, a valiant commander who

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was skilled at amassing wealth. His son, György (George) Rákóczi I (1630–48), managed the family fortune wisely and honourably, increasing his personal wealth as well as the principality's possessions in Upper Hungary. Rákóczi was a prudent man: though well known for his devotion – he was said to have read the Bible several dozen times over – and for his perseverance in defending the Protestant faith, he had little time for the Thirty Years' War. It was by then in its third and fourth phases, the 'Swedish' and the 'Franco-Swedish' ones, involving France at Richelieu's initiative. Rákóczi chose to withdraw three years before the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), the year of his death. He left behind a country that was well-governed, prosperous, and with an acquired habit of religious tolerance.

His son György Rákóczi II (1648–60) nurtured larger ambitions, though he turned out to be far less successful in his endeavours. He is chiefly criticised for a foolhardy incursion into Poland, taking advantage of the country being invaded from all sides. Rákóczi believed he could exploit the situation but his plan failed. He never recovered from the defeat and Transylvania's star fell with him. Successors of little significance followed and Transylvania's Golden Age came to an end. It was invaded by the Turks and later, in 1687, occupied by Leopold I's imperial army. György Rákóczi's son, Ferenc Rákóczi I, was also elected prince without actually being able to occupy the throne. Lastly, his heir, Ferenc Rákóczi II, was called upon to fulfil a great destiny at the beginning of the next century, but that particular episode belongs elsewhere in the story. From the middle of the seventeenth century, as Ottoman power declined, Hungary's political centre of gravity moved to the kingdom.

THE KINGDOM OF HUNGARY AND TURKEY UNTIL THE LIBERATION OF BUDA (1686)

More than any other, the seventeenth century in Hungary is riddled with contradictions. Despite its misfortunes, Hungary remained Europe's last bastion against the Ottoman invasion. Amidst the wars and ravages, new spiritual and cultural waves swept across the entire country and even its economy managed to survive. Vital links between the regions of this fragmented country remained intact. The first Hungarian Baroque writer, Péter Pázmány (1570–1637), the architect of

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the Counter-Reformation, articulated the need for role-sharing between the 'two Hungarys' in no uncertain terms: 'He who would incite you to break with the Turks, will be damned', Pázmány wrote to János Kemény, future prince of Transylvania. 'Pay what you must to the Porte', he advised, 'and keep your relations with the Christian sovereign over here [in other words, the Habsburg] amicable. Because without a flourishing Transylvania, he added, 'the Germans will be spitting behind our backs'.

The language is hardly episcopal, but the philosophical approach expressed here would have certainly been echoed by Archbishop György Fráter, murdered a century previously. Despite numerous conflicts between the 'two Hungarys', a tacit contract united the Magyars, their desire to liberate the entire country, though there was no consensus on how to go about achieving this.

It is difficult to understand this period without knowledge of the ambivalence of feelings, the splits, alliances and side-swapping that characterised the political landscape of the time; and there were other forces at work in this complex situation. Unlike the absolutism of Spain, the Stuarts or the Bourbons, the Austrian Habsburgs had to adopt a measured approach towards the various states that made up their rather heterogeneous family empire. While Czech resistance was easier to overcome, the legitimacy of the Hungarian state, defended by a large and powerful nobility, was a hard nut to crack. Indeed, the Hungarian states general did not cede to absolutism until the second half of Leopold I's long reign (1657–1705) – and even then only temporarily. Until that point, Vienna's interventions had been limited, tending to leave the task of governing – and the solving of domestic disputes – to the palatines and the Diet.

For centuries, an aristocracy of rich and powerful barons had risen from within a socially very differentiated nobility. Over time, through titles and influence, they had become a superior class. The kings ruling from Vienna wanted these magnates as allies and had therefore made several of them counts, even hereditary princes, among them the Pálffy, Nádasdy, Eszterházy, Wesselényi, Forgách and Csáky families. This new upper class would later form the upper chamber of the Diet.

The Counter-Reformation had changed the cultural and political landscape. Most squires returned, under duress or for convenience, to Catholicism. The political impact of a great squire's reconversion, such

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as Prince Ferenc Rákóczi I, who abandoned the Reformed religion of his ancestors under the influence of his mother, was likely to be considerable. Alliances and quarrels with either the Turks or the Habsburgs, as well as differences in religious loyalties, had serious political repercussions and were not easily overcome. Religious tolerance was far greater in Transylvania than in the kingdom; nonetheless, the success of the Counter-Reformation movement was not unequivocal: Hungary was predominantly Catholic but remained a multi-faith country. For reasons that were as much diplomatic as internal, Leopold I and his ministers were forced to contain their zeal. Cultural pluralism survived despite the Counter-Reformation campaign – through pressure, brutality and physical violence – of confiscations, and the occupation of churches and schools.

The cultural repercussions of these religious struggles were the re-emergence of the Catholic Church and its political influence, as well as their effect upon literature, education and the arts. Péter Pázmány founded a university; the Jesuits, established since 1561, spearheaded both religious propaganda and instruction. The Church and wealthy magnates like Eszterházy were responsible for the spread of baroque art and architecture in Hungary; Miklós Zrinyi had a sumptuous castle built at a time when a *kuria* (country mansion) was not very different from the home of a rich peasant. The devastated country awaited better times to improve its material circumstances.

The Viennese court's main preoccupation was to keep the peace both at home and abroad, so it left the Hungarian nobility to its own devices and did not interfere in its relationships with a peasantry now reduced to serfdom. Only the most enterprising of the rural class succeeded in escaping universal serfdom. As for the ephemeral and very relative prosperity of the sixteenth century, it soon disappeared due to unfavourable conditions in Europe, engulfed by technological and social stagnation and, most importantly, endemic and relentless warfare.

Trade and commerce were also adversely affected by Viennese policy. The government had adopted a more interventionist approach *vis-à-vis* trade than it did in political matters and one of its strategies had been the creation of trade monopolies (a practice also adopted in the principality), mainly entrusted to foreigners. Among the latter were several Jewish entrepreneurs, notably prosperous Viennese bankers Oppenheimer and Wertheimer, who dealt in army supplies. Monopolies in the trade of

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cattle, ore, glass and other products seriously reduced the scope for a free market and the income of the proprietors. 'Money, silver and gold left the country by the cartload', Zrinyi wrote. Only a handful of rich and enterprising magnates threw themselves into 'undignified' commercial activities.

Expectations following the Treaty of Westphalia (1648)

The great dignitaries loyal to the king had not forgotten their duty: that of preparing for the decisive war against Turkish occupation, despite the reticence of the Habsburgs. One of the architects of this policy of resoluteness was the palatine, Miklós Eszterházy, and Count Pál Pálffy, a stalwart supporter of Emperor–King Ferdinand III, followed in his footsteps. The significance of Pálffy's election in 1649 was that this Catholic and aulic was supported by none other than Transylvania's Protestant prince, György Rákóczi II, against candidates belonging to his own faith. As baron and prince, Rákóczi had the inalienable right to participate personally or via a representative at the Diet of the kingdom. It was a sign of the times that Rákóczi, whose younger brother Zsigmond was to play an important part in the political life of the kingdom, was prepared to go to war on King Leopold's side, against the Turks.

The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) had raised hopes that Christian forces could at last combine to drive out the sultan. But Mazarin, at the head of the 'Mazarins', had other concerns, as had Spain, which was in decline, and Lord Protector Cromwell, who had just beheaded Charles I. As for Ferdinand III, bearing an imperial crown that had lost all its substance, he was more interested in negotiating peace with the Porte than in risking confrontation. Such evasion was not well received in Hungary. Attempts to turn the situation around, to sway Ferdinand – and then his successor Leopold – and to maintain a united anti-Turkish front of the 'two Hungarys', persisted for over a decade. Palatine Pálffy's contribution was to maintain good rapport with Prince Rákóczi and with his brother Zsigmond. The authority of the latter, a brilliant statesman and audacious diplomat, was further strengthened – provoking suspicion in Vienna – by his marriage to Henriette de Pfalz. The nuptials were celebrated by Comenius, the celebrated Czech humanist and priest of the Moravian order, who lived in Sárospatak at

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the time, a Hungarian fiefdom belonging to the Rákóczis. The Swedish ambassador also attended, bearing messages of goodwill from Queen Christina.

A number of political players left the scene in the 1650s, a decade of hopes and disappointments. Pálffy (who, in the meantime, had switched sides) and Zsigmond were dead, but other patriots persevered in their determination to fight against the Ottoman power, with all the national and foreign means they could muster.

The most eminent among them was Count Miklós Zrinyi (1620–64), poet and general, bán of Croatia. His literary contribution and his military and political role earned him an extraordinary reputation in the 1650s. During the Turkish wars of the 1660s, he became the uncontested leader of the nation.

After he had written a few minor works, Zrinyi's literary career took off. In the winter of 1645–6, the 'Phoenix of the Century' wrote an epic poem which recounted and exalted the heroic fight and death of his forefather commander of Szigetvár, who fell in 1566 under the attack of Suleiman the Magnificent. *The Siege of Sziget*, considered a masterpiece by posterity, brought him far less acclaim at the time than his numerous political and military treatises. This bold and passionate epic, a historical fresco written in language 'capable of moving mountains', was nonetheless the first significant landmark in his work and his fate. He was to dedicate both his work and life to the struggle for freedom.

> I, who in times before, with youthful mind
> my pleasure in the poems of sweet love would find,
> and battled with Viola's depriving cruelty
> would sing this time a louder, martial poetry
> of weapons and men, the might of Turks I sing,
> of him, who bravely faced the Sultan, expecting
> the wrath of the arms of the great ruler Suleiman,
> who all over Europe held in terror the hearts of men.
>
> From *The Siege of Sziget* or *Obsidio Szigetiana*, translated by Thomas Kabdebo, in *In Quest of the 'Miracle Stag': The Poetry of Hungary* (Budapest: Corvina Publishers, ISBN 963–13–4282–4)

Among his many prose publications, his *Reflections of the Life of King Matthias* marked an important stage in his political thinking. In evoking King Hunyadi, Zrinyi wanted to disseminate the idea of a

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Plate 16. Portrait of Miklós Zrinyi, poet and general. Brass engraving by Gerhard Bouttats from a painting by Johannes Thomas

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national kingdom. The historical narrative was, in other words, barely veiled anti-Habsburg propaganda, putting forward the idea that under the leadership of a strong – even absolutist – national king, the Turks could be driven out and the country reunited. Another essay, *The Antidote to Turkish Opium*, is also an exhortation to awaken the sluggish spirit of the nation.

There was a saying at the time, attributed to the great genius in the military arts, Raimondo Montecuccoli (who would later fight Turenne on the Rhine), that the nerve centre of war was 'money, money, money'. By force of circumstances, Zrinyi professed a rather different philosophy. His slogan, suitable for the light of purse was 'weapons, weapons and the determination of valiant men'.

In the 1660s, the war that Zrinyi had longed for finally arrived, in fits and starts. It began with omens that did not bode well: the grand vizier, Ahmed Küprülü, defeated Transylvania, then turned on the kingdom. His troops besieged Ersekujvár (Nové Zámky), a stone's throw from Pozsony and only a little further from Vienna. Zrinyi nonetheless had some successes during the 1663–4 winter campaign, as did Montecuccoli – the commander-in-chief who replaced Zrinyi – crushing the Turks at St Gotthard in August 1664. But to no avail: ten days after the St Gotthard victory, Emperor–King Leopold signed a peace treaty at Vásvár. Although Turkish power was by now on the decline, its conquests in Hungary were at their peak. A 'dynasty' of grand viziers, the Küprülüs, who had originated in Albania, had taken over the government, the administration and the army. There was talk of a 'Küprülü Renaissance', extremely efficient on the military front, but it was short-lived. After the Treaty of Vásvár, everyone's hopes focused more than ever on Zrinyi, the star of the nation. He was disapproved of in Vienna, regarded as dangerous, influential and as having ambitions that were a threat to the throne. But Zrinyi only had one hundred days to live. In November 1664, in mysterious circumstances, he was killed by a wild boar.

As far as the Viennese court was concerned, the boar was providential indeed, but it did not end agitation against Leopold's and his ministers' policy of appeasement. Public opinion was crying out for the expulsion of the Turks, leading to the 'Wesselényi conspiracy'. Count Ferenc Wesselényi headed a group of barons who wanted to galvanise the court's fighting spirit and the ardour of a dissatisfied nobility, who

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were, however, reluctant to make sacrifices. Miklós Zrinyi had been the original leader of this movement, and his brother Péter Zrinyi followed in his footsteps, as well as Wesselényi the palatine, and Ferenc Nádasdy, who would succeed him as royal lieutenant general (the palatinate having been suspended). Also taking part was Mihály Apafi, prince of Transylvania. The conspirators' plans were far-reaching, involving an alliance with France – and even with the Porte itself – and an insurrection of the nobility. After Wesselényi's death in 1667, the conspiracy lost momentum. The Porte's response was discouraging and France shied away from any involvement. France's military efforts had been, in any case, very limited until then. The Very Christian King was mainly concerned with ensuring that the emperor – whom he called 'captain general of a German Republic' – did not derive any glory from a victory over the infidels.

From 1667, the conspiracy nevertheless took off once again, this time led by Rákóczi. An insurrection took place but was put down, partly due to a lack of fighting men. The only ones to have joined the uprising were offended nobles and harassed Protestants. The leaders ended up on the scaffold, except for the untouchable Prince Rákóczi who, under the protection of his devoutly Catholic mother, reconverted and 'turned against' the other conspirators. The great fortunes confiscated in the repression that ensued benefited Vienna handsomely. Common sense dictated moderation – the government did not want to stoke the fire – but absolutism was on the rise. Leopold I crossed another threshold when he suspended the Hungarian Constitution. In 1674–5, persecution hit the Protestant preachers: they were condemned and forty-two of them sold as slaves to the galleys.

Meanwhile, a new phenomenon was born: the *kuruc* movement (the name derives from the word crusader) was the focus for all victims fleeing persecution, called *bujdosók* ('fugitives'), and thousands of soldiers who had been dismissed from the defence line fortresses and replaced by imperial soldiers. The 'fugitives' found an ally in Mihály Apafi, the last prince of Transylvania, and battles against the imperial forces ensued. Finally, in 1677, Louis XIV granted the *kuruc* the sum of 100,000 thalers and sent 2,000 French soldiers to support them. A young baron named Imre Thököly (1657–1705) became head of the movement and was appointed general in 1680.

Thököly won numerous battles: he conquered almost the whole of

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Upper Hungary. The Porte, which until then had tended to curb the struggle against the kingdom, ended up supporting Thököly and even bestowed upon him the royal title. In the same year, 1682, the brilliant 25-year-old commander married 39-year-old Ilona Zrinyi, niece of the legendary Miklós Zrinyi and widow of Prince Ferenc Rákóczi. From then on, Ilona Zrinyi governed the prince's fabulous domain, Munkács Castle. She became part of national mythology for fighting alongside Thököly and for heroically defending Munkács against besieging imperial troops. After three years of siege, Ilona Zrinyi surrendered, and was taken to Vienna as a prisoner, separated from her children, one of them the future Ferenc Rákóczi II. For the time being, however, the prince was but a youngster and it is still his stepfather, Thököly, who concerns us here.

The turbulent epic that was his life lasted until 1690, when he was defeated by the imperial forces after a brief month on the Transylvanian throne. Thököly – courageous, colourful and energetic – was the embodiment of all the ambiguities and contradictions of his time. The Transylvanian princes had tried on several occasions to unite the 'two Hungarys' with the help, or consent, of the Ottoman government. 'Turkophilia' also took hold in the kingdom. After the disappointments that followed the Treaty of Westphalia – or as Zrinyi put it, 'the missed opportunity' – and in the aftermath of the 1664 Treaty of Vásvár, scores of high dignitaries, palatines, seneschals and high commanders appointed by the king were ready to offer the country to the sultan on a plate.

Despite an abundance of historical documents, it is difficult to evaluate this 'Turkophilia' and to understand the thinking behind it. Transylvania had no choice but to seek an alliance with the Porte. But the fact remains that a Hungary under perennial Ottoman domination in Europe is hard to imagine. Circumstances had changed, following the Treaty of Westphalia. Habsburg ambitions had turned away from the Holy Roman Empire towards Austria. Common sense dictated that Hungary's interests lay, for better or for worse, with the Habsburgs and with Europe. Thököly's headlong rush into the adventure of a war of national liberation against Vienna, waving the flag of 'independence under the emblem of the crescent', can only be seen as fuelled by the vision of a rather dubious utopia.

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The deliverance of Vienna and the liberation of Buda

In 1683, the sultan made an assault on Vienna, via Hungary. The Turkish offensive had been predicted: diplomats and spies did not fail to signal the signs of preparation. Whether he liked it or not, Emperor Leopold was now forced to act and, in order to do so, had to win the support of the German states. There were supposedly 300,000 men in the Turkish camp and though research suggests that these figures, as many others, are probably exaggerated, it was nonetheless a massive offensive, comprising the Ottoman army supported by Tatars, the Transylvanian Prince Mihály Apafi's troops, who had been ordered to join up, and – of course – Thököly. While the Turks pushed up towards Vienna, on the right bank of the Danube, Thököly was responsible for the left bank, and was joined by most Hungarians of the region, if not inspired by the vision of a unified land then out of simple cowardice. Whatever the reason, there were very few Hungarians on the ramparts to defend Vienna from the Turks.

In July, the emperor suddenly withdrew to Linz, but the capital's commander, Ernst Rüdiger of Starhemberg, successfully defended the now surrounded town. Major General Charles IV of Lorraine, meanwhile, crushed Thököly before rushing to Vienna's rescue. The famous and decisive Battle of Kahlenberg took place on 12 September 1683. John Sobieski, king of Poland, at fifty-four years of age, led the rescue army, and set off on the attack, at the head of his formidable heavy cavalry. The besieged, meanwhile, made a sortie, catching the Ottomans in a pincer movement.

It was a great victory and was followed by the recapture of numerous Hungarian towns and fortresses. The pasha of Buda held on to the town for another three years. At the instigation of Pope Innocent XI, a new Holy League was formed to continue the war, which cost tens of millions of florins per year. In 1686, an allied army set off towards Buda, under the command of the duke of Lorraine, this time with a large Hungarian contingent.

The siege began in June. The old pasha of Buda, Abdi Abdurrahman – a Swiss renegade or an Albanian? – was well prepared, with 10,000 men, 400 canons, and with reliable sources of ammunition and supplies. He was also counting on the arrival of the grand vizier with an army to assist him. The siege lasted seventy-eight days, with an apocalyptic final

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Map 7. Hungary after the expulsion of the Turks

scene. Eight hundred tonnes of gunpowder were ignited under the ramparts, making victory for the Christians seem an inevitability, but the pasha put his trust in Allah, blocked up the holes, and continued to resist till his dying moment, thus escaping the cord that the sultan always sent to his beaten generals. The imperial forces did win in the end and, on 2 September, Buda was liberated – the Turkish rescue army did not even get the chance to join the battle.

According to the duke of Lorraine, there were 4,000 Turkish soldiers dead and 6,000 prisoners. The town, already reduced to rubble, was now on fire. An Italian colonel, who led the siege tactics according to the Vauban technique, set about trying to rescue what he could of the *Corviniae* volumes from King Matthias's fabulous library from the debris. He also made an inventory of Turkish buildings, mosques, baths and schools.

The cruelty of the conquering soldiers was well on a par with that of the Turks and the Tatars: as well as the usual pillaging, there was, as throughout the entire war, much slaughter. Despite Charles de Lorraine's orders to save them, around five hundred Jews, half the community, were massacred. Turkish prisoners were tortured and killed, their skins flayed to be dried and sold to apothecaries in Germany – the powder that was produced from them was a sought-after remedy.

Christianity celebrated the symbolic liberation of Buda, but the war was not over yet. Over the next two decades, each fortress, each town had to be recaptured until the Ottomans left the country and, in 1699, signed a peace treaty at Karlóca (Sremski Karlovci, Serbia). The legendary Prince Eugene of Savoy was by then at the head of the imperial army; Leopold I still reigned in Vienna; Louis XIV was at his peak at Versailles; while Hungary, liberated but now subjected to Vienna, was about to undergo further ordeals. Over a century and a half had gone by – 173 years to be exact – since the Battle of Mohács. But a new insurrection was about to erupt.

'RECRUDESCUNT VULNERA': THE INSURRECTION OF FERENC RÁKÓCZI II

Prince Rákóczi's insurrection, planned since 1700, set in motion in 1703 and terminated in 1711, was just one incident in a larger pattern of anti-Habsburg movements and wars that had been going on, parallel to the

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Turkish wars, ever since historical Hungary had split into three kingdoms. 'Bearing in mind that no fewer than five wars were conducted within a century, one could say that they were continuous', wrote Prince Ferenc Rákóczi in his *Memoires*, written in French during his exile in France years later. The wars he refers to had been led by Transylvanian princes, among them his own ancestors. His own war was the sixth. His famous 1704 proclamation, intended to unite the nobility and the people under his banner, begins: *Recrudescunt diutina inclytae gentis Hungariae vulnera* – 'Once again, the ancient wounds of the glorious Hungarian nation are open.'

The future Ferenc Rákóczi II (he succeeded in being elected prince of Transylvania in 1704 and of Hungary in 1705), son of Prince Ferenc Rákóczi I and Ilona Zrinyi, was born in 1676, shortly before the death of his father. When his mother was taken to Vienna in 1688, Ferenc Rákóczi was separated from her and raised by Jesuits under the surveillance of the imperial court and a tutor, Archbishop Léopold Kollonich. The young Rákóczi eventually freed himself from his guardians, married and returned to his lands in Upper Hungary. After his initial refusal, Rákóczi associated himself with Miklós Bercsényi's insurrectionist projects. The latter became his closest friend and future general of his armies.

It was now 1700. Rákóczi's greatest hope was Louis XIV, who had previously supported the *kuruc* movements. But initial contacts with the king proved costly. Rákóczi's correspondence with Versailles was intercepted at Vienna and he was thrown into prison. He managed to escape and fled to Poland, to his relatives, the Sieniawski-Lubomirskis. In 1703, he returned to Upper Hungary to lead the insurrection. From that moment on, alliance with France became the cornerstone of his policy. For France, caught up in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–16), an insurrection against the Habsburgs was potentially very useful. So, the Very Christian King granted him an annual subsidy of around 30,000 then 50,000 pounds until 1708, out of a French military budget estimated at 1 million per year (Goubert). The king of France, however, side-stepped the alliance, even though in 1707, Rákóczi, at the king's request, had directed the Onód Diet to proclaim the deposition of the House of Austria.

Though conscious of the fact that he could not rely on France's military support, he had consented to the wishes of the king, following the

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Plate 17. Portrait of Ferenc Rákóczi II. Painting by Ádám Mányoki, 1712

failure of peace negotiations with Emperor Joseph I (1705–11), who was more benevolent than his father Leopold. As Rákóczi himself wrote with considerable perceptiveness, the loss of the Battle of Blenheim in 1704 (Marlborough's victory) had shattered 'my faith in the help of foreign troops', the one foundation upon which 'I went into this

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war', hoping to link up with the elector of Bavaria, who was allied to the French. Rákóczi nonetheless continued to wage war for a number of years, until 1711, and his respect for Louis XIV would remain intact. It was reciprocated right up until and beyond the insurrection: the exiled prince was well received at Versailles.

Rákóczi was undoubtedly the more naive of the two protagonists and the Sun King the more calculating. For the latter, Rákóczi was a potential ally, a back-up in a huge struggle involving 300,000 French soldiers against a coalition led by Marlborough and Eugene of Savoy. In other words, the prospects of the two sides were rather unequal. The same was true for Rákóczi's alliance with Tsar Peter I, before and after the latter's victory over Sweden at Poltava (1709).

The causes of the insurrection undoubtedly lay in Leopold I's absolutism – which did not go down well with the nobility – and extortion of all kinds inflicted upon the population at large. Rákóczi was galvanised into action for these reasons and others. He felt that it was God's will that he should lead the fight because of 'the desire for Freedom in the hearts of Youth' and to 'teach the kings of the House of Austria that the Hungarian nation could not be led through servile fear, but would willingly accept the yoke of paternal love'. He resented Leopold for having replaced the elective kingdom with a hereditary one, and for having 'fleeced Trassilvania [sic] of a national prince'. In his *Mémoires*, he also explains a number of contradictions – or ineluctable difficulties – in his project. He denies having led a religious war, and rightly so, since he was a Catholic prince with Protestant ancestors and had been at the head of mainly Protestant nobles, of a Russian (Ruthenian) peasant army, and other Slavs and haïduks. He may well have contributed to Hungary remaining a multi-ethnic and multi-denominational country. A reading of the *Mémoires* also reveals his concern to reconcile the divergent interests of the various social classes who had gathered under his banner. Being a prince, he would never have been able to reconcile himself with leading a peasant insurrection, nor could he have envisaged managing without noble officers and the political participation of the nobility. For him the nobility, along with the Constitution, was indistinguishable from the nation that would win back its rights and freedoms through insurrection. But in order to succeed in uniting an army of 70,000 men at the height of the war, Rákóczi had to exhort the people, the bare-foot serfs who made up the majority, badly

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equipped, undisciplined – but present nevertheless. The prince–general had exempted them not only from state but also seigneurial taxes, and had promised that at the end of the war they would be granted 'haïduk freedoms', knowing full well that this would antagonise the landowners. In the end, it was one of his own serfs, the future brigadier, Tamás Esze, who brought the first peasant troops to him. What is striking in the *Mémoires* is the prince's obvious attachment to his soldiers, these 'ragged kurucs', these 'tolpaches' as they were known colloquially. The name *kuruc* was immediately countered with *labanc*, the name given to partisans of the imperial camp, an opposition that would remain in the public domain right up until the political struggles of the nineteenth century.

Despite the pessimism that Rákóczi had already felt by the second year of the war, he fought on until 1711, we do not quite know why. It is said that he felt a moral obligation towards the bare-foot serfs who had pinned their hopes on him, while some historians explain his perseverance as an obstinate desire to preserve Transylvania.

Whatever the reason, the war continued through its ups and downs. The *kuruc* generals, the likes of Bercsényi, Tamás Esze, Károlyi, Bottyán, won some battles and lost others, against an army that was for the most part numerically smaller but technically superior, better armed, organised and led. At its peak in 1707–8, the *kuruc* army held most of the country, but was then beaten by the imperial general, Siegbert Heiste, provoking the desertion of tens of thousands of soldiers. From then on, accompanied by numerous betrayals, the light of the *kuruc* was on the wane.

To top it all, after Villars's defeat against Marlborough and Prince Eugene at Malplaquet, Louis XIV let it be known that he intended to make peace with the Habsburgs. Any remaining hopes placed in an alliance with Peter I also evaporated. The insurrection retreated into Upper Hungary and was eventually forced to bow down before the new imperial general-in-chief, Count János Pálffy. Rákóczi's general, Count Sándor Károlyi, ordered surrender and, backed by the Diet's authorisation, signed the peace treaty on 30 September 1711 at Szatmár. Though Rákóczi had discussed the matter with Pálffy, he was not present at the occasion and accused Károlyi of betrayal. The judgement of history tended to be less severe towards Károlyi, and considered the peace clauses offered by Pálffy to be relatively fair. Emperor–King Joseph I,

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eager for reconciliation with the Hungarians, granted the rebels total amnesty, the restitution of their confiscated property, religious peace, respect for the Constitution and the safeguard of tax exemptions formerly achieved: in short, he balanced the interests of everyone at all levels. Unlike their experience under Leopold's absolutist measures, the orders found their powers consolidated by the will of King Joseph and his successor Charles III (1711–40) – Charles VI as Holy Roman emperor – who signed the treaty.

By then the insurrection was in any case a lost cause. The nobility was divided, the peasantry exhausted and their foreign allies had abandoned them. The long-suffering towns had now been subjected to war for two centuries and the copper currency, called *Pro Libertate*, was worthless. The insurrection had run out of steam. Gyula Szekfü, in his stern work concerning Rákóczi in exile, writes that the Hungarian people, unlike the émigrés, had no desire to 'chase the past', but simply wanted to breathe freely again and look to the future. Prince Rákóczi, on the other hand, despite the historian's respect for him, is portrayed somewhat like a sleepwalker, primarily obsessed with his Transylvanian principality which, in face of the categoric refusal of the Viennese court, nobody, not even the Sun King himself, could get back for him. By virtue of the 'Leopold diploma' the autonomy of the province was initially recognised, but was then annexed to the Crown and subjected to Viennese administration. It was under these auspices, a blend of uncertainty and hopes, that Hungary entered, rather belatedly as usual, the eighteenth century.

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4

Vienna and Hungary: absolutism, reforms, revolution, 1711–1848/9

When in 1711 the insurrectional army laid down its weapons and Prince Ferenc Rákóczi began his exile – first in Poland and then in France – a century of momentous change was just dawning in Europe. Whereas France had dominated the previous period, with the death of Louis XIV its power was waning and England, ruler of the waves, was now becoming preponderant. England's main preoccupation was to establish an equilibrium among the continental powers that at this time included a few newcomers: the Prussia of Frederick William I, the 'soldier-king', and of his son Frederick II, the Great (1740–86), with its modern and formidable army and the Russia of Peter I, the Great (1682–1725), which had emerged as a great power. Under the empress, Catherine II, the Great (1762–96), the Russian Empire would later expand at the expense of the Ottoman Empire and the three-part division of Poland. As for the Habsburgs, their hold over Spain had been broken (1700), their hold over Germany weakened, but they succeeded in constructing Austria and their hereditary provinces, centre of the empire, at the frontier of the Hungarian kingdom. King Charles III, Charles VI (1711–40) as Holy Roman emperor, and Maria Theresa (1740–80) made Vienna the splendid capital of the monarchy. Viennese power was put to the test by a series of crises triggered by Frederick the Great: the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–8), the Seven Years' War (1756–63), and the last of the Turkish wars. Vienna withstood them all, until Napoleon that is. This was the international context in which Hungary had to find its new place within Europe and, more specifically, within the Habsburg Empire.

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TOWARDS A COMPROMISE WITH VIENNA

Peace with Vienna in 1711 rested on a tacit agreement: the nation, represented by the nobility-dominated estates, would lay down its arms and the imperial winner, for his part, would negotiate an honourable compromise. The latter was sketched out between the two opposing generals at Szatmár – both *kuruc* and *labanc* belonged to the Hungarian upper nobility – and validated by Joseph I's successor, Charles III. According to tradition, the king pledged his good will to the Diet and promised to govern in keeping with its laws, in other words, with the constitution that dated back to the Golden Bull of the thirteenth century, and with the codified and customised laws which ensured the prerogatives of the states general.

Since 1608, prelates and barons had sat at the Table of the Diet with the magnates and the 104 noble deputies of the fifty-two counties, while members of the lower clergy and of the towns and bourgs sat at the lower Table. The Diet was far from being a representative assembly since, due to the large number of towns and villages that were dependencies of the nobility, it was essentially dominated by nobles. The estates formed national and county diets, thus constituting for most of the time a counterbalance to royal power – except during periods of absolutism.

This duality of royal and estates power remained in place after 1711 and especially subsequent to the 1722–3 Diet, despite the fact that a number of decisions were taken by the Viennese administration and that long holidays had to be taken by the Diet. The traditional army was replaced by a permanent army and the Lieutenant Council, named by the king, became a government organ. Maria Theresa did change some of these arrangements, but the hour for structural modernisation via absolutism had not yet struck.

The Pragmatic Sanction

In contrast to attempts at absolutism by his father Leopold, Charles III was more interested in pacifying the dominant classes than in breaking them. The latter, rather than continue to chase the mirage of total national independence were, in any case, determined to profit from the compromise. The essential counterpart to the king's conciliatory policy was for the Diet to accept the Pragmatic Sanction, concerning succession

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by the female branch of the Habsburgs, which had been in place in the hereditary provinces since 1713. This the king achieved through the 1722–3 law. The Diet's decision meant that the six-year-old Maria Theresa's path to the throne was now clear. Along with her future husband, Francis of Lorraine, Maria Theresa founded the House of Habsburg-Lorraine, which would reign until the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy at the end of the First World War.

Power-sharing between the king and the estates benefited both. The nation maintained its status and identity, but without meeting the demands of full sovereignty. However, the spanner that was put in the works of absolutism also ended up thwarting modernisation. The territorial integrity of historical Hungary was not entirely restored during the time of Charles and Maria Theresa. Transylvania was administered directly by a governor designated by the sovereign and receiving instructions from the Vienna chancellery. Romanian and Szekler territories were separated and organised into military frontier defence regions (or borders), called *Militärgrenze* in German. Such frontiers already existed on the Serbian and Croatian borders in the country's southern banates, where frontier guards were to contain Turkish incursions. The military regions were part of the lands belonging to the Hungarian Crown, but were under the command of the Military Council of Vienna. Austrian control over the administration of these regions fuelled a constitutional conflict that would endure for over a hundred years.

The setting-up of a permanent army was necessary both to ensure the kingdom's security and to support the successive wars that Maria Theresa would conduct against Prussia. The old system of levying troops, called 'noble insurrection', was becoming dated – the last one would take place in 1809 against Napoleon. The permanent army of around 300 to 400,000 men, one third Hungarian, was placed under the leadership of the Viennese Military Council; its general officers and language of command were German. All aspects of society, including army organisation, civil administration, finances, education and religious practice, were revised numerous times during the course of the century. Maria Theresa's absolutism was moderate. For example, she made a number of concessions that favoured the Hungarian estates but it was a fragile *modus vivendi* and the compromise required constant renegotiation.

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MARIA THERESA AND THE BAROQUE

Maria Theresa (1740–80) was twenty-three years old when she acceded to the archdukedom of Austria, then, in 1741, to the royal crown of Hungary and Bohemia. By her side was her husband Francis of Lorraine, whom she made prince consort in Austria and succeeded in having elected Holy Roman emperor in 1745. Despite her multiple crowns, Maria Theresa began her reign with bad omens. As soon as it became known that her father was dead, Frederick II of Prussia started the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–8) and invaded Silesia. He was not the only one to covet the dismemberment of the Austrian states. Charles-Albert of Bavaria also entered the fray, contesting the legitimacy of the Pragmatic Sanction and making claims upon the imperial crown. France, meanwhile, recognised Maria Theresa's Austrian rights, but not her succession to the imperial title. So France also joined the succession war.

Thus, Maria Theresa's tribulations began from the moment she was crowned at Pozsony and found herself in desperate need of the Hungarian orders' support. Almost all her possessions were at stake and her powerful enemies, Prussia, Bavaria and France, no doubt dreamt of sharing out the spoils. Hungarian loyalty remained a precious asset to her throughout the wars, even after she had succeeded in consolidating the Austrian army, and state finances and administration.

The Hungarian Diet of 1741 did not disappoint her. The states general responded to her requests with the cry: '*Vitam et sanguinem pro Rege nostro Maria Teresia*', offering her their lives and their blood. According to an anecdote, probably an invented one, some lords supposedly added under their breath: '*sed avenam non*' – but no oats. Indeed, in article 63 of the law, the Diet had also voted for 'oats', in other words, the mass levying of troops from the nobles ('the insurrection') as well as setting up an army recruited by 'porta', that is of bonded serfs. Serbian soldiers and the Transylvanian cavalry were also mobilised. This would have provided an army of 100,000 men. In fact, the estimate is closer to 60,000, perhaps even less to begin with. Figures fluctuate later, doubling or even trebling according to wars and circumstances. Nonetheless, the Hungarian army of the 1740s, heterogeneous and rather outdated though it was, saved the Habsburg-Lorraines. The Hungarian regiments went on to fight in every single one of their

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queen's wars; among the most courageous of her generals in the Seven Years' War against Frederick II were Counts Ferenc Nádasdy and András Hadik. In the final analysis, despite losing Silesia, the Austrian Empire ended up stronger than before, not least due to two efficient ministers, Friedrich Wilhelm Haugwitz and Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz. Each in his own way contributed to the modernisation of the administration and finances, but could not interfere with Hungarian affairs.

The scene of Maria Theresa's coronation at Pozsony has been immortalised in paintings, literature and history books as an alliance between a chivalrous nation and a tearful queen forever grateful to them. The queen, who underlined the particular state rights of the kingdom through her diploma and who restored, for a while at least, the palatine's role, was indeed extremely benevolent towards the Hungarians.

Before moving to a description of the situation at the time, which was improving daily thanks to Maria Theresa's reforms, an outline of her contradictory personality is needed. That she was intelligent is beyond any doubt, but she was culturally limited. Her German was restricted to the Viennese dialect, which she spoke fluently; her French was mediocre, despite its being the *lingua franca* at court. The empress was both a moderniser and strongly attached to conservative values, a profoundly religious Catholic and yet quite tolerant towards Protestants – although she supported the Counter-Reformation. She was devout, maternal, and marked by the contrasting traits of 'the spirit of the age': the baroque – a mixture of mysticism, pathos and glitter.

'The Baroque – Gloom or Glory', is the title of a chapter in a book in French by Victor L. Tapié on the Danubian monarchy. The moot question, without interrogation mark, finds an answer precisely in the harmony of difference. In Maria Theresa charity, sensitivity and piety were the undoubted foundation stone. A bishop present at her coronation compared her governance to a building with many storeys: its foundations were the queen's sanctity; the first floor symbolised the Hungarian nation and its freedoms; while the upper floors were the Crown and a peaceful government; finally, the attic contained Jacob's ladder reaching up towards the sky and the Holy Virgin, symbolising Hungary as the kingdom of its patron, Maria – *Regnum Marianum*. This metaphor, however confused, gives an idea of what might be called the baroque in politics. According to the Hungarian historian Szekfü,

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Plate 18. Maria Theresa wearing the Hungarian crown

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the dual political system donned baroque garb, in the sense that eternal confrontation was replaced by a search for equilibrium and the illusion of timelessness.

If the spirit of the baroque is hard to define in the political domain, it is much easier to identify through architecture and in the wind of civilisation that blew through the century. A new landscape was being drawn. At first, it appeared in churches, chapels and castles built in the manner of the Italian baroque style of the previous century. Some magnates like Miklós Zrinyi wrote, built and lived in the baroque style. But the flourishing of the baroque is primarily attributable to a desire and a need to rebuild a country from the ruins and neglect of the previous centuries. Towns like Buda, Eger, Vác, Veszprém, and into Transylvania (where the great Protestant Prince Gábor Bethlen's legacy lived on), bear the marks of this reconstruction. As for the Great Plain, there were numerous flourishing peasant towns thanks to the sultans' wisdom, but there was also an extended wilderness of ruined market towns and villages which were now rebuilt in baroque style, to the extent that it is not uncommon to see an Orthodox church in non-Magyar regions built in this quintessentially Roman Catholic style.

Wealthier magnates, like Eszterházy, constructed the most sumptuous castles at Kismarton (Eisenstadt, Austria) and Fertöd – previously called Eszterháza. For thirty years, up until 1790, Joseph Haydn composed his works and directed the great lord's orchestra in these palaces. Count Antal Grassalkovich's, one of them at Gödöllö, were also famous. In all, around 200 baroque castles were built countrywide, along with manor houses, schools and public buildings. Some great artists like Georg Raphäel Donner left marks of their genius not only in Prague and Vienna, but in Hungary too. Donner was a sculptor at Archbishop Imre Eszterházy's court, of the town of Pozsony and the altar of St Paul's monastery. For a country still recovering, subjected to Turkish wars up until the 1780s, and to the ravages of the plague and cholera, reconstruction efforts were remarkable even if Hungarian baroque remained less widespread than its counterpart in Prague or Vienna.

Since the court was in Vienna, many Hungarian magnates had their palaces built in the imperial city. It was a custom that gave rise to the view that the eighteenth century was 'aulic' and 'anti-national'. Be that as it may, civilisation spread to all domains: town planning, public instruction and literature.

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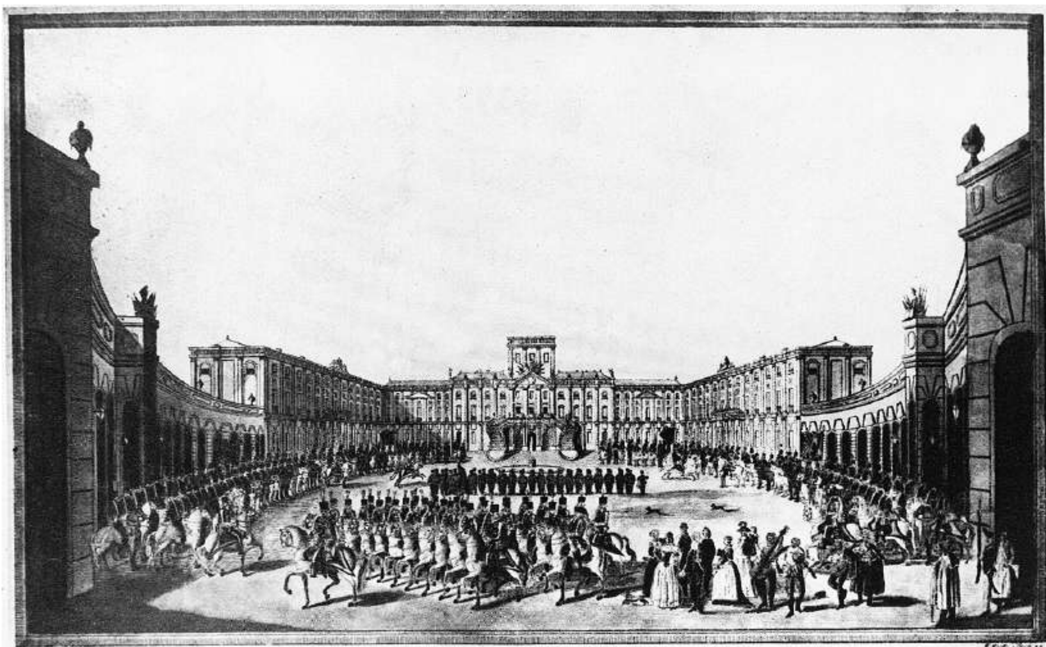

Plate 19. Eszterházy Castle at Fertöd, 1791

With the decline of Protestantism, education was taken over by government authorities and especially by the Jesuits. In 1773, when the order was dissolved, there were seven Jesuit colleges and forty-one secondary schools as well as several university faculties at Nagyszombat and at the Kassa and Kolzsvár Academies. The Jesuits were not the only teaching order (the Piarists were teaching almost 2,000 pupils and their role in education would later increase significantly) but they were the most influential. After the Jesuits, Maria Theresa's reforms gave teaching new impetus, but the order left its mark on the written word, notably through the hundreds of plays and thousands of school performances, along with history and geography textbooks. The Piarists' contribution was also considerable, as was the Protestants', whose scholastic and literary culture, despite having been curtailed by the Counter-Reformation, remained a major element in the baroque period. The tradition of attending Protestant universities abroad continued. Wittenberg, Jena and Halle's spirit of devotion was disseminated through the hundreds of Hungarian Protestant students. The greatest thinker of this school was Mátyás Bél, a Lutheran pastor, geographer–historian and ethnologist, before the term existed. He wrote his scientific work in Latin, his others in Hungarian, German and Slovak.

Alongside Latin, Hungarian literature was also growing. Its period of great expansion began around the 1780s, due in part to the evolution in thinking and institutions and also to an original initiative by Maria Theresa. In 1760, she founded the noble Hungarian Guard, targeting 120 Hungarian and Transylvanian officer-cadets. After five years of study and service, the cadets could choose either to join the army or to return home enriched with knowledge. The same went for the Hungarian pupils of the Theresianum College, founded in 1749. One of the guards' officers, György Bessenyei, organised a Hungarian literary circle and became its figurehead and pioneer of the new Hungarian literature inspired by the philosophy and the literature of the Enlightenment. When Bessenyei donned the guards' uniform in 1765, however, such developments belonged to a distant future. Maria Theresa and her son, co-ruler then King Joseph II, were to transform the political and social landscape before a new era of national and literary revival began in Hungary.

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ECONOMY, SOCIETY AND ATTITUDES IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: AN OVERVIEW

The first reliable census was carried out in 1784–7, on Joseph II's orders. The king's states numbered 23.3 million souls, 9.5 million of whom lived under the Hungarian Crown, that is to say, in historical Hungary, comprising Transylvania and Croatia. By the beginning of the nineteenth century (1804), 9.5 had risen to 10.5 million, an important factor both at the time and retrospectively. Once again, Hungarian demography was level with England, as it had been prior to the Ottoman wars. Forty-five per cent of all the peoples living under the Habsburgs lived in Hungary and together with their more distant dependencies in Belgium, Holland and Italy, the proportion was over half. In historical terms, this demonstrates that Hungary carried some weight in the policies of the Viennese monarchs. It was only thanks to their Hungarian dominions that towards the end of the eighteenth century the Habsburgs were a great power, compared with France with 26 million inhabitants and giant Russia with its 40–45 million. Europe without Russia consisted of 200 million inhabitants. This meant that after the break-up of Poland (1772, 1793 and 1795), Russia, France and Austria with Hungary dominated the continent, both in terms of territorial mass and their respective populations, while Prussia dominated militarily and England ruled the waves. The sixth power, the Ottoman, was still close but would become the 'sick man' of European politics.

Having resumed its historical size – which included Transylvania and Croatia – Hungary held an important position in the new European configuration, despite its limited sovereignty and its state of convalescence. To return to demographic data, previous estimates were retrospectively revised: despite mass devastation, the number of inhabitants after the Turkish withdrawal is likely to have been closer to 5 than to 3.5 million and reached 9.5 million in 1784–7. The last figure certainly includes long established non-Magyars and recent arrivals: Serbs (called Rác) and Romanians (called Oláh). Their immigration began in previous centuries and continued throughout the eighteenth century. Under the Habsburgs, abandoned or sparsely populated territories were systematically colonised by both old and new immigrants, including 1 million Germans who settled in various regions. The newcomers, among them Walloons, French, Greeks and Armenians, were settled by

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a special state committee set up by Maria Theresa or by the governors of Transylvania, or again by large landowners in need of labourers. Priority was given to skilled farmers and artisans. In exchange, they received material (land, houses, equipment) and financial assistance. As well as Serbs, numerous Slovaks and other Slavs joined older settlers, together totalling some 3 million. With an estimated 1.5 million Romanians, 5 million of the 9.5 inhabitants were non-Magyars. Ethnic composition had been reversed.

The repercussions would be felt later. As Kosáry points out, ethnic proportions were not an issue at the time, indeed, statistics did not take them into account at all. Nonetheless, the new migration wave also changed the religious make-up of the country. Alongside the Catholics and Protestants, there were now large numbers of followers of Orthodoxy and Greek Catholics (Uniates). The latter preserved the Byzantine liturgy but recognised the primacy of the pope and Roman Catholic dogmas and in 1771 founded their first bishopric, distinct from the Orthodox, at Munkács. This was was followed by Romanian and Serbian Uniate bishoprics. There were also Armenian Christians and a small number of Jews, estimated at 10,000 at the beginning and at over 80,000 by the end of the eighteenth century. After the retreat of the Ottoman Empire, Turks also remained in Hungary, but there is no trace of any Muslims. As for the Protestants, they had been curtailed by the Counter-Reformation. Despite churches and schools being restituted to the Protestants, Catholic Reform was pursued with more flexible methods. Joseph II's Edict of Tolerance in 1781 ensured religious freedom for all.

For the first time in centuries, under Maria Theresa, Hungary entered a long period of relative peace and prosperity. There were still Turkish incursions, and it was obliged to contribute to the war effort required; it underwent social unrest and localised conflict, notably the Szekler protest movement against violation of their freedoms (called the 'Mádéfalva Peril') which was violently suppressed in 1764; her reign was also punctuated by Romanian and peasant revolts along with natural calamities and epidemics. Yet society was able to pick itself up, despite its cumbersome and archaic social structure which consisted of 80 per cent peasants on the one hand and a dominant nobility on the other representing approximately 5 per cent of the inhabitants. In between the two was a weak bourgeoisie, soldiers and a mixed population of varied

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status. Regional variations and status diversity make it impossible to draw a faithful social tableau.

The magnates and prelates were at the top of the pyramid. The 200 castles erected within the space of a half a century corresponded *grosso modo* to the 200 richest families. Among them were a number of foreign families – like the Schönborns, Grassalkovichs, Brunswicks and Harruckerns – 'naturalised' by the application of the indigenate (*indigenatus*). Like many before and after them, these foreign families integrated with the Hungarian aristocracy. Through their immense fortunes and elevated state offices, the latter instigated what Norbert Elias calls a 'civilisation process'. They enjoyed a scintillating, cosmopolitan, European lifestyle in their castles, playing host to thinkers, artists and men of letters, both foreign and Hungarian.

In this multilingual environment, the more cultivated were familiar with Latin, French and German writers, while Hungarian books were the preserve of the more patriotic. The spirit of the time embraced a plethora of styles: baroque increasingly took over classical culture, and the Enlightenment also became influential. Alongside small libraries, there were the larger ones. Count Jószef Teleki's collection amounted to 25,000 volumes by the time he donated it to the Academy of Science as the foundation of its collection. If a new work by Voltaire or Diderot could not be found, there was always the chance that the minister of state, Carl von Zinzendorf, would drop in on his way to his Trieste governorate. He was in the habit of travelling in two carriages, carrying an entire library so he could read en route, and would lend and borrow books as he travelled to and from Paris, Vienna and Zagreb.

It was a lifestyle only of the rich. A mass of 400,000 nobles, on the other hand, were literally and figuratively speaking stuck in the mud of the past. Inequality between magnates and nobles and their relative power over the 7–8 million peasants was huge. Some had just one servant, while others owned several villages and others still lorded it over vast estates comprising thousands of serfs.

Inequalities existed among the peasants, too, but were less differentiated. The luckier or more enterprising among them inhabited a 'complete' tenure of around twenty hectares or more, while the poorest lived in a shack with a backyard. The more comfortably off sold their products on the market, settled in the market towns and escaped servitude. Then there were those who swelled the ranks of agricultural labourers

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(*inquilini*) of the *latifundia*. Liable to unlimited drudgery, labourers were much in demand by landowners who enlarged their allodial estates in order to increase production.

Peasant grievances over this 'second servitude' exploitation reached the royal court and did not pass unnoticed. Numerous documents and memoirs from that time testify Maria Theresa's concern to improve their lot. But *vis-à-vis* the nobility her hands were tied: she guaranteed their seigniorial rights as set down in Hungarian state law and she needed their support. It is worth remembering that the archduchess of the Austrian hereditary counties would not have been a powerful European monarch had she not been in the possession of the Czech and Hungarian Crowns.

While the administration promulgated reforms in Austria and Bohemia, it encountered resistance from the Hungarian orders and counties, where the nobility enjoyed a system of self-rule and used it to preserve its privileges. The queen's government nevertheless succeeded in regulating the *urbarium*, labour statute. The 1767 royal decree stated that a tenure had to provide 104 days' manual labour or 52 days' animal-assisted work. Between the lords and the peasants was the motley population of the towns and market towns: bourgeois, lower clergy, traders, craftsmen, employees, policemen, soldiers, along with a slowly rising number of literates. In the middle of the century, there were around 20,000 graduates, both nobles and commoners, the *honoracior*.

At the close of the eighteenth century there were more than 60 free royal towns, of which half numbered in excess of 10,000 inhabitants, along with 665 county and market towns and 15,000 villages. Debrecen had 30,000 inhabitants, while Pest, Buda and Óbuda (future Budapest) had altogether 50,000. The majority of free commoners lived in the towns as did graduates. In all, urban dwellers numbered approximately 600,000, 7 per cent of the kingdom's subjects, compared with France's 12 per cent, Italy's 15–18 per cent and Holland's 30–36 per cent. Two factors need to be added to the figures: firstly, urbanisation in Hungary was just beginning, while in Western Europe it was stagnating or in decline; furthermore, the status of Hungarian city-dwellers varied greatly and very few of them belonged to a truly emancipated bourgeoisie. They accounted for a mere 150,000 out of the 600,000 town and market-town dwellers, that is, 1.5–2 per cent of the total population. The 'civilisation process' was certainly under way, but Hungary was still

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far from giving rise to a genuine urban class, made up of bourgeois, free labourers and intellectuals.

Towns were improving, externally at least. Pest's and Buda's water systems were reconstructed (with wooden and then lead pipes). The first postmark dates from 1752 and the first post office opened in Buda in 1762. The two towns were connected by bridges; the first street lamps were lit in 1777, and Nagyszombat University moved to Buda, at the royal palace. Numerous institutions, new churches, schools, a music conservatory, hospitals, libraries, theatres (German), public parks, a botanical garden and a veterinary school all saw the light of day, along with a few factories. Over in Pest, on the left bank, 453 of the 1,146 houses existing in 1765 were constructed in stone, the rest in puddled clay with thatched roofs.

This veritable revitalisation was also felt far from the capital, in Transdanubian towns close to Austria and, to a lesser extent, in the vast countryside. The landscape was becoming less harsh, woods were being replanted, muddy tracks were improved in order to be more like roads. Most importantly, there was a commitment to raising living standards through education, health and taking care of the most deprived.

Until the Reformation, education at all levels had been in the hands of the Catholic Church and then had been shared with the Protestant churches, not without difficulties and quarrels between the faiths and rivalry among the teaching orders. Though the eminence and confessional pluralism of these schools resisted the reforms introduced by Maria Theresa and Joseph II, the educational system was nonetheless transformed. The first *Ratio educationis* in 1777 subjected education to state directive and created a uniform system. If the manner in which the Hungarian authorities implemented the decree left much to be desired, progress was noticeable. Primary schools multiplied and literacy spread to the villages, especially under Joseph II. Before these arrangements, there were 4,421 school teachers for 8,726 small towns and villages (not counting regions directly under Viennese administration) – larger towns had better provision – with the addition of a small number of minister–teachers. The new decree required each village to set up a primary school with at least one teacher. Inevitably, these plans were not consistently carried out and actual school attendance was mostly confined to the three winter months; but despite a certain lack of diligence, improvement was indisputable though very relative. According to an

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inventory, attendance in Vas, one of the more developed counties, was 1.86 per cent in 1781 compared to 2.5 per cent in Austria and 2 per cent in Bohemia and Moravia. Conditions improved further, following Joseph II's Edict of Tolerance (1781), which encouraged the development of Protestant, Orthodox and Uniate schooling.

At secondary level, there were 130 schools at the start of the *Ratio educationis*: 79 were Catholic, 47 Protestant, 4 Orthodox and Uniate. As for higher education, there was already talk of transferring Nagyszombat University to Buda where it expanded to 14 faculties, 32 professors and 423 students. A high school for training mining engineers and a medical faculty were also founded. Both Catholic and Protestant professors were usually well-known scholars. István Hatvani, for example, pastor, doctor and chemist, an exceptional and flamboyant character, who was nicknamed 'the Hungarian Doctor Faustus', taught at the Protestant college in Debrecen. Despite the ravages of the Counter-Reformation and Metternich's restrictions, the great Protestant teaching tradition did not falter. Transylvania, true to its tradition, produced exceptional talents, like Farkas Kempelen, inventor of a chess automaton (1770) and scientists like Farkas Bolyai and his mathematician son, János Bolyai, who discovered non-Euclidean geometry.

Training for midwives and veterinary surgeons was also set up. Charitable enterprises multiplied: the queen was concerned with orphans, the poor and re-education for fallen girls. For the first time, attempts were made to settle the gypsies and attend to educating their children, even if it was within the context of peasant families. Justice was dispensed according to the rules and it was now separate from the administration. Maria Theresa more or less put an end to 'witch' trials; the last *malefica* was carried out in 1777 and the last trial in 1784 ended in acquittal. In any case, even before this date there had been far fewer sorcery cases than elsewhere: 600 in the three centuries following the appearance of *Malleus maleficiarum*, the book written by two Dominicans, which triggered this religious hysteria among Christians. Since there was no Inquisition in Hungary, trials were less fierce, punishment more tempered and acquittals more frequent. Witch trials in Hungary, furthermore, originated more often in pre-Christian beliefs in the supernatural than in 'demon mania' or Satanism.

Maria Theresa abolished torture in 1776. Freemasonry, not without

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influence, had around 30 lodges and 900 members in 1780. In all respects, a new civilisation was being born. There was no lack of books being published in Hungary: 5,000 of them during the first six decades, 10,000 between 1765 and 1790. The first literary dictionary, by Péter Bod, was published in 1766 and contained biographies of more than 500 Hungarian writers. These were astounding statistics for an economically underdeveloped country. The proportion of books published in Latin decreased from 50 per cent to 36 per cent. Works in Hungarian now made up more than a third, those in German, more than 23 per cent. There was an increase in secular, literary, historical and scientific works. The press, which began in 1705 with Prince Rákóczi's *Mercurius Hungaricus*, remained Latin and German until 1780 when *Magyar Hirmondó* (Hungarian News), then *Magyar Kurir* (Hungarian Courier) appeared, both published in Vienna, followed by a general expansion. German newspapers and books addressed the German-speaking bourgeoisie, while Latin publications were for the educated public. Hungarian found a broad spectrum of readers, from the great palaces to the ranks of graduates and scholars, to wealthy peasants who could read and write and the lesser nobility, highly cultured but some of whose wealth amounted to no more than their ancestral 'seven plum trees'.

The Hungarian economy, as everywhere at the time, was rural but more markedly so than in Western Europe, where industrial capitalism had created new wealth and had given rise to an embryonic working class. In 1747, Pest had 464 artisans shared between 68 professional guilds; Buda and Pest together had 1,039 in 1774. By 1800, there were 80,000 of them, including the 'unlicensed', unaffiliated to a corporation or guild, jealously guarding their medieval privileges. Factories were rare: in 1790–1800 there were something in the region of 125 factories and small manufacturers.

Thus Hungary was more bound to the spiritual life of Europe than to its industrial revolution. Its wealth basically came from the land, husbandry and agriculture. Contributing to this state of affairs was Viennese economic and customs policy, which discouraged industrialisation in Hungary. While in Austria and Bohemia industry was making rapid progress, Hungary was forced to remain their supplier of meat, cereals, potash and wine (exported to Poland as well). After the annexation of Fiume in 1776–9, Hungarian wool, leather, pork, honey, wax

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and tobacco crossed by sea towards other markets; indeed, it was believed that exports would increase as a consequence of the Hungarian Crown's acquisition of Fiume as *corpus separatum*, but the poor state of roads and waterways had not been taken into account.

Just as in the distant past, cattle-rearing headed exports, bringing in 1,630,000 florins in the 1730s; in second place was wine, making 620,000 florins, and cereals, 510,000. In the second half of the century, developments in agriculture were inconsistent. The *latifundia*, while still relying on the unpaid labour of the serfs, adopted slightly more modern techniques, whereas the peasants on their tenures still practised three-year rotation and worked with the most rudimentary tools. However, the introduction of maize around 1700 and the very late appearance of the potato (1769) did improve the peasant's lot. Agriculture was divided between an autarkic, subsistence economy of small holdings on the one hand and farmland production for the market, on the other. Vienna favoured a degree of land-use diversification, like mulberry trees for the silkworm, flax and hemp, or tobacco during the American War of Independence. Agriculture nonetheless remained the single most widespread use of land and its methods, if not archaic, lagged far behind in terms of techniques, management and modern multiple rotation. The Geometric Institute, founded by Joseph II in 1800, trained engineers for the construction of the Ferenc Canal between the Tisza and the Danube. Until the large-scale construction work undertaken in the nineteenth century, however, a quarter of the plains, 6.7 million hectares, remained covered by lakes, marshes and unmanaged rivers.

Tradition was shaken in more ways than one with the arrival of Joseph II, an impatient and exceptionally brilliant reformer. He contributed towards progress in both the economy and trade but Joseph's ten-year reign was too short and structural resistance too strong for any real change to take place.

JOSEPHISM

Among Maria Theresa's and Francis of Lorraine's numerous children, three became historical celebrities: Marie Antoinette, who died on the scaffold in 1793; Joseph, who succeeded his father as emperor in 1765, and to the hereditary and Hungarian thrones of his mother in 1780, and

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died in 1790; finally, his brother Leopold, grand duke of Tuscany, who assumed all the crowns of Habsburg-Lorraine only to die two years later. He was followed by his son Francis. Together, they witnessed a *fin de siècle* marked by events and men that would change the world: the Battle of Yorktown, Washington's and Jefferson's America, the French Revolution, the Republic, Lavoisier, the Terror, the Directory, the triumph of English industry, Watt's steam engine, Adam Smith, Wordsworth, Coleridge, romanticism, Catherine II's Russia, the rise of Prussia, the division of Poland, Kant, Herder, Schiller, Goethe, Haydn, Bach, Mozart.

A single generation saw the triumph of science, enlightened absolutism, philosophers, revolution, rococo, romanticism – all in preparation for a new polyphonic modernity. States found themselves forced to run their governments, economies and structures more efficiently.

It was this necessity rather than an inclination for new ideas which led the traditionalist Maria Theresa to reform the administration, army, finances, towns, countryside, schools and hospitals. Her son Joseph II (1780–90) waited impatiently for his day to arrive. Historians attribute his impatience to his temperament and to the divergences between his views and those of his mother, if not a basic incompatibility. Maria Theresa was certainly authoritarian and a reformer, but not to the point of imposing her will without consideration for the interested parties. And certainly not to the extent of alienating magnates and nobles and their support for the Crown. Apart from her moderation and his impetuousness, this was probably the nub of their disagreement. Maria Theresa instigated innovation only when it seemed to her absolutely necessary in the interests of her people and in order to preserve royal authority. Joseph, on the other hand, seemed driven by an ardent desire for change for its own sake. The spirit in which he imposed his designs was more modern and enlightened than his mother's; he was undoubtedly more in tune with the times, but certainly not with his subjects. Maria Theresa acted gently, tactfully and with poise. Joseph employed all the unlimited means of an authoritarian monarch; with him, enlightened absolutism reached its peak. Joseph wanted to transform society immediately while strengthening Austria against other powers – among them, the Prussia of Frederick II, that other enlightened and despotic prince, his peer, whom he envied and admired.

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For a long time, Chancellor Kaunitz, a man with broad yet well-balanced views, acted as intermediary between the queen and her son. But the chancellor's competence was exercised in Austria and Bohemia, not in Hungary. On coming to power, Joseph II immediately set about integrating Hungary into his conception of a unitary state. In so doing, he attacked in one fell swoop the privileges of the nobility, the rights of the state and Hungarian cultural identity.

Joseph initially refused coronation in order to avoid direct confrontation with that jealous guardian of Magyar particularity, the Diet. And yet, a substantial number of decrees issued by this 'king with a hat' got through without encountering much resistance. The relaxation of censorship was a notable case in point (Maria Theresa's vigorous application had included confiscation of works by Montesquieu and Voltaire from foreign diplomats) as was the famous Edict of Religious Tolerance in 1781. The Edict abolished most discriminations against Protestants, Jews and the Orthodox. Joseph II subsequently suppressed congregations with the exception of teaching and hospital orders. In all his lands, 738 convents were closed down and turned into schools. Civil marriage was introduced and the dioceses – like the counties – were reorganised into new administrative units. In some respects, Josephism has been compared to Gallicism, but Joseph II was looking well beyond the subordination of the Church: he wanted to be the architect of a modern state, for the good of both his empire and his people.

These reforms would not have provoked such bitter resistance if they had not affected the most sensitive interests of the nobility and indeed of a large section of public opinion. In 1784, Joseph II decreed that forthwith the official language in all the states was to be German. His decision was not a result of petty German nationalism on the part of the emperor. Rather, he wanted a single administrative language in order to govern better. Latin could not fit into his conception of governing the entire nation since the vast majority of his subjects had no knowledge of it. Hungarian could not be universally used beyond the confines of the kingdom and not even within them, for the linguistic minorities like Czech, Italian, Serbian or Romanian did not even come into consideration. The only contender, then, was German, which, once extended to education, could train the elite capable of managing a modern state. Joseph allowed three years to execute the project.

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Nothing, or very little, was to come of it, since in addition to provoking 'national' resistance, the decree was impossible to implement.

In the same year, 1784, population and house censuses were introduced as well as a cadastral survey – a move which brought fears of future measures which would involve taxing the nobility. These fears were well founded: the royal decree of 1789 ordered the introduction of a unitary tax on lands belonging both to peasants and to the nobility, set at 12.22 per cent of revenues. Peasants, who were no longer called *jobbágy* nor, thanks to another decree, compelled to free labour duty, paid an additional 17.25 per cent dues to their landlords. This included the redemption – or 'instalments' – in lieu of fee labour, thus improving the peasant's lot without abolishing serfdom altogether.

Even for the more enlightened landowners it was too much, all the more so because, in 1785, the king had abolished the county system, bastion of local self-rule and heavily dominated by the nobility. In its place, there were now ten administrative departments in Hungary and three in Transylvania. We should remember that the county diets, the dietines, had enjoyed extensive power: they had implemented the laws and decrees – or conversely, sabotaged them. Their abolition, therefore, reversed the so-called 'dual' system, in other words, a government shared between the sovereign and the orders. Unrealistic and inapplicable, Joseph II's audacious reforms were doomed, resisted by the classes he relied on to support his authority. The explanation for his stubbornness or desperate relentlessness remains open to speculation. The fact is that the Austrian Empire was cracking up in several places: in Belgium, in Hungary and in Transylvania, where a powerful revolt of Romanian peasants had to be put down. Joseph also faced defeats in terms of foreign policy. Prussia thwarted his Bavarian ambitions, he became embroiled in a useless war against the Turks and the monarchy was deeply threatened by the French Revolution, the Constituent Assembly and the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

In January 1790, on his deathbed, Joseph II had the moral courage to admit defeat. He withdrew all his decrees, except for the Edict of Tolerance and the decisions taken concerning the peasants.

His successor, Leopold II (1790–2), was reputed to be an enlightened and efficient prince in Tuscany. With the help of his own qualities and the notable Chancellor Kaunitz, Leopold was able to appease the passions of a Hungary exasperated by his dead brother, before turning back

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to authoritarianism. In faraway Belgium, he put an end to an insurrection that had already run out of steam and, in 1792, allied himself with Prussia against France. During the long reign of his son who succeeded him, the absolutist King Francis I (1792–1835) – Francis II as Holy Roman emperor – all the problems of the old regime resurfaced.

ABSOLUTIST IMMOBILITY AND NATIONAL AWAKENING

Francis I was no enlightened prince, except on the subject of despotism. The page of the Habsburg reformers had been turned. The authoritarian innovator had been replaced by a reactionary brute, in conflict with revolutionary and Napoleonic France.

The influence of the Enlightenment and the Revolution may well have been overestimated but was real nonetheless. Some counties actually asked the king to re-establish national rights – by virtue of Rousseau's *Social Contract*. But these nobles held the *Social Contract* in one hand and the 1517 *Corpus juris* in the other. In other words, as the historian Kálmán Benda suggests, they had confused 'Rousseau's people' with 'Werböczi's people', the latter meaning the nobility as *the* incarnation of the nation. He cites one deputy at the Diet who declared that sovereignty belonged to the 'privileged people'.

A small minority of public opinion, however, was seduced by the Revolution. Rousseau and Voltaire had been read in educated circles for some time, often in German, so as to 'escape detection' according to one conspirator, Sándor Szolártsik. Freemasons continued to frequent their clandestine lodges, while a variety of seditious clubs and circles were also established. In the eyes of the secret police and its numerous agents, all these places, whether attended by nationalist reformers, Josephists, Girondists or Freemasons, were basically Jacobin vipers' nests. Both conservative and communist historiography, from opposite angles, have tended to corroborate this image. In reality, there were very few true Jacobins, even though force of circumstance caused a certain amalgam of different tendencies. 'Hungary is overrun by spies. It's easy to be labelled a Jacobin. Priests especially pursue their old profession', the poet Batsányi wrote in February 1793 in a private letter. And he concludes: 'Revolution is inevitable in our land too and, since the light of pure reason has not made any headway, revolution will come in the fashion of Hora and Gloska.'

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Plate 20. Execution of Ignác Martinovics and his comrades, 20 May 1795

In the event, it was not to be, but the allusion to the 1784 Romanian peasant uprising led by Vasile Nicolas Horea/Ursu and by Juon Closca points to a radicalisation among supporters of change and the fear this tendency aroused amongst magnates, local squires and even industrial city-dwellers. As the Jacobin movement became more radical, sympathy for events in France dwindled by degrees. Nevertheless it went as far as Danton – at a pinch – but if the Hungarian journal *Magyar Merkurius* published in Vienna is to be believed, the fall of Robespierre was greeted with pleasure rather than regret.

Heading the movement was a rather strange individual, one Abbot Ignác Martinovics. Franciscan monk, then professor of science at the University of Lemberg, Martinovics's connections were at best suspect. In 1791 he put himself in the service of Franz Gotthardi, chief of Leopold II's secret police. His denunciatory reports are preserved in the archives. When his services under Francis I were no longer required, Martinovics transferred his loyalties entirely, joining the patriotic nobles. From being an *agent provocateur* he became a conspirator, while continuing to denounce them. What might have been going on in the depths of this tortured soul will no doubt remain unfathomable.

Most significant among his writings are two revolutionary catechisms and a project for a republican constitution. The first, written in spring 1794 for the Secret Reform Society (*Catechismus occultae societatis reformatorum*), was mainly intended for nobles open to social change and to the construction of a federal republic of various nationalities. The second catechism, written at the same time, was even more audacious, calling for 'a holy insurrection against the kings, nobles and priests'.

The Jacobin trials began before the Royal Table (court) at the end of 1794 and ended before the supreme court, called the Septemvirale Table, following an extremely severe special procedure set up by the king himself, which was in contempt of the law. Of the fifty-two charges that ensued – with the odd acquittal – eighteen death penalties were issued and seven executions carried out. Heavy prison sentences were meted out to the others. Of the seven executed, five were beheaded on 20 May 1795, two others in June, on a meadow in Buda, later called the Meadow of Blood. The trial's social spectrum was broad: among the condemned, which included both nobles and non-nobles, were a count, lawyers, judges, parish priests, monks, students, stewards, doctors,

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poets and even an actor. There were probably many more in the wider circle of secret society members, estimated at between 200 and 300, but the movement was for all that isolated, lacking in coherent ideas and a social base. One must remember the ethnic composition of the country: Slavs and Romanians made up half the population and were unwilling to follow the Magyar conspirators.

While heads fell on a Buda meadow, a landowner in Upper Hungary who belonged to the old nobility, and who was a lower-ranking civil servant of the royal Lieutenant Council, retired to his estate in order to dedicate himself to his studies and to the affairs of his Lutheran church. Gergely Berzeviczy wanted to reform the economy and the condition of the peasants in a manner that was worlds apart from that of both the Jacobins and the nobles. Misunderstood by everyone, his efforts wounded his contemporaries' national self-esteem and pride, even the most enlightened among them, like poets Ferenc Kazinczky and Daniel Berzsenyi. 'Berzeviczy is stupid and wicked', wrote Berzsenyi. In actual fact, Berzeviczy wished only to modernise the country and saw the Austrian economy as a model worth emulating, though he also condemned Vienna's colonialist policy which hindered the development of Hungarian industry.

Until the Congress of Vienna (1815), Austrian foreign policy and that of its ambassador in Paris, Metternich, sought above all to contain France so as to protect the Habsburgs' 'kingdoms and provinces'. In addition to this legitimate concern, Francis I was violently opposed to and fought the ideas of French Enlightenment and the Revolution, following in his father Leopold's footsteps. Austria suffered defeat after defeat: following the Prussian rout at Dalmy in September 1792, it was the Austrian army's turn to be defeated at Jemmapes. A succession of setbacks against Napoleon followed, at Lodi and Marengo on the Rhine. As member of the third and then fourth coalition, in 1809 Austria lost all the important battles: Ulm, Austerlitz and Wagram. As a result, it lost its possessions in Italy, Germany, then in Croatia and even in Galicia. At the Treaty of Schönbrunn (1809), it was forced to give up 150,000 square kilometres of its possessions, along with 3.5 million inhabitants, and had to pay 25 million in war reparations.

General Bonaparte, meanwhile, had been consecrated emperor of the French and Francis became emperor of Austria in 1804. Two years later,

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he left his position of Holy Roman emperor on tiptoes – the last to bear the title.

To understand Hungary's position, we have to backtrack. Hungary had contributed to the Austrian war effort in return for the semblance of a sovereign state. The 1809 insurrection against the emperor of the French is one episode highlighted by the chronicles. Napoleon tried unsuccessfully to turn the Hungarians against Vienna. In a proclamation from his imperial quarters at Schönbrunn, Napoleon exhorted the Hungarians to recover their national independence, appealing to their 'ancient and illustrious origins', their Constitution and freedoms – in the plural. He also promised them 'eternal peace, trade relations and assured independence'. In a word, the re-establishment of the nobility's old Hungary.

Documents published by the archivist Károly Kecskeméti indicate that French services had long been well-informed about the state of the country, its economy and agriculture – and not just superficially. They knew which products were crossing the sea, or were stopped from doing so due to the appalling condition of the port of Fiume and they also had detailed military information. Reports by Colonel Gérard Lacouée and by the citizen Marquis Adrien Lezay-Marnésia, addressed in (and after) 1802 to the First Consul Bonaparte, relate the situation and the general mood in a detailed and perceptive manner. 'Few Hungarians', he writes, 'do not hate the Austrians and hold the reigning House in contempt, while the French armies are admired.' But despite these attitudes, the report continues, 'I doubt very much that General Bonaparte could instigate a revolution, popular or otherwise.' If the peasants 'could be pushed to revolt', it would be 'in favour of the House of Austria that protects them against the lords that oppress them'. 'Austria is near, France is far away.' And: 'The Rákóczis and Thökölys are no more. Hungarians of today have learned to conduct their affairs according to self-interest rather than be ruled by their passions', and rumour had it that potential leaders 'are for the most part sold to the Crown'. But what of the bourgeoisie? According to an unidentified extract: 'The bourgeoisie are not poor enough to be seditious but are too poor to possess ambitions.' And in conclusion: were France to invade Hungary, it would encounter little support but equally little resistance.

This is exactly what happened near the town of Györ in 1809. The

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'insurrection' of nobles was dispersed by Napoleon's troops. The emperor, however, did not exploit his easy victory by occupying the country and such restraint may well have been due to being well informed.

Linguistic and literary revival and its 'dictator'

After his reformer predecessors, Francis I represented steadfast absolutism while Hungary was far from immovable. The Hungarian elite were drawn to the ideas of the Enlightenment which resonated with their particular aspirations. At a crossroads of ideas, the only viable way towards revival was within a secular, national and enlightened cultural framework. Its precursor, through his writings and his Hungarian literary circle in Vienna, was György Bessenyei, followed by several others. The 'revival movement' enjoyed a surge at the beginning of the nineteenth century thanks to the unceasing efforts of its organisers. Bessenyei and his linguist friend, Miklós Révai, had already expressed their belief that knowledge was the key to development, and language the key to knowledge. The role of organising a movement inspired by these ideas fell to Ferenc Kazinczky, who, in 1801, had just returned from 2,387 days spent in an Austrian prison for having been implicated in a Jacobin conspiracy. He withdrew to his estate and dedicated the thirty years that were left of his life to the revival of the national language and its literature. This endeavour almost completely overshadowed his own remarkable literary output, and his translations of Helvetius, Rousseau, Voltaire, Shakespeare, Goethe and Lessing. According to Antal Szerb, a writer of this century, however, Kazinczky was first and foremost the 'dictator' of literary life. According to another, László Németh, he was its 'telephone switchboard'. Kazinczky clearly wanted all the 'communication lines' to go through his little Széphalom manor, and he was a ruthless literary critic, imposing the elevated classicist style stripped of linguistic frills.

The revival of the Hungarian language was the focus of his life. He was the leader of the 'neologists', who want to reform grammar and lighten and enrich the vocabulary so as to keep abreast with cultural and technical developments in Europe. They created new words based upon Hungarian roots, by borrowing foreign words and then Magyarising them, or by image association. The word for 'secretary', for example,

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titkár or *titoknok* was derived from the existing word for secret: *titok*. The Hungarian name for theatre was created out of two ancient words. The word for revolution derives from the verb 'to boil', *forr* in Hungarian, which becomes *forradalom*, which more or less translates as 'on the boil''. Almost half of the 8,000 words invented by the 'neologists' have become part of colloquial and literary language; those which were too artificial were lost along the way. Reaction among their opponents, called 'orthologues', was fierce, but society at the time had genuine and complex needs which the movement could meet.

The use of three languages created problems that had to be addressed: Latin was the language of the Church, the law and political life; German was used by the Viennese administration and Hungarian was the language of the Magyar people and the new national elite. Inevitably, the promotion of Hungarian did not please all the subjects of this multinational and multilingual kingdom. The nineteenth century was, after all, the high-water mark for their different political and cultural aspirations. The promotion of Hungarian, language of the dominant Magyars, was nonetheless a major objective and both a cultural and political necessity.

Apart from the problems of trilingualism, the reforms also had to overcome geographical, social and religious divisions among the Magyars themselves. The division was between 'two different types of culture', writes János Horváth, perhaps even between 'two nations', a result of the protracted separation of the kingdom from Transylvania, aggravated by the former being predominantly Catholic, while the latter was mainly Protestant. The dislocating effect of social inequalities between peasants, urban-dwellers, country squires and magnates, who spoke the same words but not the same language, was an additional threat to the unity of the nation.

Last but not least, the language had to adapt to modern life. How could industry be forged without a word to describe it? How could trade be promoted if there was no equivalent term in the Hungarian language? How could a cultural revolution be brought to 'the boil', if the only term that existed for it was in Latin? It was through modernisation and enrichment that the old language developed the astonishing capacity to cement national identity. One thousand years BC, Finno-Ugric had had no use for the word 'revolution' or 'industry'. The political class was soon on the heels of the writers.

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AN ASIDE

For an entire generation, between the years 1790 and 1830, the literature of the intelligentsia had acted as primary agent of progress and nationalism. The 'spirit of the age' and the princes of the Enlightenment had also brought about progress in material civilisation and mores. Though there was no sharp division between the great minds of the turn of the century and the generation of the reform years between 1830 and 1840, the starting point for the reform movement was nonetheless very specific, a new situation which carried with it ideas and political programmes both old and new.

Problems in relations between the sovereign and the noble estates, for example, were hardly new. However, with the arrival of the Habsburgs, the issues of dualism became more complex. The estates were not only defending the interests – political, constitutional and economic – of the privileged classes, but also national independence or, in other words, the rights of the Hungarian state against an expansionist, tentacular and centralist foreign dynasty. The Czech and Moravian states, crushed in 1620 at the Battle of the White Mountain, had never recovered. The Hungarians, on the other hand, due to the existence of the Magyar principality of Transylvania and to the presence of the Turks, were in a better position to stand up to the sovereigns of Vienna. After the departure of the Turks and the defeat of Prince Rákóczi's 1711 national uprising, dualism had re-established itself in the constitutional order of the Pragmatic Sanction. Louis Eisenmann, a French historian of the 1867 Austro-Hungarian compromise, viewed the Pragmatic Sanction as the premise for a future compromise which would lead 150 years later to the Danubian dual monarchy. The 'first compromise' dating back to Charles III and Maria Theresa was subsequently broken on several occasions, notably by Joseph II. Re-established by his successor, Leopold II, it was once again crushed, this time by his son Francis, crowned in 1792. In the midst of the revolutionary and Napoleonic period, Francis was nevertheless forced to champ at the bit and moderate his absolutism, since he needed the support of the nobility to contain subversion, just as they needed to maintain good relations with the king for the same reasons. The situation soon changed with the arrival of Metternich at the head of government and the accumulation of Hungarian grievances against absolutism.

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Among the grievances were the so-called *gravamina*, the Hungarian–Latin name for breaches of 'fundamental laws', in other words violations of public law against the nation, its status, its state law and the privileges of its noble political class. *Gravamina* protests were building up at the county diets and in public political life to the point where, in 1825, after a thirteen-year gap, the king was forced to call a national Diet.

The *gravamina* issue dominated the Diet but other demands, of a very different kind, emerged simultaneously: liberal, cultural and economic concerns – premisses of a liberal and increasingly democratic era. The era of reforms was the product of a generation marked by great figures from the upper nobility, like Miklós Wesselényi and István Széchenyi, by writers like Ferenc Kölcsey, as well as the up-and-coming generation of Lajos Kossuth, József Eötvös and others. This era of reform is situated between 1825 or 1832 and the last Diet of the states general, on the eve of the 1848 revolution.

AN ERA OF REFORMS

Until 1815 the Diet continued to provide the emperor–king with soldiers and money for the war effort despite its national grievances. The Congress of Vienna, the Holy Alliance and the European accord would not have affected this none too cordial entente between Austria and Hungary if fresh grievances had not aggravated the general discontent over Francis I's absolutism and that of his chancellor, Metternich, appointed in 1821. In addition to constitutional *gravamina*, the devaluation of paper money, together with mandatory payment of taxes in silver pieces, arbitrary levying of recruits, and lastly, the prolonged absence of the Diet, left the court with no choice but to appease the tensions. The Diet was therefore finally summoned in 1825, but the all-powerful chancellor retained his position, and his policy, as hostile towards national grievances as it was towards social radicalism, remained unswerving. The era of reform thus ran parallel to the Metternich era of his camarilla, his spies and police interventions. The chancellor's position was weakened to some extent in 1826, when Franz Anton Kolowrat was nominated to the state Council, but Metternich lost none of his influence. The death of Francis I and accession to the throne of a harmless idiot Ferdinand V (1835–48) brought little change.

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Louis, the archduke-regent, Metternich and Kolowrat followed the well-trodden path. The Hungarian national recovery, however, continued to spread to all domains: politics, the economy, education, literature, theatre and the arts and sciences. It underwent a demographic upsurge too: in the 1830s, the population of the entire country had already reached nearly 13 million (Great Britain had 16 million).

So, after a thirteen-year recess, the Diet of Hungary was finally convened in 1825. The Transylvanian Diet had to wait another nine years. The Hungarian Assembly, by contrast, now convened regularly every three years, in sessions that sometimes lasted two years or more. The laws voted in by the Diet in 1825–7 and sanctioned by the king – as was the brief 1830 session – restored constitutional rights, abolished arbitrary levying of taxes and recruits and promoted the use of Hungarian as official language but did not widen the debate of ideas and reforms. This task was taken on by the county diets, by newspapers and books, the writings of Baron Miklós Wesselényi and Count István Széchenyi, before eventually reaching the benches of the 1832–6 Diet and subsequent ones.

Reform did not signify a complete break with the past. According to the 1839 nobility statistics, the country comprised 680,000 persons of noble status (135,000 families). According to other estimates, there were less than 600,000 out of a total 12–13 million inhabitants. Whatever their precise number, this class dominated the Diet, where only fifty-one free royal towns were represented. The Diet led what was essentially a 'national recrimination policy' against Vienna's anti-constitutional measures and it defended the privileges of the nobility against ordinary people. Moreover, preoccupied with its national demands, the Assembly also rose against the Croatian deputies, who had their own grievances and insisted on talking in Croatian. Social transformation, from one session to another, was consequently slow and difficult. Any denunciation of the old regime was punished: during the 1830s, Miklós Wesselényi, Lajos Kossuth and several young liberals of their circle received prison sentences.

Spearheading social and economic progress, the opposition nonetheless managed to extract from this two-faced Diet – reformist yet conservative – numerous liberal laws on freedom of expression and on social and fiscal matters. The ambiguity was inherent: by a 'trick of history', it was up to the nobility, in the absence of a genuine middle class, to

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fulfil the historic role of the latter by abolishing the very privileges they had clung to so tenaciously.

The political classes at the Diets continued to pursue their activities, as did society at large, an embryonic civil society, that is. This aspect of the reform era is at times overshadowed by the spectacle of parliamentary struggles and its key players. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the entire country was a 'building site' for new ideas and initiatives. A building site in the real sense as regards infrastructure projects, industrialisation, urban development and railway construction. A recapitulation of the situation on the eve of the 1848 revolution will demonstrate the extent of this growth, but the signs were already visible in the 1830s. Initially, a protectionist tendency still prevailed as a counterbalance to Austrian protectionism. The doctrine of the German economist Friedrich List (prioritising national industry, protectionist customs taxes) was very influential. A genuine defence movement of Hungarian products developed, led by Lajos Kossuth, attracting no fewer than 50,000 supporters in theory but far fewer in practice.

Another indicator of an evolving society was the increase in associations, clubs and citizens' mutual aid societies. In the eighteenth century, there were around fifty societies and brotherhoods. In 1840 there were at least 250 of various persuasions. And it was only the beginning. It was also the dawning of a golden age of art and literature. In the wake of a revival of language and literature at the beginning of the century, a second generation of writers and artists now embraced the national cause fuelled by romanticism. Ferenc Kölcsey, deputy, political thinker and poet, wrote the verses to the national anthem in 1823; Mihály Vörösmarty wrote his *Ode to the Nation* in 1836. The perfection of his metric versification and the emotional power of his tragic poems, his translations of Shakespeare as well as his own dramatic works, made Vörösmarty the leading literary figure among his contemporaries, until the appearance of Sándor Petöfi's generation. There were thirty-five printing houses in 1817 (not including Transylvania), employing 251 workers; by the middle of the century their number had doubled, and there were fifty or so newspapers and journals and 200 writers.

This was also the heroic age of Hungarian theatre, started in 1790 with tough competition from German theatre. From the beginning of the century, itinerant troupes had travelled from one town to another, with a repertoire which went from Shakespeare to Kotzebue. The diary

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Plate 21. The actress Róza Széppataki-Déry. Print by Chladek-Kohlmann from a drawing by Szathmáry

of the most famous actress, Mme Róza Déry, née Schenbach (Magyarised to Széppataki), tells the moving story of these pilgrimages. The first permanent Hungarian theatre opened its doors in Pest, in 1837 – permanent companies already existed in Kolozsvár, Kassa and other towns – and in 1839 staged Jozsef Katona's masterpiece, *Bánk bán*, a romantic tragedy imbued with nationalist and revolutionary fervour. As an illustration of the contrasts that were characteristic of the times, here is a review of the play from one of the great reformers, Count Széchenyi, written in German in his journal: 'Unbegreiflich, dass die Regierung . . .'

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'It is beyond comprehension why the government has allowed such nonsense to be performed. A bad and dangerous trend.'

Lajos Kossuth (1802–94), an admirer and opponent of István Széchenyi (1791–1860), attributed this epitaph to the man who had marked the Age of Resurrection before the Age of Insurrection exploded in 1848.

István's father, Ferenc Széchenyi – like the Eszterházys or Count György Festetics who founded the first Agriculture Academy and the Helikon literary festivals – belonged to the aristocratic patrons. He founded the National Museum and the National Library, named after him. Count István Széchenyi, officer in the imperial army until 1826, began by following the usual path towards innovation. He started rearing thoroughbreds and then became founder of the Academy of Sciences and Club of Magnates, promoted both navigation on the Danube and industrial development. Concurrently, in his successive books, he developed his ideas about banking, credit and industry, in other words, all aspects of modernisation as he had come to know it during his travels in England. He paid several visits there and in 1834 met King William, Wellington, Palmerston, Peel, Grey and Nathan Rothschild, who was keen to make István his son-in-law with an apanage of 2,000 pounds a year. Széchenyi discussed the idea of constructing a bridge in Budapest with Clark. But for the country to be modernised, medieval succession rights had to be abolished and, ultimately, seigniorial bondage. As soon as his book entitled *Hitel* (Credit) appeared in 1830, he was attacked vociferously for his programme, which advocated the dismantling of the feudal system. Széchenyi answered back and, while dedicating more time to his construction projects and enterprises, defended the positions taken by the Diets of 1830 and 1840.

His grand projects, to mention but a few, included river regulation at the Iron Gate to facilitate navigation of the lower Danube; the creation of a steamboat company; the construction of a suspension bridge between Pest and Buda. For Széchenyi, an 'English-style' reformer, this, along with equalising civic duties and imposing taxes on the nobility, was the way to progress, rather than social subversion or nationalist demagogy. And yet Metternich, who was very close to the count, considered him a dangerous element, whom he needed to restrain and protect at court. The count saw danger as coming from conservative

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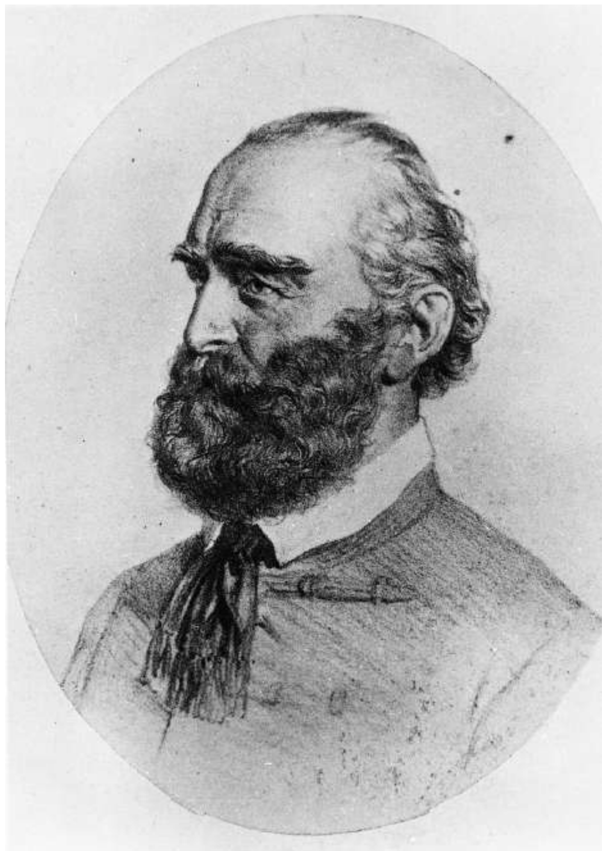

Plate 22. István Széchenyi. Lithograph by J. Kriehuber

magnates and nobles on the one hand and from those more radical than himself, notably his friend Wesselényi, and especially Lajos Kossuth, on the other.

Clashes between the moderate liberal reformer Széchenyi and the vehemently radical Kossuth fill an entire library and the debate on their merits and shortcomings continues to this day. Given that jealousy between the two men was matched by an equal mutual respect, and that both advocated a national reform programme, it is impossible to summarise their disagreements without over-simplifying them. When, in 1841, Széchenyi published an entire volume of work entitled *People of the East*, which he claimed was not aimed at the core of Kossuth's policy,

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but only his 'manner', one reader, a well-informed man of letters by the name of László Bártfai, asked in his diary what this expression actually meant. But he soon managed to 'see through the tangled web of the debate' and to understand that behind the padded words, were two conflicting notions; Széchenyi's criticism against Kossuth was in fact a warning cry: 'Do not go any further as it would lead to revolution.'

In the mid-1840s Kossuth was no revolutionary and even in 1848 he still wanted to avoid a break with the House of Habsburg. But Széchenyi, in his premonitory warnings, saw in him the 'demon' and the 'dangerous madman' who, through revolution, would lead the country to its ruin.

There was also a fierce argument between the two protagonists over their respective positions on the nationality issue: Széchenyi believed that assimilation would come about through the beneficial effects of general progress; Kossuth hoped that Magyarisation would occur as a result of Hungarian democracy, culture, education and administration. Public opinion was closer to the latter, inflamed by its own national demands against Austria, combined with its desire for preponderance over Slav and Romanian minorities in this multinational kingdom. Széchenyi's fear that an alliance between clamorous Magyar nationalism and the narrow-minded reactionary nobility, his worst nightmare, would become reality, may have been exaggerated but was not unfounded. Be that as it may, the count, once praised to the skies for awakening the nation, lost his popularity, whereas Kossuth, the first to have succeeded in conducting a policy which moved the masses, carried the day and was propelled towards the role of nation leader.

Lajos (Lewis) Kossuth, who was born in the market town of Monok in 1802, and who died in 1894, exiled in Trieste, was the son of a lesser noble, a modest civil servant and lawyer, and Caroline Weber, daughter of a district collector of taxes. Such details mean little, of course – Kossuth's dazzling career was due to his personal qualities; but his family background did represent, if only symbolically, the social stratum that would be called upon to play a rather extraordinary historical role: a nobility that was forced by circumstances to stand in for a bourgeoisie that missed the roll call due to weakness and its predominantly German extraction. The task which was incumbent upon Kossuth, through a combination of personal qualities, background and circumstance, was no less than that of knitting together into a modern

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Plate 23. Lajos Kossuth. Lithograph by Franz Eybl, 1841

European nation a land whose development had been curbed by external misfortune. Both progress and national freedom had to be fought for simultaneously.

To some, like the British Edward Crankshaw, Kossuth had been 'a new kind of demagogue, without scruples' who awakened 'the pride and arrogance, the subterranean romanticism of Magyar nationalism', and at the end of the day was no more or less than the 'precursor of Hitler and Mussolini'. This pamphleteer judgement demonstrates how inept retrospective applications of contemporary values are. Nineteenth-century nationalism brought about a genuine people's

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spring; while the nationalism of twentieth-century dictators augured totalitarianism.

The diatribes of this journalist–historian, therefore, need not be taken seriously. Though Kossuth's increasingly radical policy against the Austrian Empire was not met with approval, he was a highly respected figure in European public opinion and, after his defeat, received a hero's welcome from London to Washington, where his bust adorns the Capitol to this day, alongside those of the heroes of liberty. True, many would subsequently change their minds and denigrate him, as did Marx, who at one time called him 'Danton and Carnot rolled into one'. Deák, Eötvös and many others involved in the events started out at his side, but later became architects of the reconciliation with the Habsburgs.

We should not anticipate too much, however, the events and the circumstances, especially the conflict of 1848–9, which transformed this lawyer – propelled to state leadership – into the great hero of the nation and also a symbol of failure, his name synonymous with a war of independence and a liberal revolution. Kossuth's ascent had only just begun.

Having recently completed a three-year prison sentence because of his seditious *Journal of Debate*, in early 1841 Kossuth launched a journal that was to be the focus of the entire opposition, *Pesti Hírlap*, which became especially famous for its dazzling editorials. It was then that Kossuth's political genius really took off. He realised that the platform of the Assembly could not on its own generate a sufficiently broad change in public opinion. At the Diet, the gallery was already on his side but in order to reach the masses, he needed the press. He knew that the social foundation of his bold reform programme was the 'middle ground', the ordinary nobility, the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie – in other words, a middle class in the making. Among them, the subgroup requiring the most delicate handling in order to be won over to his cause was that of the local squires caught up in a 'feudal' situation without feudalism, knights without horses, without land and without a future. With infinite patience, Kossuth cajoled them into gradually giving up some of their privileges and very tentatively introduced the idea of a light property tax. Even this proposal failed in the 1843–4 county diets and the national Diet, during which there were violent outbursts against the liberals.

This was not enough to topple Kossuth, however, who had emerged triumphant from his arguments with Count Széchenyi. The aristocrat

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had been eclipsed by the lesser noble who was not, as he himself liked to point out, 'born with a silver spoon in his mouth'. Kossuth remained leader of the nationalist–liberal trend throughout these pre-revolutionary years.

HUNGARY ON THE EVE OF THE 1848 REVOLUTION

On the eve of the 1848 Revolution, Hungary and Transylvania numbered over 14 million inhabitants, 600,000 of whom were nobles, only 120,000 of them wealthy nobles. The latter, together with one thousand magnates and prelates made up the traditional upper class. But the new middle class, composed of nobles – many of whom embraced the liberal programme – as well as the intellectual professions (about 50,000 holders of honorary diplomas) and the bourgeoisie, constituted a considerable political and economic force. It was a force that operated like a kind of third estate, with the difference that the assorted city-dwellers who were neither noble nor bourgeois (240,000 craftsmen and 25,000 workers and their families) and a large peasantry were mere spectators, waiting for the outcome of the reforms, the abolition of serfdom and the advent of democracy.

Agriculture was by far the dominant economic activity and unmodernised save for a limited number of experimental farms. The majority of landowners and tenured peasants continued to use old-fashioned farming methods, had no money and lived in autarky. Industry was no longer in its infancy: it had started from practically nothing at the turn of the century; now, fifty years later, there were a thousand factories; and yet this was only a tenth of Austrian and Czech industries. In terms of production and foreign trade, proportions were even worse, not to mention a steam-engine park that consisted of two dozen or so compared with that of the Habsburg Empire which was a hundred times larger.

An analysis of trading agglomerations, employing the method of multiple variables (clusterisation) used by the historian Vera Bácskai, gives a precise picture of urbanisation in 1828. It is complex due to the very specific development of divergent Hungarian towns: administrative and diocesan centres, county seats, mining towns, commercial market towns and peasant villages. This survey is more conclusive than using the number of inhabitants as a sole criterion of urbanisation.

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Population figures tell us nothing about urban development levels: for example, a densely populated large town may revolve entirely around agriculture, while others might be flourishing industrial and urban centres with a relatively small population. Traditional classification, moreover, according to royal privileges bestowed over the centuries, can sometimes distort reality in terms of the importance of trade, crafts and production, or wealth, taxation and housing conditions.

Bácskai's study, using about twenty criteria, groups together 57 localities as being the most important towns, a figure close to the existing 60-odd royal free towns, but one which does not describe the same reality. Only 22 of the royal free towns and 6 episcopal towns are included among the most highly developed urban centres, against 29 rural *oppida*, a specifically Hungarian development combining peasant, craft and commercial activities. Pest-Buda comprised more than 86,000 inhabitants at the time; Szeged, Pozsony, Debrecen and Kesckemét had over 30,000 and there were three other centres with more than 20,000 inhabitants. Trades practised in these towns numbered on average sixty; in the future capital there were 150. In the largest towns there were more than fifty artisans and ten shopkeepers per 1,000 inhabitants; Pest and Buda counted approximately 400 literate taxpayers and other towns were proportionally similar. Out of the 86,000 or so inhabitants that made up Pest and Buda, 16,000 households paid tax and 3,000 enjoyed the rights of the bourgeoisie. In all this, agriculture, viticulture and small trade still played a very important role. Development continued and the dusty towns grew and changed. By the time of the revolution, Pest-Buda-Óbuda had a population of 120,000, a beautiful suspension bridge designed by two English engineers, William Tierney Clark and Adam Clark, a permanent theatre, new hospitals, schools and administrative buildings. And you could travel to the town of Vác by train on the line inaugurated in 1846 and celebrated in a poem by Petöfi.

There was never a more Magyar poet than Sándor Petöfi, son of an assimilated Serbian and a Slovak mother. Patriot, radical, revolutionary, his attitude towards non-Magyar nationalities was enlightened empathy, but he was no more concerned with them than were his friends. In those pre-revolutionary years, the order of the day was Hungary's national independence and its transformation into a modern, liberal and democratic state; a profound reform which for a Széchenyi or a Kossuth would naturally lead to universal citizenship.

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Plate 24. The Suspension Bridge, Budapest. Nineteenth-century engraving

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Debate among liberal Hungarians focused upon the modalities and the pace of change and not on the suitability of another policy. And yet, alongside social and religious divisions, the issue of national minorities was now high on the political agenda; and it was not limited to languages: there were legal, economic, educational and cultural aspects too. The whole of Europe was in the grip of romantic nationalism.

With 14 million inhabitants now under the Hungarian Crown, the demographic deficit of the post-Turkish era had been reversed, but more than half of the population comprised non-Magyar ethnic groups. In contrast to ancient times, their assimilation was practically never spontaneous. Though no one yet spoke of national identity as such, an often quite vague national awareness, diffused and mixed in with the social and religious, had been awakened.

According to the 1850–1 census carried out in the Habsburg Empire, out of the 11,600,000 subjects of the Hungarian Crown – excluding Croatia and Fiume – approximate figures were as follows: 4,800,000 Magyars, 2,240,000 Romanians, 1,740,000 Slovaks, 1,350,000 Germans, 1,100,000 Ukrainians, Slovenians and Serbo-Croats and 250,000 Jews. In percentage terms, Hungarians made up 41.4 per cent, Romanians 19.3 per cent, Slavs together 24.5 per cent, Germans 11.6 per cent. Denominational composition, established twenty years later, adjusts the Austrian figures, which tended to be prejudiced against the Hungarian point of view. Catholics and Protestants (Magyars, Germans, Slovaks and Croats) constituted 69 per cent of the population, the Orthodox 15.2 per cent, the Uniates (Greek Catholics and a large number of sub-Carpathian Ukrainians and Romanians) 11.7 per cent and Jews 4 per cent.

However one chooses to interpret the figures, one thing is certain: the 1848 events took place in a country that was both multi-ethnic and multidenominational, strongly influenced by cultural and political nationalist awakenings. The Croats, subjects of the Crown but with their own diet and enjoying considerable state autonomy, constituted a particularly complex problem. In the 1840s, Croat nobility had severed its traditional alliance with the Hungarian states and orders. The Croat national party and the Illyrian movement, an outcome of Napoleon's Illyrian provinces created between 1809 and 1813, opposed the pro-Hungarian Croats, incited by Ljudevit Gaj, writer and editor of *Ilirske Narodne Novini*.

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Equally strong cultural nationalist currents existed among the Slovaks in Upper Hungary, the Serbs in the south and the Romanians in Transylvania. To say that the intellectuals and patriots of these nationalities were unhappy about the introduction of Hungarian as the official language – the concept of 'one state, one nation' – and the Hungarian political class's assimilationist policy would be an understatement. Nor were they received wholeheartedly by Hungarian liberals. As for the Viennese court, in accordance with its age-old tactic of 'divide and rule', it encouraged the minorities to pursue their demands.

In three-nation Transylvania (Magyar, Szekler and Saxon), the fourth nation, the Romanians, had raised their heads, influenced by the intellectual Balázsfalva circle and the journal *Gazeta de Transilvania*. The journal was also read in Bucharest and among the Romanians of Hungary. The latter did not manifest hostility towards the Magyars; they were too preoccupied with their grievances against the Serbian Orthodox clergy who dominated the regional Church. Serbian demands had nonetheless made some headway, lead by Josip Rajačič, bishop of Karlóca and future archbishop, and the writer Vuk Karadžič, reformer of the Serbian language. The vision of a Greater Serbia as an ideology was also upheld by the Serbian minister of the interior, Ilija Garašanin. As for Serbians living within the kingdom of Hungary, their most important journal, *Serbske Narodne Novine*, published in Pest, leaned more towards Hungarian reformism.

In Upper Hungary, the 'war of languages' raged between Magyars and Slovaks. Two high-flying intellectuals led the Slovak movement: Jan Kollár and L'udovit Štúr, both opponents of Magyarisation. Kollár's profile illustrates well the complexity of the situation: he was a Lutherian pastor living in Pest, wrote in Czech and adopted a pro-Austrian and Austro-Slavist policy. Austro-Slavism as opposed to Russian-Panslavism envisaged the union of the Slavs of the Habsburg Empire, a vision dear to the great figure of Czech nationalism, František Palacký, author of the famous phrase, 'If Austria didn't exist, it would have to be invented.' It was he who in June 1848 presided over the Prague Panslavic Congress. Nevertheless, from the Hungarian perspective, Austro-Slavism and the pro-Russian Panslavism that Miklós Wesselényi had been the first to spot on the horizon, were indistinguishable in that both of them threatened the integrity of the kingdom's territory. L'udovit Štúr, further to the left than Kollár, played the more important

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role at the time. Writer and editor of a very influential Slovak journal, *Slovenskje Narodnje Noviny*, Štúr became Slovak Slavism's most radical and democratic leader.

In this mosaic of nationalities and trends, the German minority – with the exception of the Saxons – was the only one that did not express hostility towards or make demands on the Hungarians. Most Germans had settled many centuries previously, were scattered across several regions, enjoyed old bourgeois privileges in towns and the status of free peasants in the countryside. They were prosperous; cohabitation with the Magyars did not cause them any hardship; they used their language (in fact, a number of German dialects) without hindrance and many of them had totally integrated with the Magyar population.

The direction taken by one nationality or another was also subject to the combination of external events. In this period when great nations were being shaped, two routes opened up: German-style integration of state clusters, and unification Italian-style, led by Piedmont and involving wars of liberation. In both cases, a unifying state was the driving force: Prussia and the kingdom of Sardinia. The third way, amalgamation by secession, was only half-open due to the existence of gravitational centres, like Serbia for the Serbians, Walachia and Moldavia for the Romanians. But for the others, there was no adjacent 'mother nation-state' to allure them. Czecho-Slovakia was a dormant idea; Bismarck was more concerned with eliminating Austria than with attracting any of the Germanic groups dispersed in the back of beyond. The Serbian frontier guards who had risen up against the Pest-Buda government wanted to create an autonomous voïvodina.

The Jewish minority constituted a special case; in the mid-nineteenth century, there were some 250,000 Jews in Hungary, as opposed to 75,000 in 1785, about 1 per cent of the population. Due to a massive influx of Jews from Bohemia and Moravia, followed by another from Galicia, no other ethnic group or religion underwent such a dramatic increase in numbers over a century. Despite some reservations and suspicions, even contempt, these immigrants were on the whole well received. The acceleration of immigration as well as the favourable reception of Jews is incomprehensible without a detour into much earlier history.

Countless documents from the Middle Ages and the modern age attest to a Jewish presence in Hungary since the year of the conquest, 895. As with other Jews in Europe, they were dependent upon powerful

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lords, the king first and foremost, from whom they received protection in exchange for a collective Jewish tax for loans and other payments, services or straightforward ransoms. They were subjected to the customary discriminations: the wearing of distinctive signs and clothes was compulsory; there were restrictions concerning property and profession; cohabitation with Christians was forbidden – although this last rule was not very strictly respected. And yet Hungary's few thousand Jews fared far better than those living in Spain, France, Germany or England. They were spared from the massacres perpetrated during the Crusades and, aside from a few isolated cases, were not subjected to pogroms or mass expulsions.

One chronicle tells of an incident at the time of Matthias Corvinus's wedding with Beatrice of Aragon in 1476, when twenty-four Jews on horseback and two hundred on foot, all sumptuously attired and with swords drawn, came to salute the couple at the gates of Buda and placed the Torah scroll in their hands. Such a scene, almost beyond imagination, would never occur again. Following the death of this Renaissance king, Jews were attacked by all those jealous of their royal privileges. The mainly German urban bourgeoisie let loose its fury upon these rival foreigners who practised strange rites and often usury. Thus, alongside religious anti-Judaism, a modern day competitive anti-Semitism emerged. A sign of the times was the hysteria that characterised 'ritual murder' trials that occurred in certain towns under certain lords: Count de Bazin, for example, had thirty Jews burnt in 1529.

Nonetheless, the kingdom of Hungary had far less persecution and offered a higher guarantee of security to Jews than other countries. Religious tolerance in Turkish-occupied territories had attracted Jews escaping persecution in several Christian countries.

In Transylvania, champion of tolerance, cases of anti-Judaism were rare except in Saxon towns. The Helvetic Reformation tended to kindle a certain affinity with the people of the Bible. Transylvania was also birthplace to the Sabbatist sect, related to Judaism and founded by Simon Péchi (1570–1642), who was later imprisoned and his sect outlawed. Conversion to Christianity, on the other hand, was for some Jews the way to social integration and career openings, sometimes to the highest offices of state or Church.

The era of the Habsburg kings, and Ferdinand III's rule (1637–57) in particular, was particularly difficult for the Jews: the Diet practically

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outlawed them and a number of towns once again expelled them. Leopold I (1657–1705) then imposed a special tax, called a tolerance tax, which remained in force under Maria Theresa and Joseph II. Taxation was not to be taken lightly; nonetheless, in 1783, Joseph II – in keeping with his enlightened government – despite having no sympathy whatsoever with this despised race, promulgated the 'systematic regulation' of the Jews' status. The regulation accorded them a number of civic rights, among them, access to towns, participation in industry and admission to Christian schools without having to wear any distinctive sign.

Medieval anti-Judaism was fading, competitive anti-Semitism persisted and the Jewish question was incorporated into a long and fertile debate of ideas, throughout the periods of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, as well as during the extraordinary growth of Hungarian ideas and collective attitudes. While the urban bourgeoisie remained on the whole hostile, enlightened intellectuals and nobles were in favour of Jewish emancipation and even of further immigration, though with some reservations, particularly with regard to the Galicians, who were poor, ragged, spoke Yiddish and practised a kind of social auto-exclusion. If legal and social integration did go ahead it was because, unlike most minorities, the Jews were willing to change their ways. Whether orthodox, faithful to their religion and particular customs or, with greater reason, culturally assimilated, they adopted the Magyar language, nationality and even patriotism. Their contribution was invaluable at a time when pressure from other national minorities began to weigh upon the Magyars. Liberal leaders Széchenyi, Kossuth, Ferenc Deák and József Eötvös all favoured emancipation.

THE IDES OF MARCH 1848: THE REVOLUTION

During the year 1848, revolutions swept across Europe like a tidal wave: it was the 'springtime of the people'. Revolution broke out in Palermo and Naples, then on 23 February, in Paris, leading to Guizot's fall, Louis-Philippe's abdication and to the proclamation of the Second French Republic. On 13 March, the revolutionary wave reached Austria: Klemens von Metternich was driven out of office; Emperor Ferdinand V, under duress, promised Austria a free press and a constitution. Italy and Germany were inflamed too, but it was the Paris and Vienna revolutions

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Plate 25. Sándor Petőfi. Painting by Miklós Barabás, 1848

that ignited the Hungarian gunpowder. Nevertheless, no blood was spilled in what the historian István Deák aptly described as a 'legal revolution'.

Carried along by the enthusiasm of a few groups of young intellectuals, the 'romantic revolution' of the people of Pest coloured six months of revolutionary political transformation as well as the war of national liberation that followed from September 1848 to August 1849. As soon as the news from Paris reached Hungary, Lajos Kossuth went on the political offensive at the Pozsony Diet with his liberal–radical

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programme, which was soon relayed to Pest. In the name of the Opposition Circle, one of its leaders, József Irinyi, drafted the 'Demands of the Hungarian nation', the famous 'Twelve Points' paragraph comprising the essence of Kossuth's 3 March programme and reflecting the ideas of the Pest radicals. They planned to present the list of demands to the people eight days later, but news of the Viennese revolution accelerated events. Gathering at the Café Pilvax on 14 March, the young men of Pest took action instead. The 25-year-old poet, Sándor Petöfi, drafted the famous and flamboyant 'National Song' and, the following day, the young revolutionaries, escorted by an increasingly large crowd, had the poem and the twelve demands printed without permission from the censor. Events were precipitated forward: a meeting was held in front of the National Museum, crowds gathered at the Municipal Assembly, joining the opposition and its 'Twelve Points'. The crowds then freed the imprisoned Mihály Táncsics, an old plebeian rebel. 15 March was the revolution of the radicals and of the streets in Pest – in step with Kossuth and his opposition party at the Pozsony Diet.

After the young revolutionaries, the Hungarian men of state whose thinking had been formed during the two reformist decades took control of the political action that followed; but the heat generated on the streets of Pest was fuelled by more than a momentary flame. Petöfi, Irinyi, Pál Vasvári, Mór Jókai and their friends continued to push the revolution forward, and the demands drafted on the Ides of March determined the events that followed. The Twelve Points – comprising 69 words – gave expression to the will of the nation: freedom of the press; abolition of censorship, the ministry in charge and National Assembly in Buda-Pest; equality of civic and religious rights; equal and universal contribution to public expenses; abolition of seigniorial taxes; a national bank and national armed forces; freeing of political prisoners; legal reforms; union with Transylvania.

Each demand entailed a conflict of interest with Vienna's absolutist institutions and administration. The revolution wanted to abolish the restrictive and discriminatory laws, indeed, the entire political and economic system – dominated by Vienna from outside and by the privileged classes, their diets and dietines inside the country. Despite numerous obstacles, pitfalls and reversals, the reform programme went ahead: Hungary was on the home run towards national independence, civic democracy and bourgeois liberalism. It fell to a rather divided

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political class to conduct a double struggle: with the reaction from Vienna and also with internal divisions. And then there was the nationality problem. The freeing of the serfs had attracted mass support for the revolution among the peasants, but the national minorities were soon putting forward their own demands, thus intervening in the conflict between Austria and Hungary.

At the Pozsony Diet, conservatives in both chambers were swept aside by Kossuth's party, a victory due partially at least to scaremongering among the wealthy: it was said that a peasant army led by Petöfi was preparing to march on the Diet.

At the other cardinal point, in other words the imperial capital, the March revolution succeeded because the government was weak and psychologically destabilised. After Metternich's dismissal, the feeble king and the State Conference ratified the key laws of the Hungarian Diet, the 'April laws': The promulgation of these laws meant that the revolutionary achievements became legalised. Victory entailed the installation of a Hungarian government accountable to the Assembly, universal suffrage, the complete abolition of serfdom through the suppression of tithes and dues, eventual indemnity of landowners undertaken by the state and a general and universal tax. Despite subsequent recriminations and reversals, there was no turning back for supporters of the old regime. Seigniorial Hungary had had its day.

By April, therefore, the main national demands had been granted. The king, under pressure and also through the mediation of the palatine, István, son of Archduke József and sympathetic towards the Hungarians, agreed to the formation of a Hungarian government under the presidency of Count Lajos Batthyány. The cabinet included, among others, Ferenc Deák, Bertalan Szemere, Gábor Kaluzál, Baron József Eötvös as minister of public education, Kossuth as minister of finance and Count Széchenyi. The latter, despite his old animosity towards Kossuth and his reservations bordering at times on a phobia with regard to the revolution, accepted the portfolio of public works and transport.

On 11 April, the Diet was dissolved – for ever. The ancient institution was replaced by the National Assembly elected by direct suffrage constituted by the nobles, the bourgeoisie and wealthy peasants. There were more electors than were admitted by the British 1832 Reform Act. Hungary was now a constitutional parliamentary monarchy, governed

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by an accountable ministry, since the royal lieutenancy seated in Buda along with the Hungarian chancellery of the Viennese court had been abolished. The Austrian emperor, however, remained king of Hungary; Hungarian sovereignty was not internationally recognised and there was no foreign office minister in Pest. On the other hand, a national currency, the forint, was soon in circulation and the Hungarian national guard and army were established. Finally, following a general election, the first National Assembly of 415 deputies, mainly from the provincial nobility, opened on 5 July. The radical stream represented by Petöfi's friends, and the poet himself, did not do well at the election: their only deputy was József Irinyi, though among the liberal deputies, forty or so were close to the young republican radicals.

Transylvania soon followed suit, proclaiming reunification with the mother country on 30 May, a union which eventually gained the sanction of the king. The issue of military frontiers under Austrian rule, having been the object of dispute for half a century, was also resolved to the satisfaction of the Pest-Buda Hungarian government.

National minority demands, meanwhile, were listened to, placated but basically refuted. As was the case in more than one European country at the end of the twentieth century, the Hungarian liberals of 1848 were not ready to renounce the concept of a unitary state and to concede autonomous territories to the different nationalities. They considered that liberating the serfs and ensuring equal civic rights to all citizens, regardless of ethnicity or creed, would solve the minority problem. Minorities were, after all, within the 'constitutional bastion'. And, indeed, there were plenty of ex-serfs who were more enthusiastic about the social freedoms brought about by the Magyar revolution than they were about the respective ethnic struggles for national freedoms. Yet ethnic minorities were now increasingly aware of their identity, and the national ideal continued to win hearts and minds. Throughout the Austro-Hungarian conflict, the repercussions of the national Slovak movement in Upper Hungary, Serbian bids for autonomy and Romanian movements, spurred by the Balázsfalva meetings, were keenly felt. Even the Transylvanian Saxons, better off than the Romanians, opposed union with Hungary.

Croatia constituted a special case. It was part of the Hungarian Crown lands, but enjoyed considerable autonomy and its own diet, the

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Zagreb Sabor, while also dependent upon the authority of the bán, the civil governor designated by the king of Hungary – and consequently, the emperor–king since the Habsburgs had occupied the throne. Because of this triangular constellation, the Austro-Hungarian compromise arrived at twenty years later would have to include a Hungarian–Croatian compromise so as to respect Croatia's state rights. The situation in 1848 was more explosive than it would be in 1867–8. With the kingdom of Croatia embedded in that of Hungary, in turn bound up with the Austrian Empire of the Habsburgs, Zagreb was to play an important role. Neither the bán, General Josip Jellačič, a strong national figure, nor the more powerful section of the Croatian political class, wanted to march alongside the Magyars. Against expressed prohibition by the king – who was linked to the Hungarian constitution – Jellačič convened the Sabor and refused to enter into negotiations with the palatine.

Vienna initially approved Hungary's position with regard to the national minorities, and went as far as recalling Jellačič – though the gesture was more symbolic than anything else, and the Sabor, on its part, did not hesitate to refuse its co-operation. This played into the hands of Vienna. The Austrian government provided Zagreb with the financial means to arm itself and, on 4 September, restored Jellačič to office. The intention was obvious: the imperial government wanted to put an end to the Hungarian revolution and its independence.

A great deal had changed in the meantime. Austria had never been keen on Hungarian separation but had been unable to stop it. Furthermore, it needed the Hungarian military contribution in its fight against Charles-Albert, king of Sardinia and of Piedmont. But the victory of the Austrian army, led by General Josef Radetzky at Custozza on 25 July, followed by the re- conquest of Milan in August, had restored Austria's confidence; all the more so, as order was already restored in Prague where Prince Alfred Windischgrätz had crushed the 16 June Czech uprising and in Paris the June barricades had fallen. The court that had fled to Innsbruck on 15 May, returned to Vienna in August. These dates explain the serenity that set in: the great European revolutionary wave had been forestalled.

It was time for Vienna to play its Croatian card against Hungary. Events turned drastically: after six months of peaceful revolution, war broke out.

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THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Since Austrian power had been strengthened, threats to the Hungarian revolution increased dramatically. The Austrian government tried to renege on the political concessions it had given away in its moment of weakness and set about encouraging Croat separatism as well as the other nationalist movements within Hungary. Serbian soldiers from one military district embarked upon an armed revolt against the royal forces, and armed Slovak groups were on the brink of rebellion. In the face of danger, the Buda-Pest government speeded up its own preparations for war: a national army – known as Honvédség (the Hungarian territorial army) – was set up, armament and equipment factories bought, political and social rights were broadened and their patriotic propaganda increased. 'The fatherland is in danger', a slogan launched by Kossuth, minister and democratic leader, reverberated throughout the land. His speech to the Assembly on 11 July led the deputies to vote for 200,000 recruits and a military credit of 42 million.

War broke out on 11 September. On that day, General Jellačič's army crossed the Croat frontier and began the march towards Vienna, via Transdanubia. Austria had not yet officially joined the conflict and was in negotiation with Budapest; but Jellačič's war was Vienna's, and the Austrian General Karl Roth had already joined in the hostilities. After this manifest aggression, events accelerated: counterstroke and mobilisation in Hungary. Battyány's attempt to form a second government failed through royal refusal, leading to the resignation of the prime minister on 2 October. The effective government of Hungary was taken over by the Fatherland Defence Committee, which the Assembly held on 8 October, enlarged and vested with all the necessary powers. It was Kossuth's moment – his speeches, beginning with one he gave on 24 September in Cegléd, fanned the fires of patriotism and mobilised the population.

The first large-scale battle took place on 29 September. The Honvéd army stopped Jellačič at Pákozd, on the Transdanubian hills. Before their next confrontation one month later, momentous political events took place which hardened positions on both sides. On 28 September, the people of Pest murdered General Franz Philippe Lamberg, sent to take high command of the imperial army stationed in Hungary. He was

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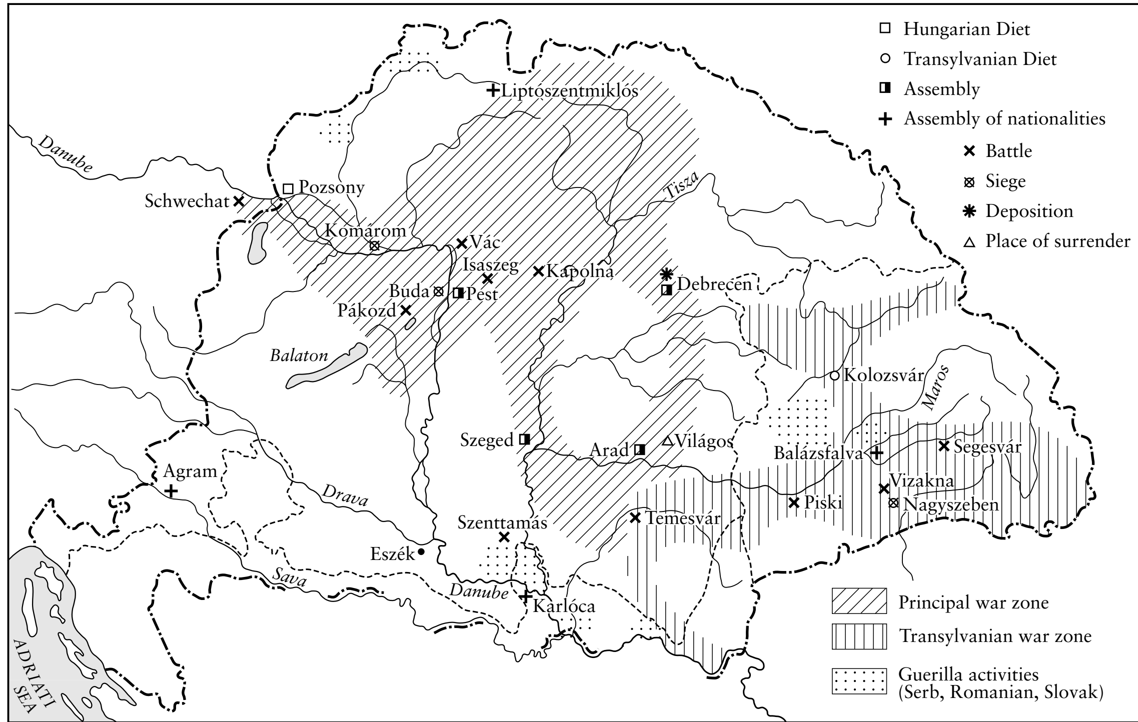

Map 8. Hungary in 1848–9

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replaced by Jellačič. At the same time the monarchy dissolved parliament and replaced Batthyány with another head of government; the Hungarian Assembly declared these decisions null and void.

On 6 October, the people of Vienna came to the rescue: Count Théodore Baillet de Latour, war minister, was hanged from a lamp post by an insurgent crowd and appallingly mutilated. To escape this second Viennese insurrection, the court escaped by train to Olmütz (Olomouc) in Moravia.

It was then, on 8 October, that the Assembly in Pest nominated Kossuth president of the Defence Committee. He proceeded to take on leadership of the executive, endowed with almost dictatorial powers. Austria was not slow to promote its own strong men: Alfred Windischgrätz, the 'Prague executioner', was nominated commander-in-chief, vested with full powers to suppress the Viennese and Hungarian revolutions.

Meanwhile, the Hungarian army twice penetrated into Austria, and, on 25 October, marched on Vienna in order to help the insurgents. The plan foundered: on 30 October, Windischgrätz defeated the Hungarian, General Móga, near Vienna, at Schwechat, and the Hungarian army retreated back to Hungary. Having quelled the Viennese revolution, Windischgrätz set about preparing for his Hungarian campaign which in December took him to Györ, and then as far as Pest-Buda.

The political and military situation at the end of 1848 was therefore hardly favourable for the Hungarians, the exception being Transylvania. In Austria, another strong man, Prince Felix Schwarzenberg – as it happens a relative of Windischgrätz – was appointed prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, therefore, like Metternich, controlling the two reins of government. Since 2 December, Austria had had a new emperor: the good-natured Ferdinand V abdicated in favour of his nephew, Francis Joseph I. The future beloved patriarch King–Emperor Francis Joseph, eighteen years of age, soon demonstrated an all-consuming ambition to re-establish absolute authority at all costs and without compromises.

With Windischgrätz at the Pest-Buda gates on 31 December, the Hungarian government decided to leave the capital and install itself 200 kilometres further east, at Debrecen. Meanwhile, back in November, a legendary Polish general, Józef Bem, had offered his sword to Hungary and taken command of the Transylvanian army. The war continued

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throughout the winter on several fronts and without any decisive advantage for either side, until spring 1849.

Having won the Battle of Kápolna on 26 February, Windischgrätz, confident of an imminent and decisive victory, told the emperor that Hungarian resistance was over. Vienna, greatly encouraged by the news, promulgated a retrograde constitution in the form of a manifesto which abolished the 1848 laws and subjected Hungary to the government of the Austrian Empire. Though this was premature, the Hungarian government faced serious dissent within its army and unrest in the 'Peace Party'.

The latter comprised a number of parliamentary political currents all opposed to the pursuit of war. From the very beginning of the revolution, several Hungarian figures, some aulic aristocrats but also nobles and members of the bourgeoisie – not to mention the non-Magyar nationalities – disapproved of Kossuth, opposed the radicalisation of the revolution and, even more so, the war against Austria. Kossuth's eloquence, ardent patriotism and sheer talent dazzled practically everyone. His policies won over the peasantry of the Great Plain, inspired the army, rallied the moderates and the undecided, but not the entire political class. The Peace Party wanted him defeated, driven to capitulation or persuaded to join their ranks. It could never compete with the charismatic leader that was Kossuth to the extent of achieving its goals, but it did not give up.

The big question of this war of independence remains unanswered: would a compromise with Austria have been possible? Europe would have no doubt wished it but Russia would not; as for Austria, it wanted to pierce the abscess of Hungarian obsession. After the Monarchic Constitution had been promulgated and granted in March 1849, there was no longer any room for a 'Hungarian exception', as Austrian historian Hugo Hantsch calls it. Be that as it may, in spring 1849, Kossuth saw only two alternatives: either to fight until victory had been achieved, which he still considered possible, or to capitulate without any real chance of a compromise. In April, he chose the first option.

On 13 April 1849, despite refusal from the Defence Committee, predictable opposition from the Peace Party, and accusations of betrayal and treachery, Kossuth, in a meeting behind closed doors put the Declaration of Independence of the Hungarian state and the proclamation of the deposition of the House of Habsburg-Lorraine before the

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National Assembly. The bill prevailed and was unanimously approved the following day at a public meeting of an enlarged Assembly – one might say a plebiscite – at the Debrecen Temple. The Peace Party therefore rallied with Kossuth, who now had behind him not only the majority of Parliament, but also he claimed, the loyalty of the army and popular support. The break-up with Vienna and the king was sealed.

Contrary to the proposal from the radical left, Hungary was not proclaimed a republic. The constitutional shape the Hungarian state was to take would be decided later. For the moment it was left in abeyance. Kossuth's rise to supreme power was confirmed when he was immediately elected state president–governor. Contrary to the wishes of a very small radical left, however, the Assembly did not confer full powers upon him. Kossuth was more representative of the dominant middle nobility in the Assembly than of the left or, indeed, the opposition which favoured accommodation with Vienna. His principal objective had been achieved: Hungary had become independent.

With Kossuth elected head of state, the executive was re-established. On 1 May, Bertalan Szemere was appointed head of government and minister of the interior; Count Kázmér Batthyány was minister of foreign affairs and a few days later, Artur Görgey was appointed war minister. Collaboration between the president–governor and several of his ministers was not always smooth. Szemere's sympathies leaned towards the Peace Party and the relationship between Görgey and Kossuth was, and continued to be, tempestuous.

When independence was declared on 14 April, the military situation had already turned in Hungary's favour. Political and personal disagreements in the army had been temporarily overcome. Indeed, during the winter, in the midst of a retreat before the Austrian army, the officers' corps was divided and several of them left the army because of political convictions. Loyal to their oath, they were willing to fight for the 1848 Constitution sanctioned by the sovereign but condemned the 'unruly republican' tendency. Commander General Görgey spoke to that effect in January 1849 when he declared the army's loyalty to the April laws (and therefore to royal legality). In fact, like the entire political class, the officers' corps included a fair number of republicans. The unprecedented situation of a constitutionally independent country, which was at the same time under the authority of a king whose army

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had invaded it, was bound have repercussions. The army, if not exactly split, was certainly torn between its oath to the nation and loyalty to the king: two allegiances that became increasingly irreconcilable.

Despite this friction, army unity was maintained through several personal and political conflicts, notably between Kossuth and Görgey. The president–governor had even decided to appoint the old Polish general, Henryk Dembiński, over Görgey, but soon changed his mind when Görgey proved his military genius at the head of his army corps. In March 1849, Görgey was at the heart of the army once again. The waltz of the generals continued, but military operations were going well. In early April, a spring campaign was launched on all fronts. The Hungarians defeated the Austrian general Schlik at Hatvan, not far from Pest, and Serbian resistance was suppressed in the south. Klapka and Damjanich defeated Jellačič and Windischgrätz's main army suffered a serious defeat at Isaszeg.

The victorious advance of the Hungarian forces continued but the 14 April Declaration of Independence did nothing to improve relations between Kossuth and Görgey. Their more or less relentless conflict underlined the incompatibility of their personalities as well as the political antagonism between those who wanted to go 'all the way' and the moderates. When Görgey heard about the Debrecen declaration, he is said to have remarked: 'Another victory and Kossuth will be declaring war on the Emperor of China.' Was this simply a witty remark? In any case it reveals the general's state of mind and that of many others. The Austrian emperor had meanwhile also changed his general commander-in-chief. After his defeat, Windischgrätz was replaced by Ludwig von Welden, who was soon also fighting a retreat and was forced to surrender Pest. After the bombing of Pest on the left bank of the Danube, its twin town Buda fell on 21 May. Welden was in turn fired and the emperor nominated Baron Julius von Haynau in his stead.

Kossuth and the government returned to the liberated capital in June – but not for long. The war continued but Hungary's days of independence were numbered. Responding to his imperial cousin's call, Tsar Nicholas I soon sent his army in against the Hungarians. A handful of Russian units had already penetrated Transylvania before the campaign by the main army. Assistance provided by the tsar to Francis Joseph was far from selfless. It was motivated by Russian interest in a large number of Poles who had participated in the Hungarian War of Independence.

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Furthermore, the tsar had some ideas of his own which will be discussed later.

As soon as the bulk of the Russian army arrived, the Hungarians found themselves caught in a stranglehold: on 15 June, General Ivan Fyodorovich Paskievich, duke of Warsaw, invaded Hungary with his troops, followed by a second Russian army which entered Transylvania. Austrian and Russian superiority of forces was overwhelming: 370,000 soldiers and about 1,200 canons, compared to 152,000 Hungarians with 450 pieces of artillery.

Militarily, it was the beginning of the end. Politically, the end had already begun well before.

Policy and diplomacy

The Hungarian state naturally concentrated on its military effort and the tasks it entailed. It also continued to pursue its liberal democratic legislation until the end. On 28 July, at its last refuge, Szeged, the government and Parliament ratified a law emancipating ‘the inhabitants of Moses’ faith’ born or legally settled in the country and legitimising mixed marriages between Jews and Christians. The nationalities law was promulgated on the same day. For the first time, Hungarian legislation gave minorities the freedom to use their mother tongue at the local administrative level, at tribunals, in primary schools, in community life and even within the national guard of non-Magyar councils. It was the first law in Europe to recognise these minority rights and was based on a ‘pacification plan’ drawn up by the Romanian democrat Nicolae Bălcescu (1819–52) and Kossuth at a meeting in Szeged. All these actions were too late to influence the unfolding of events in the two weeks leading up to military defeat. It was also too late when, in exile, Kossuth and a few liberals rethought their relationship with the minorities and with neighbouring countries and went as far as to propose a Danubian confederation.

The activities of Kossuth and of other émigrés in Turkey, England, the United States and elsewhere belong to another chapter of history; Kossuth himself died in Turin, having spent forty years tirelessly defending the cause of independence and opposing reconciliation with Austria. Among his companions in exile were most of the emissaries he had previously sent abroad on diplomatic missions.

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The Hungarian government of 1848, tied to Austrian diplomacy, could not claim international recognition; nor did the 1849 government born of the Declaration of Independence. Its emissaries nonetheless did their best to win over to their cause influential men in France, England, Italy and as far afield as the United States. In Germany, Hungarian delegates, historian László Szalay and Dénes Pázmándy, appeared at the Frankfurt Parliament in 1848 – with the consent of the Austrian minister for foreign affairs – but without success. Hungary had to tread carefully within the labyrinthine Germany, which was divided into thirty-nine states. A greater Germany that included Austria would have excluded Hungary, since Austria would not have entered it with a non-Germanic country. A smaller Germany without Austria would have appealed to Hungary only on condition that the centre of the Austrian Empire moved from Vienna to Pest. Austria refused to even consider such a proposition and yet Kossuth entertained this last unrealistic idea for as long as he continued to hope for an agreement with the Habsburgs rather than a break-up. Once Austria became entrenched in its position, Hungary was forced to abandon any hopes in that direction. Pázmándy returned to Hungary while Szalay went on several missions to other countries. Most important among them was his visit to London, which came to nothing.

Arriving in London in December 1848, his request to be received by the foreign secretary, Lord Palmerston, was refused in no uncertain terms. England had no sympathy with Austrian methods and later received another Hungarian, Ferenc Polszky, but as an unofficial visitor. Its position remained inflexible: it recognised Hungary 'solely as part of the Austrian Empire' and any 'internal quarrels' between the two were none of its concern. At most, England was willing to act as mediator in order to reach some sort of agreement.

Kossuth and his diplomatic agents believed they could count on British support because of Anglo-Russian rivalries, Hungary being useful as a rampart against Muscovite expansion in Europe. However, the argument backfired since a strong Austria represented a far more effective barrier, even an Austria saved at the eleventh hour by the Russians themselves. The British reiterated their position: there was to be no 'amputated Austria'. In its eyes, the Viennese monarchy remained one of the essential pillars in the balance of power.

In Paris, Hungarian diplomacy encountered the same basic problems

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as in London: namely, refusal of recognition owing to international law and treaties, as well as the absence of political will. Furthermore, Count László Teleki, government emissary and kingpin of its diplomatic activities, could not have chosen a worse moment when he arrived in Paris in September 1848, only three months after the barricades of the June revolution had fallen. The head of government, General Louis-Eugene Cavaignac, refused to enter into discussions with the Hungarian delegates. The minister for foreign affairs, Jules Bastide, Alphonse de Lamartine's successor, was more welcoming and he received Teleki cordially, but the atmosphere changed overnight and Bastide's promises evaporated into thin air.

This sudden change of heart was partly due to pressure from the Austrian chargé d'affaires, Ludwig Thorn. Bastide dropped Teleki in order to avoid diplomatic complications. The outbreak of war between Austria and Hungary within days of Teleki's arrival in Paris made the situation even more precarious. Pierre Renouvin in his *Histoire des relations internationales* (History of International Relations), sums it up in a sentence that is more pertinent than many long commentaries: 'self-interest replaced ideology as the dominant force behind French policy'. The new Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexis de Tocqueville, who according to Renouvin displayed a 'melancholy interest' in Hungary, received Teleki privately, but not officially. After all, the great liberal writer had declared to his ambassadors, according to his own memoirs, 'We do not get involved with what goes on at the other end of Europe, in the Principalities, in Poland and in Hungary.'

Great powers certainly have an annoying tendency to rush to the rescue of victors rather than to lost causes. The only way Hungary could gain Europe's support was to win the war. But was that still possible?

The débâcle

After the invasion of Hungary by the Tsar's army in June 1849, hopes of saving the country were slim if not impossible, consisting of dividing the enemy, firstly defeating Austria, then confronting Russia and asking it to grant Hungary an honourable exit. The plan was not entirely illogical, since Austria's appeal to Nicholas I for military assistance had been very reluctant. However, the idea that Hungarian

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manoeuvres could disunite these two enemies had no basis in political reality. Whether Vienna's appeal was reluctant or not, Russian aid was vital. As for the tsar, contrary to what was often written, his decision was taken before the Declaration of Independence. Violently hostile to the revolution, to subversion and to progress, the tsar's primary concern was to crush the rebels. The participation of Polish generals and legionaries on the Hungarian side strengthened his resolve, as did the fear of contagion.

The question then remains as to whether the Hungarian plan to fight the two enemies separately was feasible in the field, a question that military historians have been debating for the last 150 years. If one compares the respective military capabilities, one can but be sceptical. The Hungarian military plan consisted essentially in concentrating the main army in the Komárom fortress, equidistant between Vienna and Budapest, to be used as a base from which to make the decisive strike on Haynau. The War Council accepted the plan and then immediately abandoned it. At the end of June, Görgey received orders to withdraw the bulk of his Komárom troops and to begin a retreat towards Szeged, to eventually join the main army at Arad, commanded by Dembiński. (General Klapka's division was left to hold the fort, which it did successfully for many months.) A glance at the map is enough to understand that this new military plan moved the centre of operations from the north-west of the country to the south-east. To some, this looked more like an 'escape strategy' – the army's evacuation to Ottoman territory – than a planned offensive.

Another of Kossuth's decisions precipitated catastrophe. Once again he dismissed Görgey and appointed Dembiński as commander-in-chief, to the exasperation of the officers who worshipped their general and had no faith in Dembiński. The waltz of the generals, sometimes favouring incompetents, had already sapped army morale, though not their loyalty, which remained firm, as did Görgey's. He totally disagreed with the plan but obeyed orders nonetheless whereas Dembiński, who he was supposed to meet, failed to turn up. Instead of going to Arad, the Pole retreated further south, to Temesvár, on the route towards Turkey. Meanwhile, the Russians inflicted a major defeat on Bem at Segesvár and then at Szenbenszék (6 August). The Honvéd army of Transylvania was virtually wiped out. In the midst of this drama and confusion, Bem took command of the main army, not knowing that

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Dembiński had already withdrawn the artillery's ammunition. Despite the talent and heroism of Bem and his soldiers, the battle fought by them at Temesvár in these desperate conditions ended in disaster. On 9 August, General Haynau beat and dispersed the main army. All that remained was Görgey's army at Arad, consisting of 30,000 exhausted soldiers facing 370,000 men in the Austrian and Russian armies. Kossuth abdicated, transferred all powers to Görgey and sought refuge in Turkey. Three days later, on 13 August at Világos, the War Council decided to surrender to the Russian general, Rüdiger.

Epilogue

The war ended and repression began. Görgey and the War Council surrendered to the Russians and not the Austrians, to prove their resolve had only been broken by the involvement of the Russians who, in fact, behaved more honourably than the imperial forces. The tsar sent his son to Vienna to persuade Francis Joseph to act with clemency. It was a waste of time: Schwarzenberg – and Field-Marshal Haynau in Hungary – ordered pitiless repression. The Austrians executed thirteen generals along with the former president of the Council of Ministers, Count Lajos Batthyány, and several other military and civil individuals. The tsar was able to save only the life of Görgey. Of the rest, 120 were executed following condemnation by war tribunals, others were simply massacred and thousands were condemned to long prison sentences of forced labour. Despite broad international indignation and protests from the tsar, repression continued for a decade.

Petőfi did not live to bear the brunt of defeat and its aftermath. He died two weeks before the end, fighting with Bem's army in the Battle of Segesvár in Transylvania. He was twenty-six years old. Count Széchenyi fell into a depression in September 1848. His tortured soul found a degree of tranquillity in Döbling, in a psychiatric establishment near Vienna, where he continued to write and to receive friends – and visits from the police, because one of his last writings was an unrelenting indictment of absolutism. He took his own life in 1860. Other great figures of 1848–9 followed Kossuth into exile or lived as best they could in Hungary.

Contemporaries understood, long before the age of psychoanalysis, that a lost cause needed its heroes and its scapegoats. The designated

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target was the one who had laid down his arms at Világos, in other words, Artur Görgey. Immediately after fleeing to Turkey, Kossuth proceeded to stigmatise him. Görgey was treated like a traitor and continued to be publicly reviled throughout his life and even after his death, aged ninety-eight. True, Görgey was the only one to receive assurances from Paskievich that his life would be spared, but he had not committed any act of treachery. Yet for Kossuth, and the majority of public opinion, clinging to the tradition of the heroic fight, Görgey's capitulation provided a pretext: the scapegoat had to be sacrificed in order to save the morale of the nation. Attempts were made to prove that the general had no other choice but to surrender, but it was only 150 years later, with the publication of Domokos Kosáry's historical oeuvre, that the witch-hunt finally ended.

A wounded Hungarian society now faced a new ordeal. After Haynau's cruel military repression, the civil administration of Alexander von Bach descended upon them like a millstone.

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5

Rupture, compromise and the dual monarchy, 1849–1919

For the next seventy years, Hungary's ties with Austria were to be closer than they had ever been before, first under neo-absolutist constraints, then in the wake of the 1867 compromise. This was also the era of the balance of power on the continent, overseen by England and 'readjusted' by several conflicts: the Crimean war (1854–5), Napoleon III's Italian war (1859), the Austro-Prussian war (1866), the Franco-German war (1870–1) and others. The Austrian Empire, which emerged from the 1848–9 crisis unscathed, suffered defeat in Italy and was ousted from Germany by Bismarck's Prussia; its relations with Hungary were shaped by these events. As Austria's international position weakened, Emperor Francis Joseph moved towards the 1867 compromise which was to create the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy.

THE BACH SYSTEM

After three years of crises, calm prevailed in the Habsburg kingdoms and provinces. The young Francis Joseph succumbed to 'the intoxication of power' (Jean-Paul Bled) and opened a neo-absolutist 'septennat' not unlike enlightened despotism, but in conjunction with a rise in clericalism. Francis Joseph assumed total control, to the point of presiding over the Government Council in person. Pro-constitutional ministers resigned one after another; Schwarzenberg held his post till his death in 1851. Alexander von Bach, the minister of the interior, who was already very influential, became the architect of the neo-absolutist turn that began in 1850. With the decree of 31 December 1851, the emperor

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abolished the final vestiges of the turbulent years, in other words the Constitution of March 1849. This took place four weeks after Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte's 2 December *coup d'état*, a prelude to Napoleon III's authoritarian empire.

Alexander von Bach governed a now unified empire with a strong bureaucracy. His officials, nicknamed 'Bach's Hussars', administered Hungary, replacing Marshal Haynau's cruel military dictatorship. Like all absolutist regimes, Bach's stood out for its violations of laws and traditions. The government sliced the forty-six counties into five bureaucratic districts, administered Transylvania and Croatia separately from the main kingdom, applied harsh censorship, suppressed civil associations and introduced foreign penal and civil codes. In other words, it reduced the country to stunned silence.

However, some very important 1848 reforms also came into effect under the Bach regime: the repurchase of peasant servitude, for example, accompanied by an anti-feudal propaganda aimed at dividing – unsuccessfully – nobility and peasantry. Indeed, the population's state of mind remained surprisingly united around the memory of the lost war of independence. Kossuth the legend endured – everyone awaited his return. Petöfi, who died on the battlefield fighting for freedom, was now part of a new national mythology engendered by the 1848–9 uprising. Epinal's depiction of the poet, mortally wounded by a Cossack and writing the word 'liberty' in the sand with his own blood, became part of the patriotic decor in the humblest peasant houses. Throughout this politically uncertain age and despite censorship, national literature continued to evolve towards a new golden age.

The most original feature of this decade of oppression was the appearance of a new form of opposition to authority and to Germanification: passive resistance, which became a way of life and an ethical code. The government introduced a tobacco monopoly: 'Well, in that case, I'll stop smoking', was the response of a character in a novel of the time, consigning his fine pipes to the ocean waves. His response to having to pay tax on his own wine? 'I'll give up drinking.' Tarot cards carried a stamp duty. 'In that case, I'll give up cards.' The novel, written by Mór Jókai, friend of the deceased Petöfi and his comrade in the 1848 'Ides of March', was undoubtedly a romantic expression of passive resistance but also witness to a certain collective mentality and social behaviour. So too was a play written by Imre Madách, *The Civiliser,* less

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Plate 26. Francis Joseph in ceremonial coronation robe

well known than the *Tragedy of Man* written in 1860 and marked by post-revolutionary pessimism. *The Civiliser* (1859) was a direct and violent attack on the Bach system. Wielding satire as the most powerful weapon, Madách created the German 'civiliser' come to Germanise his good-natured Magyar peasant host. And finally, the prince of poets János Arany, upon being invited to greet Francis Joseph on his second trip to Hungary in 1857, wrote a scathing poem disguised as an English historical ballad, *The Bards of Wales*: 'Five hundred went singing to die, / Five hundred in the blaze, / But none would sing to cheer the King, / The loyal toast to raise' (translation by Peter Zollman).

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Plate 27. Queen Elisabeth, 1867

These are just a few examples to give a flavour of a decade characterised by hatred and despair. This distress and genuine trauma was to be the basis for the conciliation constructed by the architects of the compromise. But what about the role of the exiles?

After the defeat, several thousand people chose exile. This was a very significant number at a time when the only major emigration was that of the Poles. Many refugees returned but one thousand or so exiled

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Hungarians had dispersed to the four winds, to America, to Western Europe or had remained in Turkey. The most active among them tried to influence British, French, American and Italian public opinion. Kossuth was warmly received at some 500 meetings organised for him in England and America, but he did not succeed in translating public sympathy into action on the part of politicians. Whereas for the Hungarians under Austrian domination he continued to represent hope, in the eyes of the political world of Europe he remained the heroic representative of an honourable but hopeless cause.

A flicker of hope appeared with the French–Sardinian alliance of 1858. Emperor Napoleon III pledged his support for the liberation of Northern Italy from the grasp of Austria. Prime minister and diplomatic leader of the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, Camillo Benso, Count Cavour, tried for his part to involve Kossuth, who ended up agreeing to Hungarian participation in Italy's war and met with the emperor in person. Russia remained neutral.

At the famous Battle of Solferino, 24 June 1859, Austria suffered a crushing defeat but to the stupefaction of the Italians – and the Hungarians – Napoleon III stopped the war. Austria nevertheless lost Lombardy and unification of Italy continued in stages, without inflaming Europe.

Was Hungary, therefore, the main loser in this affair, apart from Austria? In any event, the former was a mere pawn on Napoleon III's political chessboard. Napoleon's Italian policy was certainly designed to change the European status quo but he did not want a Hungarian insurrection. Austria was still an indispensable element in Europe's balance of power. No one, least of all England, wanted to see it weakened. Thus, in 1859 the likelihood of Hungary regaining its liberty with international assistance was even more remote than ten years previously. A solution, whatever it might be, could only be found within the country itself.

Three historic dates represent three different approaches to a solution. 1847: traditional Hungary. 1848: a liberal constitutional Hungary under the sceptre of the Habsburg king, who was also emperor of Austria. And finally, the third date: 1849, the Hungary that declared its independence and split with Vienna.

The first option was outmoded as far as Hungary and even Austria were concerned. The idea of a return to the *ancien régime* was as

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unpopular in Hungary as it was at a court intent upon imposing a neo-absolutist monarchy, but not upon restoring feudal powers and privileges. As for a return to the 1849 situation, Kossuth and his loyal followers supported the idea, but the realists resigned themselves to its impossibility given the international situation at the time. Finally, imperial Austria that had crushed Hungary as the price for a war was unlikely to concede independence around the negotiating table with the rebels. There was, therefore, no solution acceptable to both parties other than the constitutional model of 1848 as a means of creating a new arrangement.

Thinkers and politicians in Hungary set about paving the way for this compromise (which has divided opinion – and historians – ever since), slowly, patiently and sporadically. As has been mentioned earlier, there were many opponents to the extreme attitude that led to the April 1849 rupture. Baron Zsigmond Kemény, a novelist and statesman who had initially been close to Kossuth, subsequently joined the Peace Party in 1849. Baron József Eötvös, also a writer of great novels, eminent political thinker and former member of the 1848 constitutional government, left both post and country because he disagreed with those striving for independence. He lived in Vienna, then Munich, until 1853. It was abroad that he wrote his principal political work, *The Influence of Dominant Nineteenth-century Ideas on the State*. Another former 1848 minister, Ferenc Deák, also withdrew from political life after having attempted in vain to come to an arrangement with the Austrians. Finally, the most important political figure among those who distanced themselves from the revolution before it reached the point of rupture was Széchenyi. Though seriously ill, he was not to be silenced and criticised the Bach system until his last breath.

The compromise's intellectual breeding ground was therefore the liberal moderate trend represented by these men, among whom Ferenc Deák played the key role from 1860 to 1861 when Austria displayed the first signs of a change of direction. In order to reach an entente, the spirit of reconciliation had to mature in the imperial capital, too. Setbacks also played a significant part. In response to the Solferino defeat and internal rumblings of discontent, Francis Joseph reorganised the government and his states though without giving in to aristocratic constitutionalism and even less to liberalism. The 1860 October Diploma and the 1861 February Bill (in any case contradictory rather

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than complementary) were the first steps towards a constitutional regime of sorts, but the emperor's state of mind demonstrated the extent of their ambiguity: 'We shall have a little parliamentarianism, but power will remain in my hands and the whole thing will be adapted to Austrian realities.' As distrustful of the magnates as he was of the liberals, Francis Joseph therefore imposed a centralising bill which took into consideration the 'individuality' of the kingdoms that constituted the monarchy without really giving them satisfaction. With the liberal Anton von Schmerlig at the head of government, the Austrian political system also developed, but not enough to dissipate ambiguity.

As a result, the Hungarian Assembly convened at last in 1860–1, opposed the royal rescript by a respectful 'petition to the king' rather than approaching him with a 'resolution' of the Assembly, as proposed by the more intransigent. The nuance was significant: Deák's petition party was more moderate than the resolution party. The emperor, however, rejected the petition and dissolved Parliament. Thus the idea remained in limbo, but after a gradual maturing process, political life re-emerged as a result of the celebrated 1865 'Easter article' in which Deák proposed a dual compromise with a joint Austro-Hungarian administration for shared external and military affairs. At the 1866 National Assembly, matters became serious: the deputies elaborated a project for a compromise. The decisive turning point came on 3 July 1866 when Prussia decimated Francis Joseph's imperial army. The Sadowa (Königgrätz) defeat was evidence both of Austrian failure in Germany and of the need to reach an agreement with the Hungarians.

Another year had to pass before a definitive conclusion to the compromise laws – that did not bear the name of 'compromise' but were entitled: '1867: article XII – pertaining to relations between the countries of the Hungarian Crown and the other countries under the reign of His Majesty and to the methods of their administration.' A homologous Austrian law was introduced. That year was full of international complications since the European cabinets were concerned by Prussian successes. Francis Joseph went as far as to nominate an anti-Prussian Saxon Friedrich Ferdinand Beust as minister of the interior. In the end, moderation prevailed all round. Bismarck took great care to accommodate Austrian sensitivities by allowing Austria the possibility of an 'honourable exit' from Germany without loss of face.

Francis Joseph's wife Elisabeth is also seen to have been influential in

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the emperor's leniency towards the Hungarians and in his accepting the royal crown in the country of former rebels. The empress 'Sissi' was clearly sympathetic towards the Hungarians but the key factor in the *Ausgleich* was political rather than sentimental. The judicious moderation of Deák and his party in the aftermath of Sadowa reassured the emperor that the Hungarians would stick to their position and not up the stakes. And though Bismarck did secretly encourage the Magyars, he also demonstrated his legendary ponderousness by discreetly backing the compromise solution: the dual monarchy's focal point would be that much further from German affairs.

The great turnabout of 1867 can therefore only be explained by a web of intertwined interests.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 1867 AGREEMENTS

Born of circumstantial constraints and under the sign of moderation on the part of all concerned, the 1867 compromise was, like all political accomplishments, both perfect and imperfect. It created a totally new state system composed of two constitutionally distinct entities, but united under the sovereign's sceptre and sharing governmental institutions – a characteristic that rendered it more than a personal union. Dualism was, for the moment, the optimal solution for safeguarding both the Magyars' sense of identity and the dynastic sovereignty. However, it would have required profound amendments. These were not undertaken because the ambiguity, a result of the unity of the monarchy and diversity within the two contractual parties, was insuperable. In fact, however paradoxical it may seem, it was necessary to preserve the fragile framework. Hungarian law, Eisenmann points out, did not mention the word 'unity' anywhere, but spoke rather of 'community'. It carefully avoided terms and measures which might suggest the superiority of the monarchy over the Hungarian side. Nearly fifty years after its creation, the dual monarchy was not able to withstand the storm of 1914. For the time being, it provoked a mixture of satisfaction, reservations and protests. The *Reichsrat* promulgated an analogous law for Austria.

On balance, however, despite sporadic hostile reactions, the political class and Hungarian public opinion were more satisfied than frustrated – and not without reason. Compared with the Pragmatic Sanction of

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1723, the 1867 law was far more favourable to the Magyars. Transylvania was once more within the kingdom's administration. Hungary, along with the others, was under the king's rule but was not subject to the Austrian imperial government. Indeed, the latter was not even mentioned in the compromise laws which prompted the Austrian author Robert Musil to write the following famous ironic passage in his novel *Mann ohne Eigenschaften:* 'The Austrian calls himself citizen of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy's kingdoms and countries as represented at the Council of the Empire – which comes down to saying one Austrian plus one Hungarian minus the self-same Hungarian.'

Irony aside, the identity of the Hungarian 'half' of the Habsburg 'whole' was far better defined than that of its other components. Contrary to other minorities, the Magyar sense of identity was respected. And yet the ingenious legal edifice of the compromise did not reflect the economic correlation between a rich and powerful Austria and a less-developed Hungary. A balance had to be redressed through a quota system for maintaining the army. 'When the time came to pay the bill', writes Eisenmann, 'the unit principle enabled Austria to be charged for roughly a third of the common army's Hungarian contingent. The equation of community and dualism was as follows: equal rights, two thirds expenditure for Austria, three quarters influence for Hungary.' It was a witty remark. Hungary was heavily handicapped by the economic gap. In addition, alongside its independence it was dependent in domains which remained the preserve of the emperor–king: foreign and military affairs. In terms of diplomacy, war and international law, Hungarian national sovereignty was incorporated into Austria–Hungary.

Within the legal structure of the compromise, its ambiguities were elegantly camouflaged by the dispositions pertaining to common affairs. Two equally representative delegations had to be elected by the two parliaments, to deliberate on the financing of foreign and military affairs, each managed by a common ministry. Thus the delegations had no legislative power and their deliberations took place separately, communication between the two conducted strictly by the written word. So much so that, as was often jokingly said at the time, 'The session might as well have been conducted in the dark.' It was all designed so that the common parliament should be no such thing, just like the 'common' ministries that constituted the government. The Hungarians

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had a particularly strong aversion to all legislative and executive institutions of the *Gesamtmonarchie* – an all-embracing monarchy which included Hungary.

The system was complicated and vulnerable, to say the least. In the fifty years of its existence it was the object of incessant controversy, particularly from the Hungarian nationalist left: the party of independence formed under the flag of the great absent exile. It had a programme that was less intransigent than Kossuth's and indeed changed over time, as did the name of the party. For half a century, political life was dominated by the opposition between the party of 1848 and Deák's great liberal party merged with the moderate left. Until 1905, the latter retained a three-quarter parliamentary majority or at least two thirds of the seats. The opposition meanwhile wore itself out in legal arguments over public rights. Kossuth's prophecy concerning the catastrophic consequences of the compromise, expressed in his *Cassandra Letter* in 1867, failed to occur. *Fluctuat nec mergitur*: though rocked by the waves, the dual monarchy survived, its accomplishments pacified the general mood and turned a reviled emperor into an accepted and then even venerated sovereign.

Politically speaking, the real losers of the dual system were neither the Hungarians nor the Austrians, but the other 'nationalities'. During the neo-absolutist 1850s, they had been in the same boat as the Hungarians. As ironists of the day put it: 'What the Magyars received from Vienna as a punishment, they received as a gift' – in other words, the Bach system, centralisation and Germanisation. Under the dual system, on the other hand, the minorities had to return to the fold of the Hungarian Crown, and the Croats in 1868 had to settle for a compromise with the Budapest government, modelled essentially on the Austro-Hungarian one. As for the other provinces and the kingdom of Bohemia, they remained, as before, 'countries represented at the Council of the Empire', the *Reichsrat*.

The dual monarchy thus settled into its new home with the promise of a new era – but saddled with a heavy mortgage.

In his famous work *Three Generations,* Gyula Szekfü includes the liberals of 1867, Deák, Andrássy and Eötvös – architects and executors of the compromise – in the second generation. It is thanks to this legal and political artefact that a Hungarian sense of identity was respected. However, the age of duality was rocked by struggles between those in

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favour of the compromise on the one hand – in other words the 'second generation' liberals – and, on the other, partisans of complete independence. The latter were also more intolerant towards non-Magyar nationalities who, it should be borne in mind, constituted half the kingdom's population. Reconciling 'patria and progress' meant having to navigate between stumbling blocks on both sides, indissoluble and yet utterly contradictory. For the liberals also aspired to national independence and the independents also wanted some progress – both within the limits of a conservative ideology, to the point where the line between nationalism and liberalism divided not only the parties but members within the same party and probably also in individual hearts. The liberal path was a narrow one and it was purely the genius of Deák and Eötvös that enabled the creation of a national liberal state – not an easy task. Waves of nationalism, of social and religious conflict, considerably eroded its liberal foundations over the decades.

No one who thought about Hungarian liberalism in the nineteenth century did so with as much insight as Baron József Eötvös, a Magyar Tocqueville. Alongside him were: László Szalay – who belonged to the generation of '48 and died in 1864; Ágoston Trefort – the youngest; Baron Zsigmond Kemény – the most conservative (he died in 1875, four years after the death of Eötvös); and lastly, Ferenc Deák (1803–76) – 'sage of the homeland' – embodiment of all conciliations. Just as he had conceived the suitable formula for the 1867 agreement, Deák was always able to find the right word to eliminate discord and to ease through even the most controversial laws, notably those which addressed problems of minorities and schooling. The laws regarding institutions, churches, the emancipation of Jews, education, the minorities, penal law, and industry – partly promulgated after his death – also bore the stamp of enlightened liberalism and were among the most progressive on the continent.

Eötvös's ideas centred around personal freedom, cornerstone of civic liberty and progress. He wanted to create a state that was sufficiently centralised to adequately administer affairs and justice, at the same time with competences limited enough to allow scope for the development of citizenship. Undoubtedly inspired by Tocqueville, he envisaged a system of local self-government and a powerful network of autonomous associations between state institutions and the individual. His success in passing the minority and educational laws was certainly in

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part due to Deák's support, but also to his having understood that in order to win, it was sometimes necessary to yield. He was able to find the middle road between the disadvantages of French-style centralism and the anarchy of 'Hungary's fifty-two anarchic self-governing counties'; between secular and Christian morality, between individualism and collectivism, between a national unitary state and freedom for the minorities.

As far as the minority issue was concerned, Eötvös's initial concept was unquestionably utopian to the point of being impossibly idealistic, not only in Hungary, but anywhere in Europe. To give the half a dozen minority languages equal status with that of the Magyars would have transformed the unitary state into a federation. If the 'third generation' governments had not toughened the nationality and public instruction laws, the model created by Eötvös's and Deák's generation would have in fact remained an unparalleled example of wisdom and generosity.

Internal stability: Kálmán Tisza's era

Until the end of the nineteenth century, the dual system and parliamentarianism worked without major hitches and, despite the 1873 crisis, liberalism favoured economic growth. With regard to the outside world, Austria–Hungary's prestige grew as much as its influence waned in Germany, now a hegemony since the fall of the French Second Empire.

In this international context, Andrássy, head of the Hungarian government, then minister of Austro-Hungarian foreign affairs from 1871 to 1879, played an important role. Together with Bismarck, he worked towards strengthening the Austrian–German alliance, keeping Russia at arm's length and defending Austrian interests in the Balkans. At the Berlin congress of 1878 he orchestrated the provisional occupation of Ottoman Bosnia-Herzegovina, which would be later annexed (1908) and serve as the stage for the 1914 Sarajevo assassination. But there was still some way to go.

Between 1867 and Francis Joseph's death in 1916 – in the midst of war – Hungary had seventeen successive cabinets – sometimes the same ones. After Andrássy's departure in 1871, there were a few short-term governments, followed by Kálmán Tisza's between 1875 and 1890. Tisza's era marked both the zenith of liberalism and the beginning of its decline. Internal stability was assured thanks to the abilities of this

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Plate 28. Count Gyula Andrássy

'centre left' prime minister and the preponderance of the liberal party, which Tisza founded in 1875, merging his own moderate opposition with Deák's party. The liberal party was thus an amalgam which managed to mix a small dose of ''48' with a strong dose of ''67'. Thus it went on to win elections for thirty years, taking between two thirds and three quarters of parliamentary mandates.

Apart from a small conservative party and rather weak representation of non-Magyar nationalities, the opposition consisted of independents who relied for support on a nostalgic provincial lesser nobility and on the Magyar peasantry of the Great Plain, who had gained little from

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Plate 29. *Kálmán Tisza's Tarot Party*. Painting by Artur Ferraris

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the development of an ascendant capitalism. Nor did the new tax-based voting system work in their favour: only 24 per cent of the male adult population had the right to vote (less than one million people); voting rights based on noble titles remained in place. National policy conducted in parliament now eclipsed an erstwhile dominant provincial policy anchored in the counties. The latter were placed under a mixed administration with a county chief (*föïspán*) representing king and state and the vice-chief (*alispán*), elected by the local assembly, representing the supremacy of the gentry and remaining the pillar of Magyar administration.

The workings of the 'grand old liberal party' no doubt favoured the entangled interests of the well-to-do classes, landowners and middle classes, who constituted the majority of both the electorate and the political class. Indeed, alongside the magnates and nobles, the benches of Parliament, of political clubs and casinos and the editorial boards of newspapers, the management boards of banks and factories were filled with the bourgeoisie and elected representatives of the liberal professions, mainly lawyers. The class element of liberal power – denounced by historians of the left – is undeniable – as was the case elsewhere around the world. It has also been called the 'party of clubs', and rightly so, since political decisions matured in corridor conversations and, to be more specific, in the corridors of the national Casino, the exclusive preserve of the aristocracy, and in less exclusive clubs frequented by the nobility and bourgeoisie. Kálmán Mikszáth, a great contemporary novelist and serial writer, with an acidic pen, though a regular partner of the prime minister at the card table, described his political style with as much sarcastic humour as affectionate collusion. Decisions to build the railways, carry out regional developments and other public works were taken in between two games of tarot; policies regarding minorities were shaped between pre- and post-prandial drinks.

The two liberal–conservative decades corresponded to a period of unprecedented progress in terms of the economy, urbanisation and education. The legal state was respected but the ever acute problems of non-Magyar minorities and of social injustice also darkened its horizons. Ethnic minorities were subjected to political and educational pressure but the state did not interfere in their private affairs; the various ethnic groups were free to pursue their economic activities, to practise their respective religions and to develop a national conscience.

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As for the social problems posed by the agrarian structure with its *latifundia*, they remained as serious as ever. A vast proletarianised peasantry co-existed with the reverberations of rising capitalism: a new industrial proletariat, the social democratic party and the struggle for workers' rights and the right to vote.

A self-assured political class lacked the audacity both to address new conflicts and to resolve old ones. As the end of the century loomed, Kálmán Tisza's successors seemed even more inclined to consolidate the gains of the wealthy to the detriment of society's rejects. Sándor Wekerle, the first president of the Council of middle-class origins (he was the son of a bailiff), was an exceptional financial specialist. But in this *fin de siècle*, Church issues, in particular that of the civil marriage bill, occupied the political centre stage. Despite a clerical and aristocratic counter-offensive, the liberal bill was passed – causing Wekerle's demise in 1895. The next government, presided over by Count Dezsö Bánffy, excelled in repressive measures. It dealt harshly with any 'subversion': minority demands, the agrarian socialist movement, the social democratic party, the Kossuth cult, which became widespread after the death in 1894 of the exiled 'father of the nation' in Turin. 'Rights, laws, justice' – despite this promising slogan, the successors of Bánffy, who was ousted in 1899, did not stop the decline of liberalism any more than the erosion of dualism and successive political crises.

'MILLENNIUM' HUNGARY AND ITS ENTRY INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In 1896, Hungarians celebrated with great pomp and circumstance the thousand-year anniversary of the conquest of their country by their ancestors. Festivities, tricolour flags, commemorative books, exhibitions, a visit by the royal couple – no effort was spared. The stability of the country seemed relatively secure, justifying the optimism and enthusiasm of the crowds, and its economic health was to last just into the twentieth century. The Hungary of the triumphant 'Millennium' steered itself through buffeting storms.

In 1910, when the last general census was carried out within the monarchy, Hungary (without autonomous Croatia) had 18.3 million inhabitants, against 16.8 million in 1900. The Magyars, about 10 million, made up 54.5 per cent of the inhabitants, compared with 51.4 per cent

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Map 9. The Austro-Hungarian monarchy, c. 1910

in 1900. Other nations, therefore, fell slightly, although Germans still constituted 10.4 per cent of the overall population, Slovaks, 10.7 per cent, Romanians, 16.1 per cent and Ruthenians, Serbs and others, more than 8 per cent.

Nearly half the population was Roman Catholic, 22 per cent Protestant, 23.8 per cent Greek Orthodox and Uniate (Greek Catholic). At almost 1 million, Jews accounted for 5 per cent.

The impact of voluntary assimilation, notably, of large numbers of Germans, along with a policy of 'Magyarisation', was far from insignificant, as was the assimilation process of the Jews, who continued to follow the Jewish faith, but adopted Hungarian as their mother tongue. Indeed, Jewish emancipation, in progress since Joseph II, was completed under the liberal regime. For Slav and Romanian nationals, on the other hand, the situation became more precarious, as nationalism overshadowed liberalism.

What were the social structures? Feudal, seigniorial, pre-capitalist, agro-industrial? Attempts to stick a label on such a complex reality fall short. According to 1910 statistical data, in a simplified form, the primary sector accounted for more than 60 per cent of the population; industry, 18 per cent; services, not far off 22 per cent. Compare this with figures for the 'workshop of the world', England, where the proportions were 8 per cent for agriculture and 46 per cent for each of the other two sectors. In the European table, Hungary was in the middle, just above Italy.

In other respects, social divisions were far more marked, especially in agriculture. About 5,000 of the biggest landowners, including members of their families, had estates of more than 570 hectares (1,400 acres) and together owned 8.7 million hectares, approximately 27 per cent of cultivated land. Esterházy and other magnates, churches (primarily the Catholic Church), a handful of rich nobles and members of the bourgeoisie, who made up this land-owning class, were called the 'thousand acres'. Some 66,000 landowners, the gentry, wealthy peasantry and rich tenant farmers, lived on lands covering areas of between 57 and 570 hectares (between 140 and 1,400 acres) 950,000 on properties of 30 hectares, and 3.5 million small peasants worked approximately 7–8 hectares. The mass of 7 million peasants owned less than 2.8 hectares, of which two thirds owned less than 0.57 hectares. In other words, at

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the top of the ladder was an extremely rich and very small stratum (0.3 per cent of the population) while at the bottom was a poverty-stricken peasantry and agricultural workers (about 38 per cent of the population). In between the two were the small and large landowners. There were also 1,851,000 industrial workers and 600,000 in transport and commerce (13.4 per cent of the population), about 2 million craftsmen and shopkeepers (11 per cent), 1,100,000 employees, civil servants, officers, pensioners (6.1 per cent), half a million soldiers, servants and others (2.7 per cent) – and 66,549 capitalists (0.4 per cent).

Taking national revenue per capita as a criterion, Austria and Italy had marginally overtaken Hungary, while revenue in England was three times higher, and in France and Germany more than double. While in developed countries like France, Germany and Sweden an average of three quarters of the revenue came from the industrial and tertiary sectors (in England, it was 90 per cent), in Hungary these sectors provided only 56 per cent and agriculture close to 44 per cent. Nevertheless, it is important to note that forty years previously, agriculture accounted for 60 per cent; the secondary and tertiary sectors had therefore made remarkable progress.

Agriculture, still dominant from an employment point of view, showed signs of some technical progress, notably in the increased use of agricultural machinery, crop rotation and growing yields per hectare. Livestock was also on the increase: cattle went from approximately 5 million head in 1884 to more than 6 million in 1911; growth and improvement of stock was especially apparent in the western part of the country, due to intensive rearing which replaced free-range rearing. In the east, on the other hand, techniques remained old-fashioned and productivity was far lower than in the large pilot properties or peasant farms in Transdanubia. Viticulture, which had flourished for so long, was seriously affected by phyloxera. Before 1885, wine production had reached 4.5 million hectolitres; it dropped to 1,130,000 hectolitres and then rose again to 3,190,000 by 1900.

Wealth, therefore, increasingly came from industry, industrialised arts and crafts, transport and other services. After the late start of industrial capitalism, the number of factories increased rapidly, from 2,500 at the end of the century to 5,000 in 1913, with a workforce which also doubled: from 250,000 in 1901, to more than 474,000 in 1913.

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Modern factories, with less than half a million workers, produced twice as much as the workshops of 2 million small artisan entrepreneurs. In 1910, industrial workers were distributed as follows:

	per cent
Clothing and leather industry	26.2
Iron, metal, machinery and vehicles	20.5
Construction	12.5
Food products	12.4
Wood	9.1
Stone, earth, clay	5.0
Mines	4.3
Textiles	3.9
Paper and printing	2.8
Chemical products	1.5
Gas, water, electricity	0.7

The state contributed actively to industrial development, to the expansion of the railways and large-scale hydraulic works. The results of river management were dramatic: cultivable land increased by 4 million hectares.

Infrastructure developments and road building had been taking place throughout the century, but the building of the railways won the prize. In 1846, there was just one line running from Pest to Vác and the construction of new lines was slow up until the dual monarchy (1867). The pace then changed, especially between 1890 and the 1914 war, the period of greatest expansion.

During this time, the network practically doubled in size, to total nearly 22,000 kilometres. Hungary followed France, the front runner with 130 kilometres per 100,000 inhabitants, ahead of Germany, Austria and Spain. Croatia's railway network was also more developed than that of most European countries.

In 1890, there were 634 credit and banking establishments (not including the co-operatives), 1,011 in 1900 and 1,842 in 1913, in addition to the Austro-Hungarian Bank's 39 branches. Eight large banks accounted for 37 per cent of all banking activities, including the Hungarian Commercial Bank of Pest and the Hungarian General Credit Bank.

At this favourable conjuncture for Europe generally, growth in

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Hungary was remarkable: 2.4 per cent increase in GDP per annum, or 3.2 per cent, calculated by national revenue (I. T. Berend and G. Ránki). Growth was supported by rapid industrialisation, dynamic technical innovation and significant modernisation of equipment and infrastructure. During the entire period of the dual monarchy, the revenue index quadrupled: from 100 in 1867 it rose to 453 in 1913, the final year before the outbreak of war.

What remains to discuss is the impact of these developments on education, urbanisation and lifestyle, material and cultural civilisation. There is a Hungarian word which encapsulates the development of bourgeois civilisation: *polgárosodás* (from *polgár*, bourgeois and citizen), the suffix implying the process itself. Attaining bourgeois status and the movement towards bourgeois values, therefore, did not have the same meaning at all.

Having covered economic aspects and the emergence of a bourgeois society, we shall now turn to churches and schools, art and literature, attitudes and lifestyles. The general level of culture increased considerably, thanks to the law on compulsory state education. It was implemented by Baron József Eötvös in 1868, who conceived the idea twenty years earlier in 1848. Illiteracy rates dropped drastically: within thirty years, two thirds of the male population had an elementary education. The number of primary schools (four-year cycles) grew from 13,000 in 1867 to 30,000 in 1905, and a vast network of schools for working-class children, 'upper primaries', and a system of apprenticeship provided teaching beyond that of primary education. At secondary level, 200 schools served 44,000 pupils, not including students attending the teacher training colleges and other specialised commercial, agricultural and economic educational institutions.

A second university was established at Kolozsvár in 1872, and two others were set up, one in Debrecen, the other in Pozsony, receiving their first students in 1910. The Budapest School of Engineering was promoted to university level and a large number of academies ensured the training of an elite highly qualified in all the scientific disciplines as well as in music, fine art and drama. In 1895, the Eötvös College was founded, following in the footsteps of the Paris Ecole Normale Supérieure.

Education at all levels was open to all, regardless of race or creed, in keeping with the spirit of the minority laws conceived by Ferenc Deák

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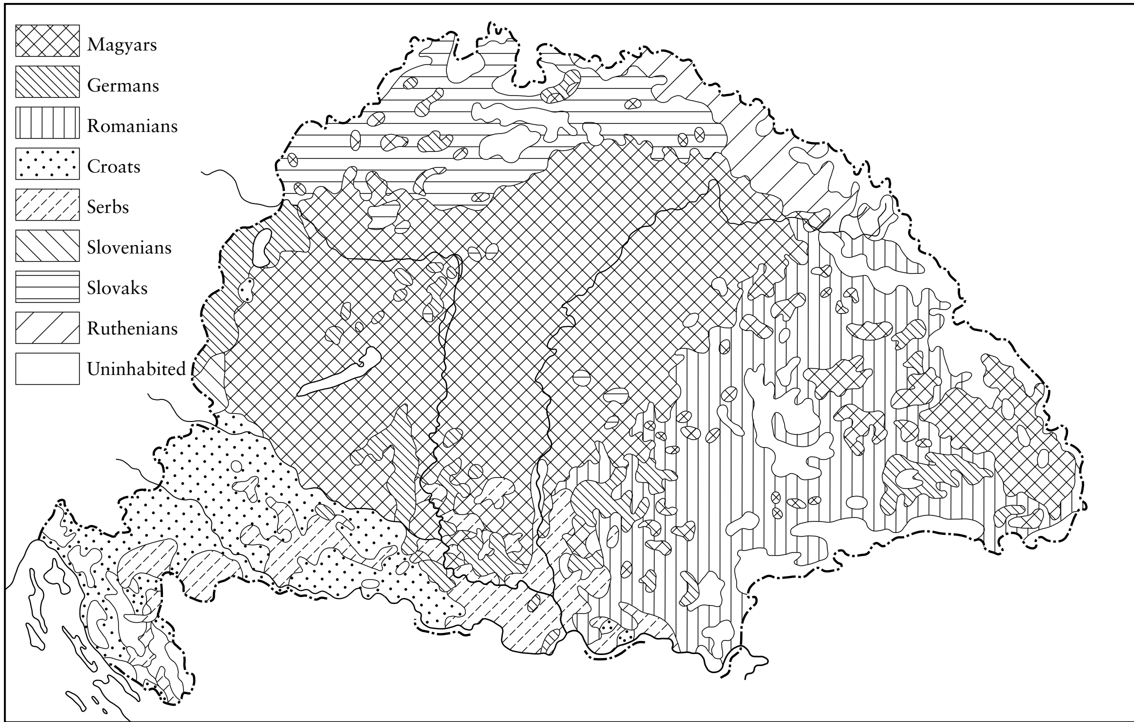

Map 10. Nationalities in the kingdom of Hungary, 1910

and József Eötvös, and adopted in 1868. Consequently, by the beginning of the twentieth century, several thousand schools and secondary schools provided education in minority mother tongues. There were over 2,000 Romanian primary schools, five lyceums and a dozen high schools and commercial colleges or colleges for young women. Conflicts with the different nationalities nonetheless erupted throughout the liberal age. In 1874–5, three Slovak lyceums were closed down due to 'pan-Slavic agitation' – in other words, all of them. Numerous other measures hit non-Magyar educational and cultural establishments. Things were particularly strained under Dezsö Bánffy's government, at the end of the 1900s. The 'lex Apponyi', adopted in 1907, introduced free primary education but also imposed 'Magyarisation', provoking strong opposition from aggrieved minorities.

Apart from a deterioration in the climate as a whole, with the upsurge of nationalism on every side, the roots of linguistic and cultural conflicts no doubt lay in the idea itself of the one and indivisible Hungarian state. The 1868 nationalities law was 'certainly a very liberal law' and 'in its details was evidence of a genuine broad-mindedness and a sincere desire for justice', the French historian Louis Eisenmann writes. It was a law that opened the way to assimilation, with no discrimination. Similarly, citizens were granted the right to 'be educated in their mother tongue' through to higher-education level. What the law did not recognise was the collective, corporate right of nationalities to cultural and administrative autonomy. Hungary constituted a single political nation in which all citizens were equal without distinction, but within the framework of a unitary state with Hungarian as the official language. Non-Magyar languages had not been relegated to the privacy of the home, however, since they were used in the classroom and, to a limited degree, even as official languages, according to a clever blend of freedoms and restrictions.

The idea of a unitary nation-state – along with an increasingly state-run education system – was very much in keeping with the spirit of the times, both in the monarchies and the Third French Republic. There was no Breton state school in France, nor a French school in German-annexed Alsace. The official language of administration and law was everywhere the language of the dominant nation – except for Austria and, to some extent, Hungary as well. As for the left, it applauded the progress of the state in all domains. A Marx or an Engels had nothing

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but contempt for regional identities and the demands of the 'non-historical nations'.

The Magyar liberals erred not in judgement or intelligence, but in lacking a long-term perspective. It was unrealistic to count on the assimilation of minorities living in a country in which they constituted half the population. Furthermore, the 'tough tactics' deployed by politicians of the second generation in their attempt to 'Magyarise' the minorities were completely counterproductive and only exacerbated antagonisms.

The Jewish religious minority was, by reason of its size and circumstances, a special case. According to the 1735 census, there were 11,621 Jews in the country – historical Hungary – of which only 4,400 were native, the others being immigrants. The growth rate progressively increased: 75,000 in 1785, 240,000 in 1840, 540,000 in 1871. The population at large, meanwhile – excluding Croatia – grew from 8 million in 1785 to 13 million in 1869. The proportion of Jews, therefore, increased considerably, from 1 per cent to 4 per cent, and, by 1910, had reached 5 per cent. The character of the Jewish question then changed to become a social problem. An ill-defined generalised animosity spread alongside more traditional anti-Judaism fostered by the clergy and what I have called the 'competitive' economic anti-Semitism.

At the same time, the liberal nobility – the Hungarian 'bourgeoisie', as it were – continued to pursue a policy of welcome and emancipation. At a time when anti-Semitism was on the rise in the rest of Europe, including Austria, and pogroms were rampant in Russia and Russian Poland, their stance deserves to be noted. The industrial, financial and cultural activities propelled by enterprising Jews were viewed with approval in this country, which was backward in many respects and with a bourgeoisie of mainly German origin. The desire for assimilation was also mutual. Even the old 'Galicians' were not averse to it, though they often still spoke Yiddish, preserved their customs, and, it goes without saying, their religion. They even adopted a zealous patriotism – a trend that can be seen in obituaries, for example, praising the good Jew and true Magyar patriot.

Assimilation was both voluntary and exemplary. It was reciprocal, too; as despite being if not hated then at least despised within the dominant public view, the assimilation of Jews was welcomed in a country submerged by its ethnic and religious minorities. In the last general

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census of 1910, 54.6 per cent declared themselves Magyars – among them, the majority of the 900,000 Jews: a significant contribution to 'Magyarness' in this multinational kingdom.

Influenced by the pivotal national and economic role of the Jews, anti-Semitism, whether of a religious, visceral, competitive or ethnic kind, was therefore moderate. It manifested itself in some social discourse, in falsely jocular or openly contemptuous behaviour, and also in social exclusion either invisible or tacitly accepted by the Jews themselves. The half-hearted auto-isolation of the most traditional played a major part in creating the divide and particular cultural affinities not shared by the Magyar public were noticeable even among educated Jews. They did not frequent the same theatres, the same cafés, or read the same newspapers; they would, however, often vote for the same political party and mixed marriages became common as did the celebration of Christmas, together with other national festivals and the king's birthday.

It would be wrong to paint an idyllic picture, but during the half a century of the dual monarchy, peaceful co-existence brought about a certain tolerance which seemed to bear the promise of a hopeful future.

Apart from some sporadic incidents, one outbreak of anti-Semitism tainted the *belle époque*, the Tiszaeszlár affair. The village bearing this name was shaken by a 'ritual murder' trial, with a peasant girl the supposed victim. The trial ended in 1883 with the acquittal of the accused Jews. In the immediate aftermath of the affair, a parliamentary group formed a national anti-Semitic party, but it generated little interest, as did the Popular Catholic Party founded in 1895. Until the First World War, anti-Semitism gained little ground, either political or social.

Towards a bourgeois society?

Since the reform era of the 1830s, the most clear-sighted thinkers had worked towards a modern, industrial and urbanised Hungarian society and for the creation of a 'multitude of educated men' as Count Széchenyi famously put it. National progress had to include the development of economic and social structures and, of course, a bourgeoisie. The liberal deputy Pál Nyári said in 1848 that the country might have changed in its ideas but that among his peers at the Assembly, 'all the names were familiar ones', in other words, aristocratic and noble.

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The civil service was the preserve of the local squires and landed gentry; impoverished and indebted nobles filled the administrative posts. Since Kálmán Tisza, nearly half the deputies of the ruling liberal party had been high-ranking civil servants. This combination of landed gentry and high-ranking civil servants and the more distinguished commoners constituted a political class and a middle class that was not easy to define, a class of worthies who would later call themselves 'seigniorial Christian middle class'. The adjective 'seigniorial' is probably not a good translation of the more modest Hungarian term, closer to 'gentlemen', but it was a specifically Hungarian self-identification, very different from the bourgeoisie of other countries. Having said that, one only has to read Balzac or Trollope (or Molière) to see that the phenomenon of a bourgeoisie aping the nobility was not unknown in these countries either. The Hungarian middle class, despite lacking self-confidence, had a strong tendency towards social posturing. Far from being merely a matter of semantics, this particular characteristic was also reflected in the attitudes and lifestyles of the nobility, whether authentic or borrowed. The huge economic transformations brought about by industrial and commercial progress, the increasing contribution of factories to the national revenue, along with other indicators of development, were evidence that bourgeois society was in the ascendant. A host of historians since the 1960s (György Ránki, Péter Hanák, Iván T. Berend, László Katus, to name but a few) have described the spectacular upsurge in the value of industrial production. From 175 million crowns in 1860, it rose to 1,400 million crowns in 1900, and to 2,539 million in 1913. The industrial growth index soared to 1,450, while the national revenue index climbed from 100 to 453. The state played its part: whereas between 1880 and 1890, industrial subsidies amounted to around 120 million, between 1900 and 1906, industry received 2,300 million from the state, and during the seven years leading up to the war, the amount trebled. Foreign investment was also considerable, estimated at 50 per cent in the 1890s – mainly Austrian capital – compared with only 25 per cent in the next decade. Once it had taken off, domestic capital became the economy's driving force – and a powerful one: industry and commerce went full speed ahead, leaving the primary sector far behind, its production value having only doubled within the same fifty-year span. It nonetheless remained dominant if at times backward.

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Behind these figures, evidence of a developing capitalism, was a society split in two; modern and dynamic on the one hand, and moving at a snail's pace on the other. These contrasts explain the disparate judgements made about the country's characteristics. Some underline its outmoded – even feudal – structures, others highlight its scientific and technical achievements, the expansion of urban centres, of civil society, the arts and literature. Life in peasant villages had changed little, whereas in the large towns – Budapest especially – it had risen to the same level as the other European cities.

The capital was born in 1873 out of the unification of three separate towns: Óbuda, an ancient settlement, Buda, the royal seat, and Pest, a small town of peasants, craftsmen and fishermen. Pest had been of little importance until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when, for the first time, its number of inhabitants (35,000) superseded Buda's (25,000). A century later, in 1910, a unified Budapest had 881,600 inhabitants, nearly three quarters of them in Pest. The growth rate climbed from 100 to 1,254 per cent in less than a century – the highest in Europe, ahead of Berlin (998) and Vienna (578). Expansion and improvements in historic Buda did not supplant its majestic 'old town' look. On the left bank, Pest, industrial, commercial and bourgeois, exploded with vitality in a disconcerting blend of styles. Everything – or nearly everything – was 'neo': neo-Gothic, neo-baroque, neo-classical, *Jugendstil* (secessionist), or simply of no particular style: the hundreds of thousands who had come to town from the countryside to work in the factories had to be housed somewhere.

Apart from a few churches and houses (especially on Buda Castle), there was not much left of the old towns. In Pest, the remains of the old town were demolished, its walls razed to the ground or embedded with houses in order to create a circular boulevard, a kind of *Ringstrasse*, and later the grand boulevard where all the craftsmen set up shop, and beyond that, the industrial zone. The boulevards and the town centre, with the Opera, the neo-Gothic Parliament, the museums, schools and theatres, the palatial banks, stock exchange, and well-to-do middle-class houses were reminiscent of imperial Vienna, though less opulent. The middle-class conquerors of Pest were less wealthy, so the town was less splendid. Out of 1,000 houses, 543 were without an upper floor (compared to 123 in Vienna and 64 in Paris) and were home to modest artisans, minor employees and factory workers. Budapest became

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Plate 30. The Hungarian National Museum, c. 1890

Hungarian at the same speed with which it became a modern urban centre. In 1850, 56 per cent of its 178,000 inhabitants were German, 36 per cent Magyar, 5 per cent Slovak, and 3 per cent other. Thirty years later, the figures had reversed and, in 1900, 85 per cent of the population was Hungarian, with 9.4 per cent German. The change was brought about by an influx of Hungarian workers, assimilated Jews and the integration of the Germans. It was a spontaneous process, a result of the culture and drive of a city in search of its identity. Family names were 'Magyarised'. Yesterday's Germans and Jews changed their names and became the thousand-year-old country's most fervent patriots.

The establishment of a strong Jewish middle class in the capital did not constitute a major problem until the aftermath of the First World War. Though 'ordinary anti-Semitism' was in no way absent – Jewish expansion in economic life and the sensitive domains of the press, publishing, theatre and the liberal professions did provoke resentment – it never reached the level of Viennese anti-Semitism. In 1910, the Jewish population represented about 7 per cent of the inhabitants in the Austrian capital, compared with 23 per cent in Budapest. Despite this three-fold expansion, Budapest did not experience the virulent rise of anti-Semitism that occurred under Schönerer and Karl Lueger (the seven times elected–resigned–re-elected mayor of the city, despite the emperor's disapproval).

Budapest was not the only triumphant symbol of urbanism and a certain urbanity. Temesvár, Arad, Pozsony, Nagyvárad and several other towns followed the example of the capital. In educated circles, development in social mores – in Norbert Elias's definition – was especially apparent. As with everything in this land of contrasts, social graces stopped at the sometimes invisible threshhold of the higher social ranks. Széchenyi, for example, tells a story, not too disapprovingly, about his friend Wesselényi – a vehement man, it has to be said – slapping a servant. Nearly a century later, this was still a common occurrence. Servants and peasants were often subjected to humiliating treatment but not the urban commoner, and the peasant with a certain status in the village was respected by the big landowners, as were the worker, post-office worker and railwayman and, of course, the educated and middle classes. Social divides remained, but class barriers were collapsing in favour of the middle classes. The new middle class was composed of an ever widening social circle and of people from all kinds of

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backgrounds; it was a Hungarian-style bourgeoisie in which all graduates were on first name terms. Though it did not expunge the insurmountable distinction between a noble of good birth and the son of a commoner, the diploma did have a certain equalising effect, and bestowed upon its beneficiaries some social status. A more democratic space was therefore taking shape among the educated and wealthy classes, though the lowest classes were excluded.

The progress of bourgeois society was also evidenced by a diversified civil society. One indication of the new sociability was a proliferation of associations of all kinds: religious, cultural (reading and singing circles), economic, professional and local. This sociability, based on new affinities and shared interests, comradeship or education, often transcended social divisions.

In 1862, there were 579 associations in Hungary; in 1881, there were 4,000. In the absence of any other statistical data, an estimate based on the 21,311 association statutes approved by the minister of the interior, suggests that the associations, circles and clubs existing towards the end of the dual monarchy numbered around half that figure. Among them were 'coalitions' of workers consisting of over twenty members – banned for so long in France – and trade unions. In 1904, there were 14 nationally organised trade unions with 408 groups and 17 local syndicate societies. The first clubs and associations for women also appeared and the very old mutual aid burial societies survived without being registered.

Freemasonry, already long established in the country, began to evolve in a variety of milieus, notably among ex-combatants of the 1848 revolution. Alongside the lodges which followed Scottish rituals were veterans from Kossuth's time, who organised the Great Oriental Lodge. The two trends merged in 1886 under the name of Great Symbolic Lodge, bringing together a number of eminent men.

Here too there were stark contrasts: the 'civilising process' in Hungary which owed much to the liberal government had two distinct limits: national minority societies were closely monitored, and socialist movements, both industrial and rural, were controlled, suppressed and even persecuted. The name 'social democrat' was forbidden and it was not until 1890 that the Workers' Party was able to operate under that name. Its activities met with countless administrative obstacles followed

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by brutal suppression in 1906. The government's main target at the turn of the century, however, was the vigorous and tenacious rural Socialist movement.

As in previous centuries, developments in science, art and literature were particularly dazzling during this period of contrasts and diversity. Physicians, doctors, numerous natural and technical scientists contributed to progress in the sciences and to research and university teaching. It is impossible to list all the scientific discoveries. The most significant were in law, philosophy of law, history and sociology, because they addressed issues related to contemporary society. Professors in philosophy of law, like Ágost Pulsky, Gyula Pikler, Ignác Kuncz in Transylvania, or Bódog Somló, were concerned with issues inextricably bound up with nationhood, the state and citizenship. Once dominated by nationalist thinking, the law for the new generation had to conform to a society based on philosophical and moral assumptions of individual freedom and equality. Trends of thought evolved towards democracy and led to the birth of sociology, thus breaking with the rigid disciplinary boundaries of the past. 'Sociology was a word which synthesised our aspirations in a new politics inspired by Bentham's ideals of justice and founded on the social sciences', wrote Oszkár Jászi in a retrospective article. The Society for Social Sciences founded in 1901 became the breeding ground for a radical democratic movement.

An expansion in historiography, dominated by national romanticism but equally influenced by positivism, the critique of sources and German historicism had already occurred.

Literature had long been dominated by the memories of 1848–9 and by the divisions created by the 1867 compromise. Petöfi, the poet, died as he had lived, fighting on the battlefield for freedom – and his national romanticism still exerted a fascinating influence, even on conservative writers, thanks to the magic and genius of his poetry. He was called by some the Hungarian Béranger though he was a far better poet. Should he in fact be seen as the Hungarian Victor Hugo or Heine's brother, for his romanticism and caustic wit, the clarity of his populist poetic language? Every great poet is, in the end, his own universe.

Among his friends, János Arany reached the highest peaks in terms of perfection of form, crystal clarity of language and his closeness to the language of the people. He left a body of work more complex than

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Petőfi's, the fruit of his experience, but also the emotional traumas of his time and his own leanings towards pessimism, melancholy and mental suffering.

The Hungarian poetic tradition, which embraced seven centuries, lived through a veritable golden age with Vörösmarty, Petőfi, Arany, Vajda's lyrical poetry and other contemporaries. The greatest among them set about translating Shakespeare, seen as 'half the universe'. The nineteenth century was also outstanding for the wealth of its epic genre, straddling romanticism and realism. József Eötvös wrote social and moral novels, while his contemporary, Zsigmond Kemény, though little read due to his heavy style, authored historical novels in which the characters' psychology is described to a degree that has yet to be surpassed in Hungarian prose. And of course, Mór Jókai, author of close to one hundred adventure and fantasy novels, enjoyed unprecedented popularity.

Kálmán Mikszáth inaugurated a period which it would be tempting to label 'critical realism', were it not impossible to fit him into a cliché. Short-story writer, novelist, author of devastating sketches, satires and short newspaper articles, Mikszáth shone at everything. His finely nuanced characters suggest parallels with Thackeray, Trollope or Maupassant, his contemporaries. However, the world which inspired this clear-sighted observer – that of his own class, the gentry, flamboyant, frivolous, charming, scheming and forever in debt – was coming to a end.

There was also an academic literature, more conservative in both its politics and forms of expression, with reviews, publishers and literary societies as well as a culture born of a cosmopolitan metropolis. Though not the sole representatives, Jewish writers and journalists were part of a rather particular breed whose lifestyle made its mark on the capital's bohemian element until the end of the monarchy and beyond: the poet József Kiss, the novelist and short-story writer Sándor Bródy and the youngest of them, Ferenc Molnár, internationally acclaimed playwright, to name but a few. Budapest had half a dozen theatres, large publishing houses and a press representing a variety of tendencies. Fine arts flourished, notably the Nagybánya School, fuelled by the artistic influences of Munich, Paris and Berlin. Pál Szinnyei Merse, Károly Ferenczy, István Csók, Tivadar Csontvári Kosztka, József Rippl-Rónai – it would be impossible to list them all. At the 1900 World Exhibition, the Hungarian school presented in Paris was admired for its 'bold and

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brilliant virtuosity', having no 'particular characteristic' if not a 'certain exoticism'; Paris bestowed the same judgement on Gustav Klimt's and Egon Schiele's Secessionism. True, the *fin-de-siècle* of Hungarian painting, like that of Viennese Art Nouveau, was only just beginning. All things 'modern' remained suspect in the eyes of the educated majority in Hungary, who feared the dilution of national cultural identity. Gustav Mahler, then Arthur Nikisch, directors of the Budapest Opera for a time, were soon dismissed. Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, had just begun their research into folk music, which would later be blended into their modernist music. For the time being, 'Budapest 1900', just like that of the previous century, cultivated a conservative national art rather than the *fin-de-siècle* art of Vienna, Berlin, Paris or London.

FROM ONE CRISIS TO ANOTHER, 1904–1914

When the 'Millennium' fires of 1896 died out, Hungary was still living under the fascination of its thousand-year-old past and bathed in self-satisfaction over the success of the Austro-Hungarian compromise. An unequivocal success, it was confirmed by progress in all domains and by a better distribution of general well-being. Social tensions and the problem of the minorities had not yet disturbed the peace. Hungary was confident, had a clear conscience, and failed to notice the threatening clouds gathering on the horizon. Until that point, Hungary succeeded in discarding any reorganisation plan to move from a dual to a tripartite monarchy or even a federation; anything that called into question Magyar supremacy within the kingdom or its role, along with Austria, in common affairs. And yet, the first crisis stemmed not from social tensions or dissension among the minorities, but from the modalities of co-existence with Austria, an as yet unresolved issue. It was sparked off by the opposition of 'left-wing' independents in the conflict over military contingency and the order of army command, one of the dual system's numerous bones of contention.

Francis Joseph, true to himself, behaved loyally towards his Hungarian kingdom, scrupulously respecting the words and the spirit of the compromise. He refused any involvement in internal affairs, including the demands of the ethnic minorities. The two common affairs, diplomacy and the army, formed part of his special domain and

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he had no intention of acceding to the nationalist demands of the Independence Party led by, among others, its president Gyula Justh and by Ferenc Kossuth, son of the famous exile. They were unhappy with the monopoly of German as the language of command, wanted the withdrawal of Hungarian units serving outside the frontiers and their oath to be made to the Hungarian Constitution. It was too much for Francis Joseph: the unity of the imperial and royal army (*Königliche und Käiserliche*), foundation of the dual monarchy, would have been compromised. To express his unswerving opposition, he made his celebrated order of the day at Chlopy in September 1903, amidst his soldiers, during the Galicia manoeuvres. Standing fast against the Hungarians was all the more necessary since the imperial army was, as in Joseph Roth's novels, the crucible of social and supranational integration of the people living under the monarchy, where individuals could advance regardless of class or nationality.

Francis Joseph made a few concessions on minor issues and appointed Count István Tisza, son of the old liberal leader, to form a new government and to pass a law on the army in accordance with his ideas. Growing opposition forced Tisza to call an election – which he lost. In 1905, for the first time since the 1867 compromise, the liberal party lost its overall majority and found itself relegated to second place, behind the Independence Party. The imperial general began to consider military intervention and suspension of the Hungarian Constitution. Francis Joseph refused but nonetheless chose to take firm action. He gave General Géza Fejérváry the task of forming an extra-parliamentary government which was nicknamed 'gendarme-government' because Fejérváry had been commander of the bodyguard.

The king had another weapon at his disposal: he threatened the former opposition, now the majority, with the introduction of universal suffrage, which would have certainly led to the Independence Party losing the elections through the hostile votes of the minorities. The ploy worked. After the dissolution of Parliament in 1906, opponents accepted Francis Joseph's conditions concerning the army and formed a coalition government under the presidency of Sándor Wekerle, the former prime minister, with the participation of politicians of all hues, including Gyula Andrássy, son of the former foreign affairs minister, Ferenc Kossuth, son of the venerated leader of the 1848–9 uprising, and Count Albert Apponyi. The Wekerle government, despite its prime minister's

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liberal reputation, led a resolutely nationalistic and anti-socialist policy, which provoked the opposition of the entire left, from the Social Democratic Party to the National Agricultural Workers League, via the middle-class radicals.

The nationalist and anti-democratic coalition government did not last. At the 1910 elections, the former liberals, now the National Workers' Party, secured an absolute majority, under the aegis of István Tisza who, without having been involved in government prior to 1913, led the policy-making of a series of ephemeral governments. The Workers' Party had as little in common with erstwhile liberalism as Tisza did with his father. His personal qualities – intelligence, steadiness and courage – are undisputed but Tisza also represented an anti-social, reactionary trend (the poet Ady called him a pit bull). As for the nationality question, he energetically destroyed the independent nationalist opposition which threatened the Austro-Hungarian edifice, while being nonetheless a firm supporter of an exclusive nationalist policy at the expense of the minorities.

Francis Joseph thus emerged victorious from the crisis, but then had to face others. The Chamber of Deputies became the stage for noisy confrontations and ludicrous scenes provoked by the opposition's obstruction tactics and an assassination attempt against Tisza. There were also more serious signs of instability and brewing discontent. A general strike and a large anti-Tisza demonstration were organised in 1912 by the Social Democratic Party. It was well attended and led to a confrontation with the police, resulting in 6 dead, 182 wounded and 300 arrests. This 'bloody Thursday' entered the mythology of the workers' movement. Agrarian Socialism, meanwhile, had taken off again, under new leaders such as András Áchim, deputy in the Assembly, who promoted the redistribution of large properties, and István Nagyatádi Szabó, founder of a small farmers' party, the future and important Smallholders' Party.

A variety of conflicts with national minorities continued, the latter finding in Archduke Francis Ferdinand a powerful protector. Francis Ferdinand, the emperor's nephew, was heir to the throne since Francis Joseph's only son, Rudolph, had taken his own life, together with his mistress, Baroness Maria Vetsera, at Meyerling Castle, in 1889. Unlike Rudolph, Francis Ferdinand was known to be 'anti-Magyar', but in reality he was first and foremost a Habsburg archduke, defender of the

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Imperial House and of its power. He developed a strong aversion to the Magyars, the main obstacles in his plans to reorganise the monarchy. At the Belvedere Palace in Vienna, Francis Ferdinand set up a kind of special cabinet, attended by individuals of various nationalities, where the reorganisation of the monarchy along federal lines was discussed and elaborated upon.

Political crises certainly did not help to consolidate the Hungarian state or to advance towards a solution to the real national and social problems. If despite everything dualism survived, it was thanks to the liberal wing of the political class, conscious of its necessity, and to Francis Joseph, who also believed that maintaining the precarious balance based on the compromise was essential. Meanwhile, the monarchy had to face even more acute crises, this time from abroad.

In October 1908, Bosnia-Herzegovina, occupied since the Congress of Berlin (1878), was annexed to the monarchy. The powers who had a direct interest – Russia and Turkey, followed by Serbia – consented reluctantly. Annexation was justified by 'historical rights' of the Hungarian Crown dating back to the Middle Ages, but in fact the Hungarians did not particularly want an increase of their Slav population. Bosnia-Herzegovina was, in effect, governed as a territory shared by the two states of the monarchy, without being made part of Hungary. After a few conflicts with the local Muslim population, the Austro-Hungarian administration, though not loved, came to be accepted. Such was not the case for the Bosnian Serbs, however. The latter looked to Serbia, where the policy had changed since the assassination of Alexander Obrenovich by officers of the 'Black Hand' and the accession of the Karageorgevich dynasty. A pro-Austrian position had been replaced by the idea of a 'Greater Serbia', based on Russian support. Nicola Pashich had already masterminded this project.

Hungary, meanwhile, was more immediately concerned with Serb unrest in Croatia. In 1908, more than fifty members of the Serb Autonomy Party (of Croatia) were arrested and brought before the Zagreb tribunal, accused of Greater Serb propaganda. Thirty-one of them were found guilty of high treason and sentenced to long periods of imprisonment, but were later acquitted. Serb unrest in Croatia was far from being the Magyars' preoccupation. Among Croats themselves, the movement supporting separation from the Hungarian Crown was gaining ground.

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Indeed, it was not long before the Balkan powder keg blew up: the annexation of Bosnia in 1908 was just a time bomb waiting for the 1912–13 Balkan wars in order to go off. Following annexation, Russia had – in the words of its minister Alexander Isvolski – 'swallowed the bitter pill'. The Serbs, forced to submit to Austrian and German pressure, no doubt felt even more embittered. They were just biding their time for the opportune moment for a renewed assault, this time against Turkey, in alliance with other Christian countries in the peninsula and with Russia (who appointed itself protector of their interests). Turkey was beaten; the victors, however, immediately set off to fight for the partitioning of Macedonia, which had been liberated from the Ottoman Empire and was coveted by Bulgaria. From here to the second, very brief, Balkan war in which Serb, Greek and Romanian armies defeated the Bulgarians.

The imbroglio that was the Balkans (a land of inextricably mixed nationalities and languages under the eagle eye of Turkey, Russia, Italy, Austria–Hungary and, behind it, Germany) was, after two Balkan wars, far from being resolved. The results achieved by the two great rival powers were limited: Russia had certainly consolidated its influence but not its hegemony; in the face of Russia's rising preponderance and Serb expansion in the Balkans, Austria–Hungary won little more than a reprieve. The plan of Vienna, to aid Bulgaria in creating a counterweight against the Russians and Serbs, had to be abandoned. Italy, its ally, opposed the plan, while Germany, the Triple Alliance's pivot, was putting the brakes on Vienna in order to safeguard its relations with Russia. Caution also prevailed in London and Paris. The degeneration of the Balkan conflicts into a European war was thus avoided – but only just, and without having resolved the tangled antagonisms that would eventually be its root cause.

During the political crisis of the early twentieth century progressive minds had drawn the contours of a radical transformation of society, those of a 'new Hungary' and a democratic 'counter-culture', open to the ideas of the century. The guiding light was the poet Endre Ady; the breeding ground for these ideas were journals like *Huszadik Század* (Twentieth Century 1900–19) and *Nyugat* (West, 1908–41), and associations like the Social Sciences Society. We have already come across the leaders of this movement, notably Oszkár Jászi, famous for his clarity and multivalent vision. Jászi raised and tackled a variety of issues

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V. ÉVFOLYAM. 1912. JUNIUS 16. 12. SZÁM.

NYUGAT

FŐSZERKESZTŐ IGNOTUS SZERKESZTŐK FENYŐ MIKSA ÉS OSVÁT ERNŐ

SZERKESZTŐSÉG ÉS KIADÓHIVATAL BUDAPEST, IX., LÓNYAY-UTCA 18.

Grossmann Simon
Szerb királyi udvari fogász
Budapest, VII. kerület,
Erzsébet-körút 50. sz.
TELEFON 86—50.

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VENTILÁTOROK, SZELLŐZŐ-
SZIVÓ-BERENDEZÉSEK
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BUDAPEST
IV., Párisi-u. 3. sz.
FIÓKOK: IV., Calvin-tér (Kecskeméti-u. sarok) — VII., Király-utca 35-37 — VII., Rákóczi-út 38 — II., Fő-u. 52 (Batthyány-tér sarok). — Szigorúan szabott árak!

HUNGÁRIA Általános BIZTOSITÓ R.-T.
BUDAPESTEN, IV., KÁROLY-KÖRUT 2.
TELEFONSZÁM 153—98.
KARTELLEN KIVÜL KÖT: tűz-, élet-, baleset-, betörés-, üveg-, jég- és állatbiztosításokat

Plate 31. Cover of the journal *Nyugat*, 1912

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including socialism, agrarian reform and the struggle for political democracy. It was he who developed the modern democratic concept of solving the nationality problems based upon cultural freedom for all minorities, but without autonomy. He retained the concept of the integral and unitary Magyar state which he hoped to evolve towards a citizens' democracy. Like other exponents of radicalism, Jászi emigrated after the collapse of the Károlyi regime, in which he was a minister, and pursued a brilliant career as a sociologist–historian, first in Europe, then in the United States until his death in 1957, without ever returning to the public political life of his native land. Like his comrades, he was held in contempt by the Horthy regime because of his radicalism, and, later, by the Communist regime for his firm opposition to Bolshevism, a position which also caused his breach with Count Károlyi.

Jászi's itinerary is fairly typical of the fate of Hungarian radical democrats under successive regimes over a period of nearly a century. By the time they founded their association and the journal *Huszadik Század,* the radicals amounted to a small, heterogeneous group of essayists and professors of law, philosophy and the science that was their guiding light to a just and free society – in other words, sociology. Their radical social vision did not attract a very wide audience and its social base was tenuous. In the absence of an established bourgeoisie, their sphere of influence was limited to a handful of intellectuals and half of those were Jewish. Furthermore, since their social ideas and a degree of anti-capitalism set them apart from a burnt-out liberalism, the radicals only appealed to some sections of the middle classes. Though close to the social democrats, they distanced themselves from the party, from the workers' movement and from Marxism. The historian Miklós Szabó was correct to detect the inclination towards a 'third way', that bright but narrow path which has so often bewitched high-minded intellectuals, but which fails to impact upon reality.

Initially, the group advertised its political disinterestedness. It included men with divergent perspectives: Count Gyula Andrássy was president of the Social Science Society; the liberal journalist Gusztáv Gratz edited the journal *Huszadik Század* until 1906, when their paths diverged. The more radical elements among them focused on a programme for the fundamental transformation of society and state. Many of them joined the Galileo Circle, founded in 1908, which included among its members a number of future Communists. The name 'radical

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democrat' was certainly appropriate in the sense that the New Hungary of their ideals entailed the abolition of feudalism, the establishment of a lawful state, and a progressive modern democracy. With the old liberal party led by the nationalist–conservative István Tisza, they wanted to implement a revolutionary plan via the irresistible force of progress rather than through violence. Their respective intellectual development was, however, very different. In the beginning, positivism was an ephemeral presence, together with that of Herbert Spencer. There were traces of the sociology of Durkheim and Vilfredo Pareto and of anarcho-syndicalism through Ervin Szabó. Also present were hints of Marxism – treated with caution – and evolutionism. These eclectic readings could not form a coherent ideology, but they were instrumental in the advent of a new political culture. The radicals had the courage to sow the seeds without any real hope of reaping the benefits. The almost total indifference of most radicals towards economics, both theoretical and practical, further reduced the possibility that they might influence society in any significant way. Fighting everyone was hard; one ended up with a lot of enemies and few supporters.

SARAJEVO: WAR AND DEFEAT

When on 28 June 1914 Gavrilo Princip, a member of the 'Black Hand' secret society, assassinated the heir to the throne, Francis Ferdinand, and his wife at Sarajevo, none of the powers foresaw the consequences of this act. Yet the Sarajevo assassination was to trigger the deadly Great War. For nearly a century now, historians have tried to unravel the diplomatic entanglements which led to Francis Joseph's ultimatum to Serbia and, finally, to the declaration of war. The belief that Belgrade was behind the 'Black Hand' organisation weighed heavily in the decision. Francis Joseph envisaged first of all a punitive expedition against the Serbs. It was a military solution, therefore, supported by his Austrian prime minister, Karl von Stürgkh, by the chief of staff, Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, and the foreign minister, Count Leopold von Berchtold. The latter supported the view that the monarchy must rise to the challenge of Serbia. Assuming Russian intervention on the side of the Serbs, the German chief of staff and chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg considered the situation rather favourable: Russia was unprepared, the war would be brief and victory a foregone conclu-

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sion. The cogs were set in motion. Only the Hungarian head of government, Count István Tisza, was against the decision, fearing irreparable consequences if Belgrade's role in the Sarajevo assassination could not be proven and if military and diplomatic conditions were not right. Tisza finally relented under pressure from Austrian ministers and with agreement from Berlin. He was then in the front line, concentrating all his efforts on winning the war.

The population reacted enthusiastically at first. As in all other belligerent countries, mobilisation and the soldiers' departure to the front took place in a wave of patriotic fervour. The Social Democratic Party, after a brief pacifist response, gave up its opposition to the war. A crucial factor for the multinational monarchy was that none of its dozen or so ethnic minorities turned against it and defections were rare. Unity seemed to have been renewed in an outburst of loyalty towards the emperor. Enthusiasm did inevitably wane, but with its 53 million inhabitants (France had 42 million), Austria–Hungary had at its disposal at any one time about 4 million soldiers and 8 million in all fought in the war, half of this force being provided by the Hungarian Crown.

The Austro-Hungarian armies first engaged on the southern front against Serbia, then, following the Russian offensive, on the northern front and, finally, on a third front against Italy, collecting more defeats than they did victories, despite the valiant efforts of the soldiers and the officers' corps. High command was partially responsible, but the main causes were organisational weaknesses and lack of equipment and provisions; the German army had to save the day more than once during the long years of the Great War.

The monarchy's losses were extremely heavy. Of the 3,800,000 soldiers mobilised in Hungary, 661,000 lost their lives, more than 700,000 were wounded and a similar number of them were made prisoners.

The final series of débâcles began in June 1918 on the Italian front. Along the line of the River Piave, scene of Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms*, the army of the monarchy was almost annihilated. The counter-offensive by the Entente began in July, with the Germans sustaining a fatal defeat near the Somme. In September, the Bulgarians surrendered to General Franchet d'Esperey's Eastern French army at Salonika. October saw the second catastrophe at Piave; on 3 November, Austria–Hungary surrendered to the allied armies and signed the armistice at Villa Giusti in Padua.

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War diplomacy

Meanwhile, on 21 November 1916, Francis Joseph died at the age of eighty-six, after a sixty-eight-year reign. His successor, as emperor of Austria, was Charles I – Charles IV as king of Hungary. The death of the old emperor was a heavy blow to the monarchy, but the decline of the empire had already begun with the defeats and because of serious economic deterioration in its rural hinterland. Consequently, four months after his coronation, Charles initiated a separate peace deal through his brothers-in-law, Princes Sixte and Xavier of Bourbon-Parma, officers of the French army. Sixte took Charles's message to President Poincaré, a rather vague message rejected by the French and, moreover, not at all well received in Berlin.

Rather than embarking upon a serious course of diplomacy for a separate peace, the monarchy seems to have adopted those of its rivals and of the emigrants. Its fate was not sealed on its own by the Alliance and the United States until April 1918. Despite its military setbacks, desertions, the formation of the Czech legion in Russia, mutinies, strikes and agitation by the minorities, the destruction of Austria–Hungary was not yet a foregone conclusion. President Wilson's famous Fourteen Points, to be declared on 8 January 1918, did not envisage it, nor was it part of the Entente's war aims. On the other hand, the Congress of the Austro-Hungarian nationalities, which opened in Rome on 8 April 1918 and where bids for independence were made, turned out to be an unfavourable turning point. At the end of May, the United States agreed to the dismantling of Austria–Hungary. This was followed by a military council of the Entente which officially added the creation of Poland, Czechoslovakia and a southern Slav state to the war aims – in other words, the destruction of the dual monarchy. The recognition of the Transylvanian Romanians' right to self-determination was the last stroke in the disintegration of the Hungarian part.

The end of Austria–Hungary, however, cannot be explained by ultimate decisions; nor, indeed, the thesis of 'fatality' which had to be reframed in the long term. The mutilation of the monarchy, if not its total destruction, was foreseeable. Before recapitulating this long process, it is helpful to discuss the short-term events, in so far as a summary of the multiplicity of events punctuating the war years is in fact possible.

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While there was naturally no diplomatic presence in enemy cities and therefore no one to plead the Austro-Hungarian cause in Paris or London, there was an emigrant presence from the monarchy's nationalities. Czech and Slovak emigrants played a decisive role in bringing about a change in the politics of the Entente and the United States towards Austria–Hungary. The aim to 'destroy Austria' (*Austria delenda*) was propagated by leaders of the Czech emigration, primarily two high-calibre statesmen, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937) and Edvard Beneš (1884–1948). In Paris, Beneš worked tirelessly for the Czechoslovak cause, winning the support of influential French intellectuals, Slavist university professors, journalists, writers, mostly members of a national Committee for Political and Social Studies and a Society of Studies, both founded in 1916, comprising pacifists, anarchists and freemasons. The historian Ernest Denis played a particularly important role. The 'Czechophile lobby' also won the support of Stéphen Pichon and Philippe Berthelot, minister and general secretary of foreign affairs respectively. As for the head of government himself, Georges Clemenceau, no convincing explanation has yet been put forward for his violently anti-Austrian reversal in 1918–19 and his acrimony towards the Hungarians.

An influential pressure group was also formed in England, led by Professor Robert W. Seton-Watson, author of *Racial Problems in Hungary* (1908), *The Habsburg Monarchy and the South Slav Question* (1911) and editor of *The New Europe Review* from 1916, and Henry Wickham Steed, correspondent of *The Times*. 'The result was the creation of a powerful government lobby in support of a strong British commitment to national self-determination in Eastern Europe', writes Thomas L. Sakmyster in a collective work dedicated to the war (*War and Society in East Central Europe*, vol. VI (Social Science Monograph, New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1982)).

At the peace conference, the Hungarians had to pay a heavy price for the defeat. The Czechoslovak Republic, Romania and the Serb-Croat-Slovene kingdom annexed vast territories where more than 3 million Magyars cohabited with the ethnic relatives of the victorious side. The Paris treaties satisfied the latter entirely, but did so by brutally carving up territories, sacrificing millions of Magyars, including discrete groups like the Szeklers and the Magyars living in border areas. 'Another cloudless day', writes Harold Nicolson, the British diplomat, in his *Diary* on

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8 May 1919, after a decisive meeting between the foreign ministers of the five powers, held at the Quai d'Orsay.

> There (in that heavy tapestried room, under the simper of Marie de Medicis, with the windows open upon the garden and the sound of water sprinkling from a fountain and from a lawn hose) – the fate of the Austro-Hungarian Empire is finally settled. Hungary is partitioned by these five distinguished gentlemen – indolently, irresponsibly partitioned – while the water sprinkles on the lilac outside – while the experts watch anxiously – while A.J.B., in the intervals of dialectics on secondary points, relapses into somnolence – while Lansing draws hobgoblins upon his writing pad – while Pichon crouching in his large chair blinks owlishly as decision after decision is actually recorded – while Sonnino, returned to Canossa, is rigidly polite – while Makino, inscrutable and inarticulate, observes, observes, observes.

The fact that Nicolson was not particularly fond of the Magyars makes his testimony all the more significant.

Apart from Emperor–King Charles's clumsy attempt and a few diplomatic or private moves – by Count Michael Károlyi among others – Vienna and Budapest did not have the means of influencing Allied diplomacy or European and American public opinion. Hungarian internal policy had not made any progress towards democracy that would have changed the kingdom's tarnished image. Successors of István Tisza, head of government until 1917, maintained a 'greater Hungarian' position, thereby leaving little room for any kind of agreement with the minorities.

THE END OF HISTORICAL HUNGARY

The half a century of dual monarchy has been described, analysed and judged in different ways by both Hungarian public opinion and historians. The enthused crowds who celebrated independence in the final days of October 1918 were followed by disappointed generations nostalgic for 'the good old days' of Francis Joseph, for peace, and, above all, for the vanished grandeur of historical Hungary. Collective memory certainly reserved a special place for the anti-Habsburg tradition, but alongside remembrance of Rákóczi and Kossuth was also a veneration of the good kings of the Austrian dynasty. The 'legal' world was as divided as the 'rural' one. Hungary remained a kingdom under Horthy's regency, and the return of the crowned king, Charles IV, was forbidden. Schools and streets displayed the tricolour roundel on 15

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March, anniversary of the 1848 revolution, and a black ribbon on 6 October, in commemoration of the day thirteen generals were executed during the War of Independence. However, teaching about the day in April 1849 when Kossuth declared separation from the Habsburgs remained discreet. Photographs of the old man of the Hofburg and the old man who died in exile in Turin, gazed peacefully at each other on the dressers of bourgeois apartments or in the 'parlours' of peasant cottages. The predominantly Calvinist eastern region seems to have remained more attached to the anti-Habsburg *kuruc* tradition than Catholic Transdanubia. A similar split can be observed among the historians of the inter-war period. Gyula Szekfü's iconoclastic study of Rákóczi in exile had already provoked a scandal when it appeared in 1913 because of the less than complimentary judgement he conferred upon the prince, one of the symbols of national resistance. Yet the same historian became an incontestable authority for his works which cast a critical eye upon the turbulent noble estates, on Kossuth and his radical policy as opposed to Deák, the wise architect of the 1867 compromise, that 'happy accomplishment of our modern history, the best solution to an age-old problem'. Szekfü went as far as to declare that 'in terms of public rights, '67 was the peak of 400 years of history'. Communist historiography would later veto this. For twenty years, the notion of Hungary's 'colonisation' by Austria, and of the nation's oppression by the Habsburgs prevailed. In this ideological reading, Hungary's 'true' history was nothing less than '400 years of struggle for independence'. University professors, members of the Academy and respected lyceum teachers were sacked for stating the contrary or for professing a more nuanced point of view. Re-establishing the truth of the matter carried risks for several historians from the Institute of History. György Ránki and Iván T. Berend, in their studies of economic history, show that the period of dualism, whilst penalising industrialisation through Austrian customs pressures, was favourable to modernisation and growth. Péter Hanák, author of several studies on cultural and political aspects of this period, analyses societal progress, refusing dogmatic Communist theses in which only the exploiting classes supported dualism. These historian 'apologists for the monarchy', the Communists retorted, were simply renouncing the ideas of the democratic and socialist revolution. Domokos Kosáry, one of the key representatives of scientific historiography, did not bend to ideological demands and was fired. Thanks to a

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host of historians, the Hungarian position within dualism has also been rectified: they have shown how, bearing in mind that total independence was impossible, Hungary was able to find security and an honourable place in international relations. Without idealising the 1867 solution, its detrimental effects on the economic and social structures and on the petrifaction of the political system, the chiaroscuro light of reality is thus shed on dualism. In the light of an otherwise glorious history, it was an undoubtedly regrettable, in the true sense of the word, compromise, but a fertile and creative one too.

Could the monarchy have survived?

On 16 October 1918, two weeks before the Padua armistice, Charles declared the transformation of Austria (not Hungary) into a federal state. It was too late. In a cascade of declarations, Czechs, Slovaks and Southern Slavs proclaimed their separation. Austria declared itself a republic, and Hungary separated itself belatedly from its king. Within a matter of weeks, the Habsburg Empire, ten centuries old, collapsed. Could it have survived? According to the most widespread opinion, the 'worm-eaten edifice' was in any case condemned to demolition because of its outmoded structures, its heavy and punctilious organisation, and most of all its multi-ethnic composition. Every empire must perish . . . However, the only worthwhile point is not to come up with rather short theories on the 'inexorable advance of the nationalities' and the imminent collapse of the multinational empire, but to ascertain whether or not it had the capacity to rebuild itself on new foundations.

As has already been stated, in 1918 it was certainly too late. Emperor Charles's manifesto for the reorganisation of Austria, without touching Hungary's status, came at a time when independence – for all the countries of the empire – was within reach, and without a single shot being fired. One year earlier – let alone in the pre-war period – the desire for independence was far weaker. Separatism was at that time fostered by emigrants, especially the Czechs, rather than by the domestic political class or public opinion. The federal solution seemed to meet Czech desires; as for the Croats, they leaned towards an attachment to the Austrian Empire in return for separation from the kingdom of Hungary and union with Dalmatia. Other provinces, like Galicia, aspired to autonomous status. Subject to a shift in the Hungarian position, the

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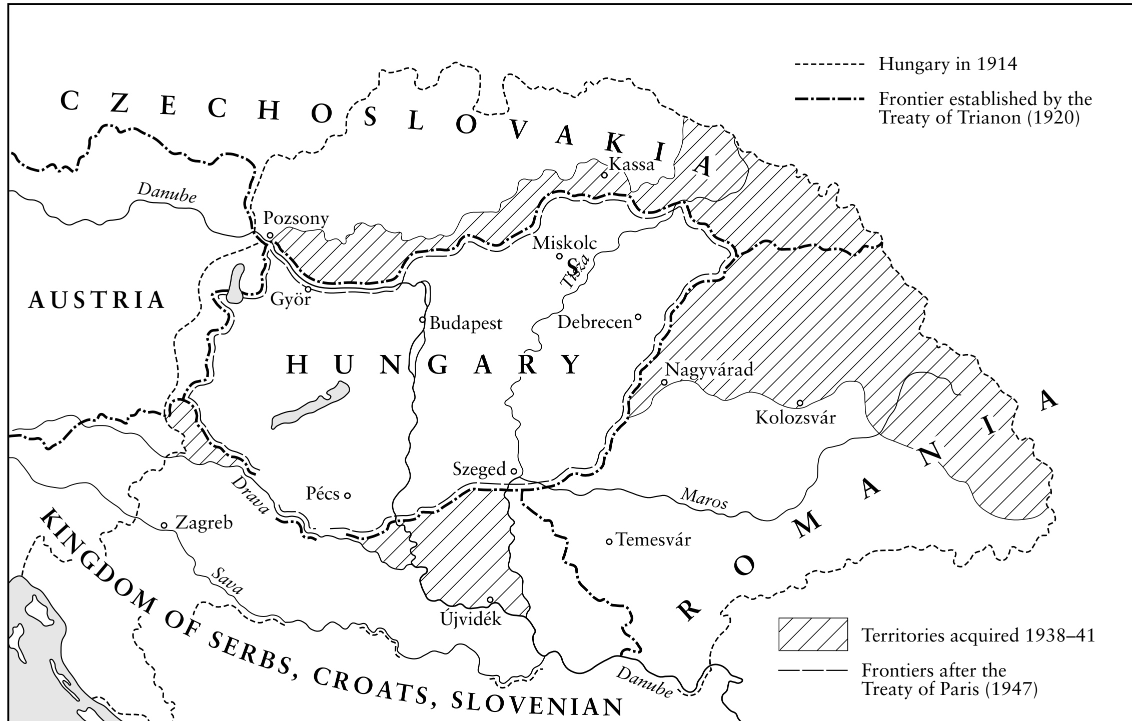

Map 11. Frontiers of Hungary after the Treaties of Trianon (1920) and Paris (1947)

federal solution was therefore viable – perhaps until 1918, certainly before the war.

It can be deduced that without the war, the Austrian monarchy, transformed into a federation, would not have been doomed. As Léo Valiani points out in his authoritative work, it was the war, the trials endured, emigrant activity, the hardening of the Allies and the final defeat which turned the nationality movement into an irresistible force which led to the eruption.

As for the Hungarian position – within the hypothesis of a solution adopted before the crisis became irreversible – the essentials are known: the Hungarians stuck firmly to their intransigent position, unwilling to give away an inch of their constitutional prerogatives. In other words, they rejected any trialism or federal project which placed the Austrian Slavs on an equal footing with the Hungarians. Furthermore, apart from the minorities of the Austrian Empire, there were Hungary's national minorities: Slovaks, Romanians, Germans, Croats, Serbs and Ruthenians. To enter into a federation with all these peoples would have been absolutely unthinkable for two reasons. Firstly, the other members – Austrian Germans, Czechs, Poles and Italians – would have been reduced to the smallest portion under the crushing weight of a Hungary comprising 20 million inhabitants. Secondly, none of the nationalities within the Hungarian kingdom would have been willing to be the leftovers of a reorganisation of this kind.

The Hungarian statesmen were right: whatever the scenario, federalisation would have led to the disintegration of historical Hungary. It would have entailed separation from Croatia, the loss of Upper Hungary to be transformed into a federal Slovak state and the secession, in one form or another, of the Transylvanian Romanians, not to mention inevitable Serb demands, probable Ruthenian demands and foreseeable Saxon ones.

All the last governments – of Tisza, Móric Eszterházy, Sándor Wekerle and Count Hadik in the final instance – acted reactively: they categorically opposed any agreement which threatened the sovereignty of the Hungarian Crown over the entire territory of the kingdom. Hungary was consequently the stumbling block in the reorganisation of the monarchy: without Hungary's agreement, the project could not be carried out; without Hungary, the result would have been an Austro-

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Czech–Dalmatian–Galician federal state reduced to half the dual monarchy. To add anything to this statement would be pure speculation.

Detractors of the Hungarian attitude were therefore not wrong either when they observed that any solution which satisfied the ten or twelve nationalities came up against Budapest's refusal. An additional question remains, however: how could Hungary have removed the obstacle constituted by its internal multi-ethnicity? Heterogeneous Austria was more easily reconciled. It had built itself up through the centuries, piece by piece, into an empire where the hereditary provinces of the House of Habsburg rubbed shoulders with Bohemia, conquests in Italy, Dalmatia, Galicia and Bucovina. It was a mosaic of states and provinces with a supranational character, headed by the shared sovereign in the Hofburg, Vienna. Conversely, the Hungarian 'mosaic' was drawn upon the canvas of a thousand-year-old historical Hungary, under the cupola of the Crown. To renounce this unity, unless forced to do so, would have been indubitably a generous act. In view of Magyar public opinion and its political class, it would have been a suicidal one – an extraordinary and historically unprecedented gesture.

Nonetheless, to defer the irreducible nationality problem from one decade to another was equally suicidal. Without speculation as to what could have happened 'if' the Hungarians had sought and found a *modus vivendi* with the non-Magyars in the kingdom, one conclusion stands out: it was never seriously envisaged. For reasons which run through the centuries and are inextricably linked to the Magyars' conception of the nation-state, apart from a few rare and isolated individuals the idea was beyond their horizons.

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6

Between the wars

Historical Hungary was over. After the 'long nineteenth century', it entered a Europe forged by the victors, a small, defeated country of less than 8 million inhabitants. Even before the Treaty of Trianon (signed 4 June 1920) had set out the peace conditions, Hungary had lost more or less two thirds of its territories and three fifths of its inhabitants. As soon as the monarchy collapsed, successor states occupied the most coveted parts of the kingdom: to the north, Upper Hungary was claimed by the Slovaks and Czechs; to the south, Serbs joined with Croats and Slovenians and created a common kingdom; to the east, Transylvanian Romanians opted to join Romania. Charles of Habsburg abdicated and the declaration of the Republic of Austria sealed the end of Austria–Hungary. From now on, Hungary had to face alone its neighbours as well as the eastern army of the Entente – which had already defeated the Bulgarians and was advancing from Salonika to its southern borders.

POST-WAR CONVULSIONS

Under attack on all sides, the country underwent a year of torment. We must return to the last days of October in order to describe the internal situation.

On 25 October 1918, three opposition parties – the Radicals, the Social Democrats and Count Mihály Károlyi's Independence Party – created a National Council. On 30 October, the latter was swept to

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power in a joyful revolution, by crowds of soldiers, men and women wearing asters in their button holes. Count Károlyi formed a coalition government with the approval of the king's representative, Archduke Joseph. When Charles abdicated on 16 November, Károlyi proclaimed Hungary's First Republic before an enthusiastic crowd. The new leader was an exceptional individual: son of a great historic family who moved to the left; a large landowner who distributed one of his domains among the peasants; a pacifist who had fought valiantly in a regiment of hussars. He was a pro-Entente liberal politician, a Wilsonian and a patriot; an arch-rival of Tisza, and yet devastated when the latter was murdered by marauding soldiers. A 'republican royalist', Károlyi was the last statesman to swear allegiance to the absent king.

Full of goodwill, the Károlyi government, reshuffled several times – notably on the occasion of the count being elected president – took radical steps to democratise the country and to improve the lot of workers and peasants. Too radical for the right and not radical enough for the Communist left, for the former the 'red count', the 'Hungarian Kerenski', was merely the harbinger of Bolshevik subversion. Indeed, Károlyi would be later condemned (in 1923), *in absentia*, for high treason. Despite his pro-Communist leanings, on the other hand, the party always kept him at arm's length, refusing to accept him within the ranks. Károlyi, the eternal emigrant, played a role of little consequence for his country, but represented a virtually democratic Hungary. During his trial, Entente governments made appeals – at best half-hearted – to the Budapest authorities, more for form's sake than to support this slightly eccentric man of the left who represented no one. During the first months of the end of war and the post-war period, however, Károlyi was the man of the moment, popular with the masses, hated by his class more than anyone else.

Two accusations levelled against him and his short-lived government are indicative of the situation. Károlyi was considered the gravedigger of historical Hungary because of his anti-militarist propaganda and, above all, his cowardice towards the 'nationalities' and the Entente. He was, with the war minister Colonel Béla Linder, very probably responsible for the disintegration of the army. Historical evidence does not, however, support the other accusation levelled against him. True, Károlyi and his friends, including Oszkár Jászi, did try for the first time

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to come to an agreement with the minorities; but the latter were no longer nationalities at the mercy of the Budapest government's goodwill. Jászi's dream of transforming Hungary into an 'Eastern Switzerland' evaporated. The time for concessions, mean or magnanimous, was past: during those days – the end of October and beginning of November – when Károlyi's government became operational, Czechoslovakia, the Serb–Croat–Slovene kingdom and the union of Transylvania with Romania were already becoming an irreversible reality. Hungary, with Austria and Germany – which surrendered on 11 November – lost the war and its army was in disarray. Interestingly, the Communist regime which followed had a brief outburst of military energy, but in different circumstances, to which we shall return.

In November 1918, the government had to ask the victors for an armistice on the Balkan front with the Serbs and the Entente. This was supposed to complete the previous armistice, signed at the Italian front by the Austro-Hungarian representative at Padua. Consequently, a delegation led by Károlyi arrived in Belgrade on 7 November, met by Franchet d'Esperey, general of the Eastern French (Danubian) army. Contrary to legend, Franchet d'Esperey behaved courteously and, contrary to the other legend, Károlyi did not sell out historical Hungary. He insisted on the territorial integrity of the kingdom (except for Croatia), and wanted its frontiers guaranteed until the peace treaty.

A freeze-frame provides an insight into his chances at the Belgrade negotiations. It shows Károlyi as evidently nurturing certain illusions, whereas the Allies had to keep their promises to the Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs and Romanians – to whom the Bucharest Treaty of 17 August 1916 guaranteed the cession of Transylvania and vast adjoining territories. In addition, military projects against Soviet Russia meant that French designs for the region left the Hungarians with no room for manoeuvre.

The lines finalised by the Belgrade military convention tightened the victors' stranglehold over the country. However, it was the extension of these zones, in the months that followed, in favour of the Romanians that brought about Károlyi's downfall. In the meantime, Paris, acting for the Entente, disclaimed Franchet d'Esperey, as evidenced by a mass of archival memos. In one of these, Stéphen Pichon, Clemenceau's foreign affairs minister, sharply rebuked the general for having signed an armistice with the representatives of the 'so-called Hungarian state'

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instead of dealing with Austria–Hungary – even though the latter had ceased to exist. These notes are dated end of November 1918, demonstrating that French policy was somewhat confused, and that it had certainly hardened towards Hungary.

Demarcation lines were pushed back to the advantage of the Czechs and Romanians; western Ukraine gained Ruthenian land. Faced with an unprepared Hungarian public opinion, Károlyi was unable to justify these climb-downs. He would have preferred French occupation of the country, including Budapest, rather than the advances of the successor states' armies.

On 20 March 1919 the chief of the Entente's military mission, Lieutenant Colonel Fernand Vix, handed the Hungarian president a note from General De Lobit demanding yet another withdrawal, namely, the evacuation of a new 100-kilometre zone, reaching almost to the River Tisza. The ultimatum expired twenty-four hours later. Károlyi and his prime minister, Dénes Berinkey, decided they could not comply. The government resigned and Károlyi announced his intention to designate a Social Democrat government. A proclamation signed by him declares that the president would 'pass power over to the proletariat'. In the event, a government comprising the Social Democrats and the Communist Party – they had merged the day before – proclaimed a Soviet Republic on 21 March.

Did Károlyi deliberately hand over power to the Communists? This was the second of the accusations which was to accompany him throughout his life and even after his death, in 1955, during his second long exile in France. The documents are in fact confused and contradictory. The proclamation handing power over to the proletariat is a 'true-fake': Károlyi did not write it, denied signing it and distributing it. And perhaps he had not really understood the difference between Social Democrats and Communists, just as he had not grasped the full meaning of this power transfer. Unbeknown to him, as he dined at his palace awaiting the call to designate a Socialist head of government, the authors of the Socialist–Communist *coup d'état* had already removed him as president. Károlyi, a rather naïve and confused idealist, undoubtedly let himself be swept along by the events. According to his biographer, Tibor Hajdu, he should have fled to Paris and defended his cause – or his dream – from there, rather than witness, powerless and with wounded pride, everything going adrift.

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The union pact of the two workers' parties and the proclamation, in the same document, of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Republic of Councils, were clinched in strange circumstances. The Social Democratic leaders, except for the most moderate, went to the prison to sign it, where the Communist leaders were detained for subversive agitation. This unique act brought together two parties with very different histories. The Social Democratic Party was founded in 1878, had as its basis qualified workers, on the German model, and was run by the unions. Unlike the Communists, the Social Democratic Party had earned respectability and several of its leaders were members of Károlyi's government. Others went over to the Communist Party instead.

Unlike other parties created from splits within the Social Democrats, the Communist Party followed Bolshevik orders and was founded during November 1918 from three initially distinct groups: left-wing dissidents from the Social Democratic Party, disciples of the anarcho-syndicalist theoretician, Ervin Szabó, and Communists returning from Moscow. The first Hungarian Communist cells were most certainly organised among prisoners of war in Russia. The same applies to the nub of leaders that later returned to Hungary. A militant close to Lenin, the journalist Béla Kun, immediately took effective leadership of the party and then, from 21 March 1919, that of the Soviet Republic, the resulting fusion of the two workers' parties.

Before summarising the principal events of the 133 days of the Republic of Councils, it needs to be said that the war and the defeat had increased the dissatisfaction of the masses along with ferment among left-wing intellectuals and the lower middle classes. Their actions in terms of a bourgeois democracy, however, had no solid social base, nor did it have any real intellectual hold. Vilmos Böhm is probably close to the truth when he writes that the success of the Communists' higher bid can be explained by the disarray among the unemployed, the wandering demobilised soldiers, the war-wounded and by the demoralisation of millions of poor, a *Lumpenproletariat* in Böhm's terms. The coinage mattered little: millions of people were in disarray and ready for the revolutionary adventure. In addition, the brief proclamation of 21 March 'against the Entente's imperialism' and announcing the intention of concluding 'a total and intimate alliance with the Soviet Russian government' raised certain hopes among the crowd which it would be wrong to judge with hindsight.

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Be that as it may, the Revolutionary Governing Council as it was called, comprising thirty or so people's commissars, took power without encountering the slightest resistance. Among these commissars was the philosopher Georg Lukács, having recently allied himself to the Communists, a presence which was to engender enduring myths and considerable confusion.

Lukács, like the screen-writer Béla Balázs and others, in fact participated in a number of radical circles during and after the war (like the Galileo Circle), several members of which ended up in the Communist Party. Lukács (1885–1971), who ran the 'Sunday Circle', stood out from the rest in breadth of knowledge and strength of personality. His is a continuous presence throughout the history of the Communist Party, of which he remained a life-long member, an illustrious and disruptive element. The 33-year-old Lukács, who joined the party and was instantly appointed people's commissar for cultural affairs, did not, however, allow his thinking to retain any trace of German philosophy – except for Marx. It was Lenin, man of revolutionary action, who seduced this contemplative individual with aspirations of rising above the commonplace.

Despite the individuals drawn to these circles, it would be wrong to consider them as the breeding ground for Hungarian Communism. The free-thinkers, anti-militarists and sociologists belonging to the Social Science Society or the Galileo Circle had more in common with the previous government. Communism, on the other hand, appeared suddenly, without roots, in response to a particular situation. Jászi, Lovászy, Károlyi – after a moment of hesitation – as well as the sociologist Karl Mannheim, the Polányi brothers (Károly and Mihály) and several other Social Democrat commissars would choose to emigrate to the West. The Communists – among them Lukács, Béla Kun and the economist Jenö Varga – chose Soviet Russia.

Hungarian cultural life as a whole, above and beyond the ephemeral age of revolutions, engendered two men of genius. The death of one of them, the poet Endre Ady (1877–1919), in January 1919, makes it necessary to mention him again at this point. The other, Béla Bartók (1881–1945) was at the height of his creativity. He had already made an impact on the musical life of his native land with his early works, the ballet, *The Wooden Prince*, his lyrical drama, *Bluebeard's Castle*, piano scores like *L'Allegro barbaro* and the pantomime, *The Miraculous*

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Plate 32. The poet Endre Ady

Mandarin. His later work became part of the world's heritage. Ady, barely older than Bartók, revolutionised Hungarian poetry. His poetic language, the audacity of his expression and his experiments with form – his tormented inner self and that of his nation – made him the most admired and the most hated (by conservatives) of poets.

21 March to 1 August marks the short life of the proletarian republic. Its revolutionary government took countless measures: enterprises, banks, insurance companies, wholesale trade and apartment blocks were nationalised; social decrees were passed in favour of women and children; the press, cultural activities and liberal professions were sub-

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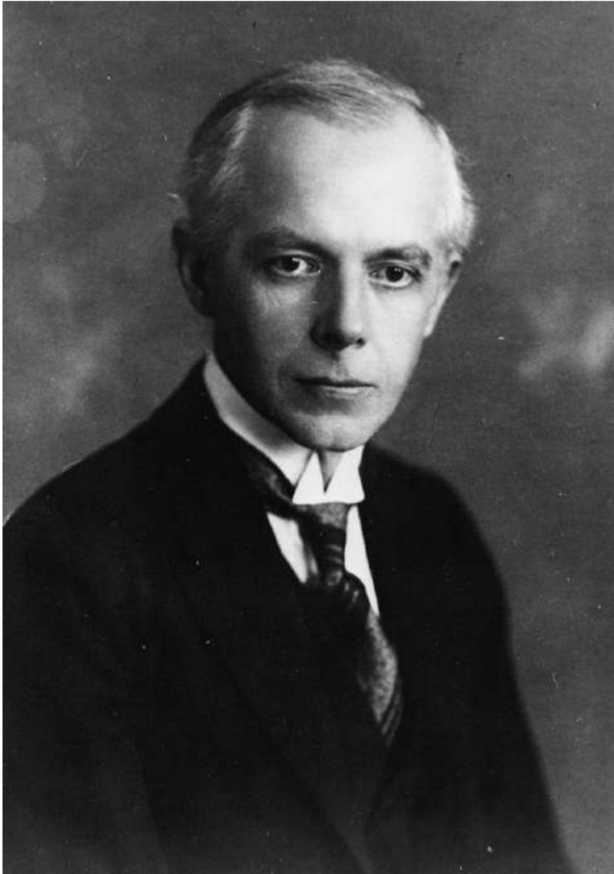

Plate 33. Béla Bartók

jected to government control. Hardship, rationing and inflation soon followed. The Hungarian crown, once on a par with the Swiss franc, fell by 90 per cent; 'blue' bank notes, good ones, were replaced by 'white notes' issued in Budapest and mistrusted by all. The gravest mistake was to allocate lands confiscated from large landowners to co-operatives rather than to the expectant peasants and agricultural workers.

The novelty effect soon turned to disillusionment among those who had hoped for better days, and the conflict between the regime and its increasingly numerous enemies rapidly turned into terror. Indeed, there was no attempt to disguise its nature: the government set up a parallel

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Plate 34. Béla Kun addresses a factory crowd, April 1919

police force, a special terror unit, colloquially known as 'Lenin's boys', referring to the great leader who encouraged his Hungarian comrades in ruthlessly haranguing the enemies and traitors of the revolution, including Social Democrats. 'Shoot them' – was Lenin's telegraphed message to Kun. Carrying out this order would have caused embarrassment since the Social Democrats were in government. The 'Lenin's boys' did not find themselves out of work, however. The exact number of victims is unknown; estimates vary enormously from a few hundred to a few thousand.

The dictatorship was run by the government and its five-member Directorate. At closer quarters, Béla Kun behaved like a less ambitious Lenin. A provincial journalist with some oratory and organising skills, Kun had returned from Moscow with an informal mandate from Lenin. When it came to diplomatic horse-trading, he also proved to be quite an able negotiator. Kun would have happily accepted a 'Brest-Litovsk Hungary' except that while Lenin had thousands of kilometres at his disposal for a retreat, Kun did not have an inch. After the collapse of the Hungarian Soviets, when he was once more in exile in Moscow, he carried the accolade of having sustained a Soviet Republic in the heart of Europe for 133 days. This unique experience subsequently placed him at the top of the Communist International, until 1937, the year of his downfall followed by his execution. Whilst recognising his merits, Lenin had in fact already sharply criticised him for joining with the party of Social Democrat traitors. Kun could only say – under his breath – that without them, the miracle would never have taken place. The extraordinary circumstances that allowed a Communist takeover never occurred again. Everything – traditions, social structures, public mentality – was against it. As Béla Kun revealingly confessed, in his characteristically clumsy way, 'The Hungarian proletariat betrayed us.' By 'us' he meant the Communists. No confession could have better illustrated the absence of any social basis for the project.

Considering the short duration of the regime, there was a great deal of military and diplomatic activity. In April, Hungary came under attack from the Czechoslovakian army, leading to mobilisation, the creation of the Red Army and war on the Northern front, where the Hungarian counter-offensive achieved considerable success.

The Allies were divided from the moment the Republic of Councils was declared. Lloyd George opposed suppression by military means and

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Plate 35. Miklós Horthy enters Budapest on 16 November 1919

the South African general Jan Christiaan Smuts was mandated by the Council of Four to enter into negotiations with Béla Kun. 'I am prepared to meet with any rascal', President Wilson said at the time, 'if it is useful.' The Italians adopted the same position. Only the French, Clemenceau and Pichon, remained intransigent towards 'Lenin's accomplices', the defeated Hungarian enemies. Nevertheless, Marshal Foch's proposal to send in the troops against Bolshevik Hungary was rejected. The plan soon became obsolete as the Hungarian Red Army suffered a decisive defeat on the Romanian front, bringing down the regime on 1 August. In April, the Bolshevik revolutionary armies were a mere 150 kilometres from the Hungarian frontier, but the meeting of the two 'Soviet sister republics' did not take place.

TRIANON HUNGARY

The Romanian offensive did not stop halfway. It advanced as far as Budapest, pillaging and requisitioning along the way. The ephemeral governments that succeeded the Councils were powerless. The Entente finally managed to ensure Romanian retreat in mid-November – not without difficulties. Meanwhile, several political parties were born, as was a national army under the command of Miklós Horthy, which entered the capital the day after the Romanians left, on 16 November 1919. The Entente delegate, Sir George Russel Clerk, for his part, approved the creation of a new government under the presidency of Károly Huszár.

Horthy's national army was an essentially repressive force of law and order, directed at Communists and their real or supposed accomplices. Half a dozen military detachments held sway under various commanders and their victims included numerous Jews, freemasons, Socialists and Democrats. An unprecedentedly large wave of anti-Semitism swept over the country, undoubtedly tolerated or even encouraged by Miklós Horthy, who did not distance himself from the military detachments until after being elected regent in 1920. The White Terror was not simply a reaction to the Red Terror, but had deep roots. Yet the Republic of Councils undeniably contributed to the upsurge of anti-Semitism as well as of virulent anti-Communism. As for the number of victims, estimates vary (as they do for the Red Terror) between a few hundred and several thousands. Ignác Romsics's calculations put the figure at 1,500.

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The Horthy regime was installed in 1920. On 1 March, a national assembly elected Horthy regent of the kingdom, not without military pressure. The new government that took office soon after had the task of signing the Treaty of Trianon on 4 June.

The conditions imposed on Hungary by the Treaty of Trianon – a follow-up to the Treaty of Versailles with Germany of 28 June 1919, and the Saint-Germain-en-Laye Treaty of 19 September 1919 with Austria – were more draconian than those imposed on Germany. Even Austria, also severely punished, received a part of the Hungarian kingdom, Burgenland, with 290,000 inhabitants, mainly Germans. Hungary's 283,000 square kilometres without Croatia was reduced to 93,000 square kilometres, its population dropped from 18.2 million to 7.6 million and reached approximately 8 million by the end of 1920, when Hungarians from annexed territories were repatriated. In all, 3,425,000 Magyars – including sizeable homogeneous communities – found themselves separated from their motherland in territories given to the monarchy's successor states. Romania received 101,000 square kilometres, a larger territory than that of mutilated Hungary, with 5,265,000 inhabitants, 1,704,000 of them Magyars. The other main beneficiary of the treaty, Czechoslovakia, was enlarged from Upper Hungary and Ruthenia with a total of 3.5 million inhabitants, which included more than 1 million Magyars. A further half a million found themselves in the Serb–Croat–Slovene kingdom, 60,000 in Austria and 6,000 in Italy.

The consequences of a peace with such divisions were disastrous. Though the principle measures of the treaty had been predictable since 1919, their breadth and the flagrant injustice traumatised the Magyars within and beyond their new frontiers. Apart from the economic consequences, the post-Trianon shock determined the Horthy regime's revisionist policies. It drove public opinion to nationalism and isolated the country from its neighbours – the future Little Entente – who mounted guard on its frontiers.

As for the Allies' decision, a host of well-known historical elements explain it, from Magyar domination over the minorities before the war to the necessity of holding Hungary to account for its belligerence and a number of outside factors in between, including the promises made by the Entente to the successor states. The Hungarians were refused a hearing at the peace conference – the treaty was a 'diktat'. The principles that had earlier been outlined in Wilson's Fourteen Points had been

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perverted. While the old minorities of Greater Hungary were given satisfaction, the treaty rode roughshod over the right of the Magyars to self-determination.

Despite all rational explanations, therefore, there remains in the Trianon verdict a deeply prejudiced, almost irrational element, largely determined by the attitudes of Clemenceau and Pichon. Through their policy, they created an unstable region, new centres ripe for ethnic conflict, not to mention frustration among the main victims of this unfortunate and unjust peace deal – the Hungarians.

The decade of the 1920s began with a crisis and with the swearing in of István Bethlen's government, which followed that of Pál Teleki and lasted ten years. The crisis was sparked off by two attempted *coups d'état* in 1921 – clumsy and unbelievable – by King Charles IV. Ousted in April, only to re-emerge in October, Charles launched into an adventure which had no future, despite considerable support. In 1920 and 1921, French policy towards Central Europe oscillated between two alternatives: the creation of a Danubian confederation, with Hungary as 'pivot' (Renouvin), or the creation of a Czech–Romanian–Yugoslav Little Entente encircling Hungary. Aristide Briand, the Council's president since January 1921, favoured the Danubian confederation option, under the aegis of the Habsburgs. But his arguments were blurred, the project was impossible and restoration of the Habsburgs, unrealistic. The idea went no further.

The problem was that restoration lacked any real political support even in Hungary, Well before these developments, just after the king's second *coup d'état* attempt, Parliament had declared the deposition of the Habsburg dynasty – seventy-two years after it had first been deposed by Kossuth. In these final days of 1921, Budapest had to opt for realism on every level. Thus, under the impetus of the head of government Count István Bethlen, who formed a second cabinet in December, a consolidation policy both within the country and in its international relations was implemented. Apart from the establishment of a legal state, negotiations with neighbouring countries – notably concerning Burgenland which had been given to Austria – and the appeasement of social tensions through an agreement with the Social Democratic Party – the Bethlen–Peyer pact – the prime minister's priority was financial consolidation and he set up borrowing procedures with the League of Nations. In 1924, an agreement was signed for the loan of 250 million gold crowns.

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THE 1920S: THE HORTHY REGIME

Hungary between the wars has been the subject of numerous labels: Fascist, semi-Fascist, authoritarian, nationalistic, anti-Semitic, semi-feudal, archaic. Reality was more complex and nuanced, but certain traits of the regime do support these summary judgements. Horthy's arrival in power was accompanied by violence and an outburst of anti-Semitism which provoked protest movements abroad and within the Peace Conference. Two years later, Mussolini's march on Rome and Fascist violence invoked parallels with Hungary's White Terror, the summary judgement and assassination of Social-Democrat journalists. Certain decisions taken in the beginning continued to tarnish the country's image. Hungary at the time was a champion of anti-Semitism, introducing the *numerus clausus* to limit Jewish access to university. Later, Bethlen's government tried to curb the excesses and Regent Horthy also distanced himself from the right-wing extremists, if for no other reason than to obliterate the memory of his involvement with the officer detachments and of his 'march on Budapest', 'the guilty city'. Under Bethlen, Hungary's parliamentary system and legal state were already established. The regime was no less anti-democratic, however, and its reactionary ideology was evident throughout its twenty-five year existence. The countryside – far more than the towns – was in the iron grip of the gendarmes, its rural social structures remained unchanged and the electoral system excluded in practice real democratic alternation. This ultra-conservative regime, however, had little in common with Mussolini's populist and corporate Italian Fascism, which was not anti-Semitic. The common denominator between the two regimes was revisionism and it was this that brought Budapest closer to Rome in the second half of the 1920s.

Another difference was that Horthy's regime, unlike Mussolini's, did not look for support among the *fasci* and *squadri*, ex-combatants. It looked instead to the wealthy classes and the aristocracy (back with a vengeance), the middle strata of the impoverished 'gentry'. The aristocracy was therefore at the top of the pyramid (three counts led the first four governments, from 1920 to 1932) flanked by landowners and a nobility now converted to serving the state. More will be said about the emergence and decidedly growing role of a new bourgeoisie, its ideology and mentality, but initially the aristocratic characteristics of the

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Plate 36. Panorama of Budapest, c. 1930

nation's higher echelons were transplanted from historical Hungary to the mutilated one.

Irredentism was certainly the common denominator among all the more or less well-off social strata. The injustice meted out to the nation – territorial dismemberment and the exclusion of 3.5 million Magyars – rallied the middle classes, if not under a common political banner then at least that of erstwhile greatness and of lost ideals. This nostalgia for the past, as comprehensible as it was paralysing, was not shared with equal fervour by the masses. Nonetheless, the policies of nearly every government were coloured and steered by it.

Leading the revisionist line – its declared aim, the re-establishment of the former frontiers – was a geographer, Pál Teleki. Count István Bethlen, who succeeded him from 1921 to 1931, shared his views while adapting to the imperatives of the time. He was the most broad-minded Hungarian statesman of this quarter of a century (Ignác Romsics has drawn a faithful portrait in his political biography). His policy at home was a strange mixture of ultra-conservatism and liberalism: the Communist Party was banned – not surprisingly – as was freemasonry. The Bethlen–Peyer pact, on the other hand, enabled the Social Democratic Party to pursue its activities and brought back some of its leaders who had fled abroad. As for the law, it came down heavily on individuals belonging to the clandestine Communist Party and on some extreme right-wing activists, though less harshly. Much to the latter's displeasure, the *numerus clausus* was toned down and lost its racist anti-Semitic dimension. Despite the introduction of the 'press offence', newspapers of all persuasions proliferated. Censorship was abolished and radio, which began broadcasting in 1925, was able to maintain its autonomy *vis-à-vis* the government.

As in politics, the economic prevalence of the upper nobility, owners of immense *latifundia*, remained intact but without affecting the development of state-supported financial and industrial capitalism. On a political level, the head of government tried to limit party fragmentation while at the same time exploiting the numerous splits and mergers in order to gather the centre right in his camp, generally called the Unity Party. After the scission of the Gömbös group, the party was able to hold the balance, thanks to its overall majority in Parliament, until Bethlen's resignation in 1931. At the 1926 elections, the party secured

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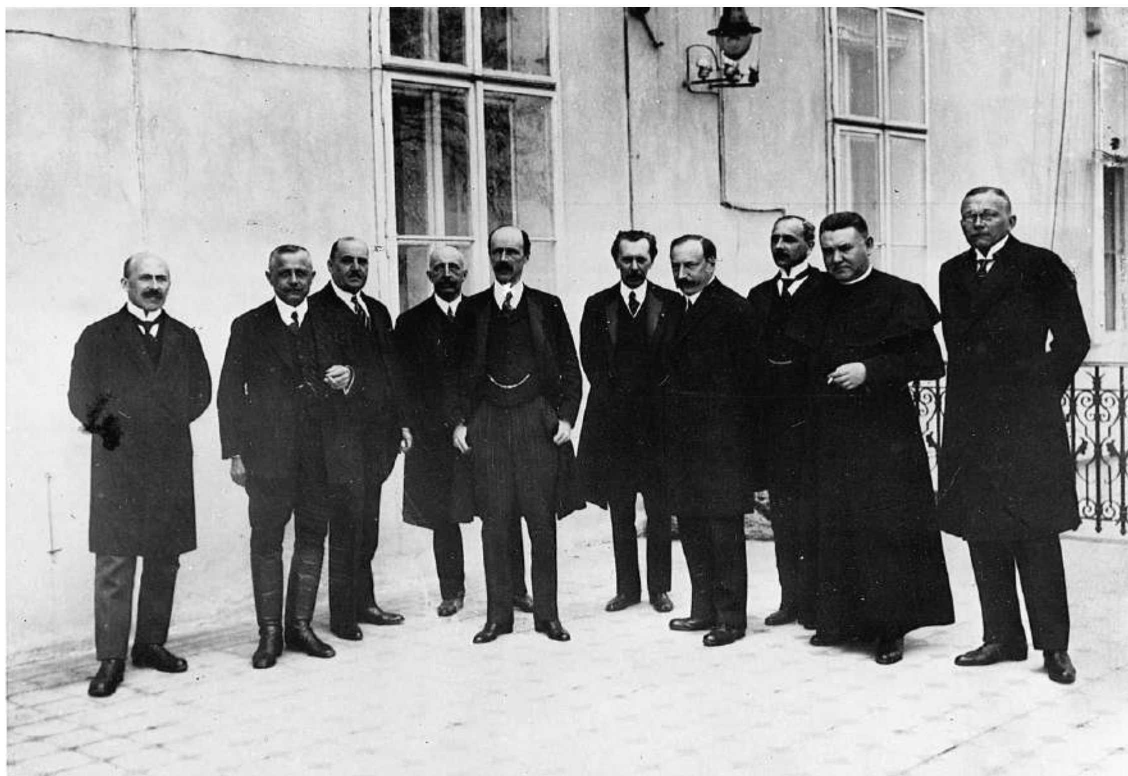

Plate 37. István Bethlen's first government, 15 April 1921

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170 mandates (70 per cent) out of 245, the National-Christian Party 35, the Social Democrats 14, and the smaller groups shared the rest.

Bethlen himself, together with foreign affairs ministers like Count Miklós Bánffy and the leading delegate to the League of Nations, Count Albert Apponyi, was wholly committed to the idea of historical Hungary and diplomatic efforts were entirely concentrated on seeking rectification of the Treaty of Trianon and on obtaining concessions for Magyars separated from their motherland. Thanks to persistence at the League of Nations, Magyars who opted for Hungarian citizenship received partial compensation.

Bethlen was and remained attracted by the British model. He made overtures to the Entente, but in the end had to make do with Italian support, granted to him from 1927. True, the English expressed a degree of goodwill but it never went further. As for France, it was pursuing its pro-Little Entente line and Germany had lost interest in its former Danubian ally. A spectacular action by Lord Rothermere, the British press magnate, demanding 'justice for Hungary', made a certain number of waves and fuelled Bethlen's secret hope of some day assuming St Stephen's Crown.

Economically speaking, the Bethlen decade was modestly healthy. The introduction of the new currency, the pengö, in 1927 – replacing the crown which had been heavily devalued by inflation – concluded a consolidation programme to which we will return. We have to bear in mind that the convalescing country was badly hit by the world crisis of the early thirties and this was one of the causes for Bethlen's departure in 1931. After Gyula Károlyi's brief spell as head of government, Gyula Gömbös led the country from 1932 until his death in 1936, followed by two short-lived cabinets and then, in 1939, by Pál Teleki. But before we turn the page, a summary of the state of the nation between 1930 and 1940 is necessary.

Conditions in a diminished Hungary

The population in 1930 had reached 8,688,000, of which 92 per cent were Magyars and 5.5 per cent Germans. Denominational homogeneity had also increased. Catholics now constituted around two thirds, Protestants 27 per cent, Uniates and Orthodox 2.8 per cent and Jews 5.1 per cent. Whereas before, Hungary had had to contend with national

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minorities, it now found itself in a reverse situation: according to statistics of the time, 3,227,000 Magyars lived in neighbouring countries. Ten years later, birth rates and transmigrations had increased the number of inhabitants living within the Trianon borders to 9,300,000 – excluding the annexed territories, of which more later.

Economic adaptation to the country's reduced geography was hard. The Great Plain and Transdanubia (give or take a few borders) provided the bulk of national product. Aside from a small quantity of coal, there was no energy source or industrial raw materials. Waterways had been cut at the new frontiers, as were roads and railway lines, which came to dead ends. Furthermore, there were no more outlets to the Adriatic; the forests belonged to the now distant and foreign Carpathians. The economic consequences of peace were as disastrous as those of war.

Admittedly, there were also some not negligible advantages, such as a more educated workforce, low rates of illiteracy, higher industrial concentration and a slight decrease of the primary sector which, in 1930, nonetheless still employed 51.8 per cent of the workforce against 23 per cent in industry and the mines. According to statistical calculations, the proportion of workers increased to 26.7 per cent, somewhat reducing agriculture's share. Budapest had over 1 million inhabitants, followed far behind by Szeged and Debrecen. The town of Sopron remained Hungarian following a plebiscite. There were more kilometres of railway track per person, more primary schools (7,000 with 30,000 teachers), gymnasiums (sixth-form colleges) and additional faculties to add to the four universities and thirteen institutes of higher education. There were also more newspapers, books, theatres and doctors: 96 per 10,000 inhabitants in 1930 and ten years later 106, one of the highest rates in the world.

All in all, the composition of society was a little more bourgeois than before and the level of civilisation higher, though still behind the developed countries.

With an average growth rate of 1.5 per cent (Berend and Ránki), economic performance remained one of the weakest in Europe and achieved only half the average growth in the last decades of the dual monarchy. Figures have been slightly revised and upgraded, but growth was undoubtedly slow, the Treaty of Trianon having left the country in a state of frailty. Obsolete agricultural structures were also responsible, as was the world crisis, which hit agriculture particularly harshly.

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Growth in industry and mining production, on the other hand, was considerable. Compared with the pre-war period, coal extraction increased by 30 per cent, discovery of rich bauxite deposits led to the birth of the metal and aluminium industry, and electricity production quadrupled. Mechanical industry thrived in some sectors, notably locomotives (the Ganz factories), motorcycles, radios and a few other popular consumer products. The electro-technical industry, light-bulb production and a few chemical and optical products also flourished, but numerous technical discoveries, notably a mass-produced low-cost car, were neglected. The textile industry, meanwhile, developed at an accelerated pace, comfortably overtaking traditional food industries. On the whole, compared with the pre-war period, industrial output until 1938 increased by 28 per cent, the number of workers by 16 per cent and industry's contribution to the national revenue reached approximately 36 per cent and peaked the year before the Second World War.

Industrialisation, some progress in urbanisation, health and education, were measures of an increase in civilisation in this quarter of a century. However, the performance of industry and construction could not rescue the country from the slump in agriculture, transport, trade and crafts which resulted from its diminished size, or from the world crisis which followed, after a brief flurry.

Towards 1938, national revenue per capita reached 120 dollars, that is, 70 per cent of the European average according to upgraded calculations. It was not much. Hungary remained, if not poor, then an underdeveloped European country, as did the entire region when compared with Western Europe. To add to the imbalance between a modern industrial sector and a backward agrarian sector, financial circumstances also dragged the country down. The 250 million gold crown loan accorded by the League of Nations assisted consolidation but triggered a spiral of debt: further loans, finally reaching 4 billion pengös, the equivalent of 800 million US dollars. Enterprises were also crippled by debt, as were the landowners, including small farmers who were most seriously affected. More than urban areas in the process of modernisation, it was the immense rural half of the country which continued to suffer from its semi-feudal past. Modernisation was nonetheless on the horizon in some pilot areas, due to new industrial plants, increased vegetable and fruit production and the canning industry.

Though the proportion of industrial workers rose from 23 per cent

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to nearly 27 per cent in the 1930s, half the population still lived off the land. The entire workforce in industry, transport and trade constituted only 35 per cent; the rest of the population worked in the public sector, in the army or the clergy, were members of the liberal professions, were retired or pursued various trades. Social divisions crossed professional frontiers, of course.

Excluding the aristocracy and the wealthy bourgeoisie who numbered a few thousand, the middle classes now occupied a higher rung on the social ladder. An increased number of graduates – close to 30,000 – is one indication of this progress. Apart from the slow modernisation process, the period's richest legacy was university, intellectual, literary and artistic life in all its diversity and richness . It was also a period which engendered an immense sector of rural deprivation, however – a veritable thorn in the nation's side.

A thousand lords and three million beggars

The picture of a 'feudal' Hungary consisting of a thousand lords and 3 million beggars is probably exaggerated but undoubtedly contains an element of truth. As we have seen, in between the two extremes, upward mobility was taking place among some social strata: a section of the peasantry, the future *kulaks*, rose to middle-class level; civil servants who were reasonably well off and enjoyed some degree of prestige; the urban proletariat, indubitably suffering poverty and bad housing, but who could at least defend their social position acquired through work and union struggles. If the latter featured very little, it is precisely because of the 3 million at the bottom of the ladder who were, if not beggars, then at best, rural paupers, half of them living in sub-proletarian conditions. What cannot be stressed enough, towards understanding this complex situation, is that there were two Hungarys: one in the process of modernisation and of becoming a middle-class, liberal society; the other stuck in the past.

Some statistical data concerning the labyrinthine property distribution give an idea of the rural social problem. In the mid-1930s, a hundred or so families and the Catholic Church – about a thousand landowners – owned almost one third of cultivated land. Beneath them, some eleven thousand large landowners exploited 1,700,000 hectares. Together, the two groups owned 48 per cent of the cultivated land,

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Plate 38. Harvest on the Great Plain, c. 1940

comprising domains which ranged from 60 to 60,000 hectares or more (Eszterházy, for example).

Halfway up the ladder, some 233,000 individuals (landowners and their families) shared one third of property wealth, farms which ranged on average between 8 to 40 or 50 hectares. These data, like those pertaining to the large properties, demonstrate the inequality existing among average-sized farms, but situate their owners above the poverty line. The problem was far more serious for the rural population of 1,300,000 subsisting on plots of land averaging from 1 to 3 hectares. Finally, right at the bottom of the ladder, were the 'penniless': 1.5 million seasonal agricultural labourers and one section of the agricultural servants, not to mention the equally destitute domestic servants. Whichever way one adds it up, the figures come close to the '3 million beggars' (one third of the population), destitute when employed, starving in times of crisis.

Civil society and mentality

Gyula Szekfü's 'neo-baroque society' is a singular label in that it concurs with views held by its liberal opponents and even those on the

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left. It targets society between the wars, its rigid economic and social structures and the mentality of its political class. 'Neo-baroque' is first and foremost the imitation of an erstwhile nobility's lifestyle, without the religious element, without the authentic patriotism and moral values of the great mid-nineteenth-century generation of reformers: Széchenyi, Kossuth, Deák and the like. Szekfü writes: 'The "reform" element was removed from Széchenyi's reformist-conservatism.' Indeed, the Széchenyi who wanted to modernise Hungary, without having recourse to subversion, had been forgotten. Szekfü had little respect for the post-war political class which was neither noble nor as genuinely Christian as it claimed. Similar qualifiers appear in practically all the assessments of those sharing this point of view: false, flashy, a farcical masquerade. For reformist conservatives like Szekfü, apart from the state of the country post-Trianon, the moral degeneration and social disintegration were largely responsible for this state of affairs: the selfish mentality of the upper classes, their contempt for the 'underdog' combined with the latter's deference towards those higher up, a system based upon friendship and nepotism, and lastly, foreign, principally Jewish, infiltration.

What is certain is that the narrow-mindedness that prevailed in neo-baroque society, dressed up in National-Christian aristocratic costume, hindered the adoption of civic values and the creation of a confident middle class that would be industrious and mindful of the public good. In other words, it prevented the formation of a nineteenth-century-style bourgeois society, adapted to modernity. One of the obstacles to development in this sense was the clergy, and primarily the Catholic Church. At a time of declining liberal values in Europe as a whole, progress would have posed considerable difficulties but the democratic deficit was nonetheless evident.

Having said that, signs of change were not entirely absent. The notion of straightforward honesty, the work ethic, the prestige accorded to education, and urbanity in relationships, were evolving. Readers of sentimental novels and the operetta public may have applauded the 'Hussar officer', the revelling, gambling charmer, but they also laughed at his expense. Imitating the gentry was by then nothing more than a superficial – and outmoded – fashion. Despite everything, a civil and democratic European society was slowly taking shape, sometimes treading on conservative, nationalist and anti-liberal sensibilities.

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The 'sinful', 'Jewified' capital, certainly more cosmopolitan and frivolous but, above all, more bourgeois than the provinces, was the target for both conservatives and the 'populist' trend. For some of the latter, anti-capitalism went hand in hand with anti-Semitism, though they failed to win over large sections of the general public. While anti-Semitism had never appealed to the peasantry, the provincial middle class was perhaps more drawn. As for the capital, though a degree of relatively controlled anti-Semitism existed, until the end of the 1930s, Budapest tended to favour integration rather than segregation for its 250,000 Jews – a quarter of its population.

Budapest's Jewish middle class (writers, journalists, thespians, liberal professionals) imprinted the town with a mocking, caustic wit and a particular sense of humour, without provoking rejection by the majority of the population. This was because city morality had changed for better or worse, much to the reprobation of conservatives, the Church and the anti-liberal press. The evolution of a bourgeois civilisation was accompanied by increased tolerance and cultural diversity along with a degree of profligacy; but it also led to a split between the well-off and the underprivileged. The village 'penniless', workers on low wages and in bad housing (often with no electricity or running water), not to mention the army of unemployed, were not very receptive to National-Christian ideology and culture – nor indeed to bourgeois culture. However, to the extent that they could afford to consume cultural products, even if it was just a newspaper, a cheap paperback or a cinema ticket, their choice tended towards the tastes of the petit bourgeois or of the Socialists (less often) and, sometimes, instructive religious or nationalist works. This assertion may appear to disregard those public expressions which conformed to official ideology; but it would be a mistake to use official propaganda, or the undeniable swing to the right which occurred in the mid-thirties, in gauging the general mood. The right's audience increased, but not in its conservative version; it was the Fascist movement which drew in a section of the working class and aspiring 'lower middle classes'.

In any event, the gulf between the 'the legal' and 'rural' worlds continued to widen, creating a blockage in the middle of the social ladder – in other words, the path leading to a bourgeois lifestyle and outlook. Bourgeois-style civil society continued to evolve regardless, however, embracing the traditional forms of aristocratic social life, with its

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exclusive clubs and hunting parties, along with middle-class associations, parties and social circles (already numerous under the monarchy). Trade union organisations, sports and outdoor pursuit societies, working-class choirs and, finally, reading circles and meeting places proliferated in the villages too. Associative life was surprisingly popular: there were 16,000 associations, almost as many as in the three times larger, pre-1918 Hungary.

Despite a politically conservative climate, cultural life was both pluralistic and creative. Alongside often monotonous publications by conformist historians, editorialists and writers, all the movements in ideas and styles of the century in Europe were represented.

The unified ideas of National-Christianity certainly benefited from state support and Church protection. Indeed, the Bethlen government's minister of religious affairs and education declared that 'in Trianon Hungary, the minister for religious affairs and education was also the minister of defence'. Official propaganda was similarly inclined, advocating moral rearmament against left-wing, cosmopolitan and liberal individualist subversion. It was nonetheless the very same minister, Count Kuno Klebelsberg, who was responsible for the expansion and modernisation of state and university education. His successor in the thirties, Bálint Hóman, co-authored a history of Hungary running to several thousand pages, which remains to this day the most scholarly reference. After 1945, Hóman was convicted as a war criminal, while his co-author, Gyula Szekfü, became Hungary's ambassador to Moscow.

Immediately after the war, a new way of thinking had emerged and, by the thirties, had grown considerably. To call it 'populism' is at best an inadequate translation; its theoreticians advocated for the most part a kind of 'third way'. An intellectual movement organised by writers and 'sociographers', its focus was society's most pressing problem, the condition of the peasantry. The work of a highly talented writer, Dezsö Szabó – his essays and especially his novel evocatively entitled *A Village Adrift* – constituted a touchstone, though members were divided by the author's nationalist–racist ideology. His radical critique of the *latifundia* system and his violently anti-German positioning, however, resist simplistic political categorisation. Among disciples of this powerful individual were László Németh and Géza Féja. Known as 'village explorers', younger writers like Imre Kovács, Ferenc Erdei, Zoltán Szabó and the poet Gyula Illyés gave 'populism' a new lustre in the

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thirties and forties with their stirring accounts of a rural world crushed by the system. A few populists lent their talent to extreme right-wing movements and the versatile László Németh, essayist, playwright and novelist, became the principal spokesperson – incisive, stimulating, sometimes confused and tainted with anti-Semitism – of a young generation in search of a new vision.

Apart from a few exceptional individuals like Illés Mónus, editor of the Social Democratic Party newspaper, this trend, tied to Viennese Austrian-Marxism, was not noted for its originality. Lajos Kassák, an independent-minded writer and painter, was Budapest's answer to the Berlin and Paris avant-garde and had a band of followers. The journal *Szép Szó* (Fine Words), directed by Attila József, Ferenc Fejtö and Pál Ignotus, represented an independent left-wing current and was renowned for the high quality of its writing.

In addition, political and literary journals of all tendencies – bourgeois, conservative, Catholic, populist and Communist – were features of intellectual life. Communist thinking had little influence and its writers did not receive much coverage, with the exception of Attila József, who sang about the industrial suburbs, about the agony of man, of the century, and of his own tormented soul. He was the most universal Hungarian poet since Endre Ady and indeed the Communist Party did not hesitate in expelling him. He committed suicide in 1937.

Literary life comprised, apart from the committed writers, highly talented authors superior both in quantity and often quality, and dedicated to their art. The vast and rich domain of 'pure' literature was dominated by Mihály Babits, a gifted poet, an immensely literary authority, a perfectionist of form. To be published in his journal *Nyugat* (West) was the equivalent of canonisation. Worthy of mention also are the poet Dezsö Kosztolányi, the novelist Zsigmond Móricz, and the hugely talented humorist Frigyes Karinthy. Finally, there was the unclassifiable writer, Gyula Krudy, who – like his hero Sinbad – travelled in a land of dreams, touching shores peopled by characters that derived from his own phantoms. He created in his readers a nostalgia for the land of the 'never-never'.

Figurative art – more distanced from turbulence than literature – had its fair share of exceptional painters and sculptors. In musical creation and interpretation, a host of composers, conductors, pianists and others became internationally renowned under the giant statures of

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Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály. Bartók, admired by his public, was disliked by official cultural leaders. His music, rooted in popular traditions with its universal and cosmic dimension, was disturbing. The Opera House rejected his *Miraculous Mandarin*, just as Communist cultural policy would thirty years later. Bartók emigrated to the United States in 1940 and died there in 1945. Hungarian theatre between the wars thrived and formed a strong identity, especially in Budapest, exporting famous directors and actors to Berlin, London and Hollywood. Despite the political turn inaugurated in the mid-thirties, art and literature remained animated until the eve of the Second World War.

In spring 1931, Bethlen celebrated his tenth year in power – and with no intention of giving it up. The circumstances that surrounded his departure a few months later, shed light not only on this crucial moment, but also on the transformation that had taken place within the political ranks. In the middle of a world crisis, economic stabilisation had run out of resources. Production fell, agricultural prices dropped and the spiral of debt had led to the brink of bankruptcy. All this had provoked increased opposition from all sides, both left and right, including a revolt within the government itself.

Bethlen could not conceivably satisfy the conflicting demands of the agrarians, the capitalists, a civil service threatened with dismissal while pulling the rug out from under the feet of the Socialist agitators. At the same time, his personality worked against his ability to move things on. A singularly intelligent man – dry, not very communicative and incorruptible (he supported his own expenses by getting into debt rather than getting rich), Bethlen inspired admiration but not friendship. Despite sharing the values of his class and being the pillar of the counter-revolutionary and conservative system, he was criticised for his liberal, pro-Jewish, even democratic, 'weaknesses'. In fact, being excessively democratic is the last criticism that could be levelled at him. He kept an equal distance – metaphorically and indeed physically – from the village peasant, the Jewish banker and the count, and his neighbour. It was his authoritarian style of leadership and his haughtiness, rather than his reformist ideas, that created such feelings of enmity towards him. After his demise, he continued to exercise influence on political life and on Horthy himself. His departure was nonetheless a great loss for Hungary. Despite declaring himself as a 'Greater Hungary' faithful, Bethlen was a realist; he would have wanted to integrate Hungary into the European

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system, as set out at Versailles, to establish viable relations with neighbouring Yugoslavia and economic links with Czechoslovakia. His successors had more limited horizons.

Horthy's attitude remained enigmatic. He appeared attached to the count, an old friend, his superior in both intelligence and social position. He even suggested a comeback: 'Take power if you want, but let Gyula be' (he was referring to Count Gyula Károlyi, briefly Bethlen's successor). But the role of the often indecisive Horthy was decidedly ambiguous. He was implicated in Bethlen's departure and after Károlyi, in October 1932, entrusted the government to Gyula Gömbös.

A SHIFT TO THE RIGHT

Gyula Gömbös, who came from a family of civil servants, was a career officer, founder, and member for some time of the Race Conservation Party. He represented an entirely different social group from that of politicians coming from the upper nobility. He certainly shared a Greater Magyar nationalism with them, but Gömbös's target group was the middle class. He favoured their economic aspirations rather than a more dynamic policy, and sought dialogue with the populists and even with the world of work. It must be said that the Social Democrats, who had no desire for a strong-arm right-wing regime, contributed to Bethlen's downfall with an acrimonious campaign.

Gömbös's first government included individuals with very different destinies. His interior minister, Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, would later distinguish himself for his anti-German stance; Béla Imrédy, at the treasury and for a long time pro-British, became rabidly pro-German and anti-Semitic; Miklós Kállay, responsible for agriculture, became known as a pro-West prime minister; Bálint Hóman, like Gömbös, opted for continuity, in the beginning at least.

In foreign policy, continuity meant pursuing friendship with the Italians and Austrians and – after Hitler's accession to power – *rapprochement* with Germany. Internally, Gömbös had only to hold to his predecessors' anti-Communist line.

Continuity also meant persisting with hostilities towards the Social Democratic Party, trade unions, strikers and the Socialist press. Gömbös immediately proclaimed a corporatism which would forge 'a national unity between work, capital and intellectual talent'. He

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presented a national work plan containing ninety-five points, also aimed at national union. Gömbös, a conservative, with reformist and populist undertones, was determined to create a government that would play a more active role in getting out of the crisis and curbing the decline in living standards, mass bankruptcy among small farmers, and social conflict. In the same spirit, he rose up against ultra-conservatives in his own party and distanced himself from the extreme right. All this inevitably seduced intellectual reformers to some extent as well as wider public opinion. So much so, that in the 1935 elections, his party list, called the Party for National Unity, took 170 mandates out of 245, leaving 25 seats to the Smallholders' Party, 14 to the Christian Socialists, 11 to the Social Democratic Party and the rest to the Liberals and the right. This success was tainted by the pressure and violence being exerted in rural constituencies, however, where from the outset of Horthy's regime, voting was by open ballot. In one village situated in the so-called 'stormy corner' – a region of peasant revolts, in other words – the police opened fire, leaving eight dead and fourteen wounded.

The government leader proceeded to make a number of changes in the administration and in the army leadership, pensioning off twenty-two generals. His corporate project, on the other hand, failed to materialise: apart from Socialist and Liberal opposition, he came up against opposition from Bethlen, from financial and industrial circles, including the powerful National Association of Industrialists (GyOSZ). Bethlen, with several friends, actually left the governing party and Regent Horthy considered getting rid of his over-enterprising prime minister. As for attempts at a *rapprochement* with Germany, they came up against a very specific obstacle: the Austria of Dollfuss, then of Schuschnigg. It must be remembered that a triangular relationship existed between Hungary, Austria and Italy. The news of Chancellor Dollfuss's assassination in July 1934 led Mussolini to send four divisions to the Brenner so as to warn Hitler against his Anschluss project. The Italian–Ethiopian war and its consequences; collusion between an isolated Mussolini and a Hitler who in 1936 began to remilitarise the Rhine region; the Franco-Soviet pact of 1935; and, lastly, the Spanish war triggered by Franco in July 1936 – all these elements led to a redistribution around the card-table of international relations. Shortly before the Berlin–Rome axis was formed, however, Gömbös died. After

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a brief attempt at disengagement, his successors continued the political slide towards Germany.

The arrival in office of Kálmán Darányi promised a change of direction but the new president of the Council found himself cornered by Hitler, who insisted that Hungarian policy be aligned with that of the Reich, now in a dominant position in the region. After the Anschluss of 12–13 March 1938, the Reich bordered with Hungary. Despite protests not only from the left but from several conservatives, the direction – strengthening links with Germany in the hopes that, with its support, the Treaty of Trianon would be revised – was cast. The minister for foreign affairs, Kálmán Kánya, who was somewhat hostile towards Berlin, could only do a damage-limitation exercise.

Alignment included the adoption of state anti-Semitism. Kálmán Darányi put before Parliament the first anti-Jewish law, which was subsequently voted in by the Upper House, notably by representatives of the Church, and ratified in May 1938. At that time, the next government had already been formed by Béla Imrédy, former president of the National Bank. Just like his predecessor Darányi, who was now dead, Imrédy also tried unsuccessfully to get out of the Reich's clutches. Berlin made it clear that without Hungary's alignment, there would be no question of territorial revision. Imrédy surrounded himself with several of his political friends of the right. In May 1939, the second anti-Jewish law, this time racially based, came into effect; and a third was introduced in 1941.

Meanwhile, Fascist movements organised into several parties had begun to grow. At the 1939 elections, they won forty or so parliamentary mandates. From then on, they became a formidable extremist political force. Among their leaders was Kálmán Hubay and the future Hungarian *Führer*, Ferenc Szálasi. Governmental party dissidents formed a parliamentary group in defence of the Hungarian race. Party plurality survived, but the number of Social Democratic deputies dropped to five and the bourgeois parties along with the Smallholders' Party – the nub of democratic opposition – were now weak. Nor was plurality of the press abolished, but several hundred newspapers were outlawed, censorship was gradually introduced and journalists, hit by the race laws, were struck off from the profession.

In February 1939, Imrédy was forced to resign because the press discovered a Jew among his ancestors. In reality, Bethlen, who was strongly

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opposed to his pro-Nazi policies, precipitated his downfall. Pál Teleki's government which followed introduced a handful of energetic measures against the extreme right without succeeding in stemming the Nazi tide. The more the government gave in, the more Fascist pressure increased, notwithstanding Count Teleki's and Regent Horthy's wholehearted approval of the anti-Semitic measures, though they did not cross the fateful line of deportation until 1944. By then, Teleki was no longer alive and engagement alongside Hitler had reached a new turning point.

It is important to underline the crucial effect of the Munich agreements of 29–30 September 1938 which implied, writes Horthy's biographer Péter Sipos, that 'Western Europe had abandoned the countries of Eastern Europe.' The historian adds that Horthy still wanted to keep a distance from war preparations. In August, during a meeting with Hitler in Kiel, he refused to participate in the attack on Czechoslovakia, as did Imrédy and, less surprisingly, Teleki. The latter could clearly see the outcome of Hitler's policies, the already predictable war and its consequences for his country. Munich nonetheless represented an auspicious moment for Hungary to satisfy some of its territorial demands. On 2 November, at the Belvedere Palace in Vienna, Hitler and Mussolini's arbitration assigned nearly 12,000 square kilometres of Czechoslovakian land – with close to 870,000 inhabitants, 86.5 per cent of whom were Magyars – to Hungary. In spring 1939, Hungary was able to benefit from the dismemberment of the Czechoslovakian state and to occupy sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. The following year, on 30 August 1940, a second arbitration took place in Vienna, this time at Romania's expense: Hungary gained Northern Transylvania, Szekler country, the towns of Nagyvárad and Kolozsvár, corresponding to 43,590 square kilometres and 2,185,500 inhabitants, of whom 1,123,200 were Magyars (51.4 per cent), 920,100 Romanians (42.1 per cent) and approximately 142,000 Germans and other. Further annexations in Yugoslavia – home to nearly 275,000 Magyars – ensued the following year. By that point, the country's territory had reached 172,000 square kilometres, almost twice the 93,000 square kilometres agreed by the Treaty of Trianon, but well below historical Hungary. Czechoslovakian and Romanian statistics ascribe a proportionately smaller Magyar population than the Hungarian figures, but the usual arguments over numbers do not change the essential point: approximately 2,300,000 Magyars from the separated territories now found themselves back on

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Hungarian soil. The result was exhilarating: the most flagrant injustice that was the Treaty of Trianon had been largely put right.

Before the Yugoslav conflict, Hungary had already paid a price by allowing the Germans to move into Romania across its soil. On 20 November, a further step was taken: Teleki and his foreign affairs minister, István Csáky, signed the Italian–German–Japanese tripartite agreement with Ribbentrop, Ciano and the Japanese Kurusu, underlining the fact that Hungary was the first to join.

The danger of paying a truly high price, however, came when Italy invaded Greece and Hitler decided to rush in to support his routed ally. Not long before, Teleki had believed he could avoid involving his own country through a treaty – a treaty pledging eternal friendship – with Belgrade (29 February 1941). At first, Hitler had no objections – on the contrary. Belgrade signed the tripartite pact, but on 27 March, a military coup ousted the Regent Paul and brought to power an anti-German government which rapidly signed a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union. Hitler decided to invade Yugoslavia without delay and invited Horthy to join the attack, promising a reward. On 2 April, however, Hungary's London ambassador, György Barcza, let him know that if Hungary allowed the German army to cross its territory, Great Britain would sever diplomatic relations with Budapest and, in the case of Hungary's military participation, intended to declare war. It was not the first warning, but it made Teleki realise that he would have to choose between a British alliance and a pro-German policy. A Cornelian choice, if ever there was one. Breaking with Germany meant abandoning the revisionist policy which Teleki had helped build. Severing ties with England would lead to war with the Allies. Teleki put an end to this intolerable conflict by shooting himself in the head. The farewell letter he addressed to Miklós Horthy is both a confession: 'I am guilty'; and an accusation: 'We have allied ourselves with villains.' His act of despair changed nothing: on 11 April, the Hungarian army entered Yugoslavia, and set about committing atrocities against Serbs and Jews.

From May 1941, Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union was imminent. Hungary's military participation was not part of the Barbarossa plan, but Germany was counting on Hungary and its new head of government, László Bárdossy, was in favour. Pressure from high command did

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the rest: its chief, Henrik Werth, and the majority of pro-German general officers were confident of victory and had long been in league with the Germans.

On 24 June, two days after German invasion of Russia, Hungary broke off diplomatic ties with Moscow, despite Molotov's assurances that the USSR's intentions towards it were not hostile and that it had not expressed any reprobation over Transylvania.

THE WAR

The dispatch sent by Hungary's ambassador in Moscow, József Kristóffy, conveying Molotov's message disappeared: Bárdossy did not communicate it to Horthy or to the Council of Ministers, any more than he did to Parliament. He was just waiting for Berlin to ask Hungary to enter the war, whereas the Reich was trying to get the Hungarians to volunteer – through the service door of the military. In the end, on 26 June, planes purported to be Soviet but in fact unidentified, bombed the town of Kassa (Kosice): it was the perfect *casus belli*. Hungary attacked the Soviet Union.

Despite combined pressure from Germany and the Hungarian military, Budapest was only willing to increase its military and economic participation gradually, from autumn onwards. It was at this point that Great Britain declared a state of war. Bárdossy, in turn, informed the United States. Engagement had become a *fait accompli*. Through the deployment of the Second Army in 1942, approximately 200,000 Hungarian soldiers found themselves in the Ukraine and on the Don, with an additional 50,000 Jewish 'auxiliaries', unarmed and with no winter equipment. More than 20,000 met their death.

With no other goal – apart from an anti-Communist crusade – than that of further territorial gains in Yugoslavia, Romania and in a dismembered Czechoslovakia, Hungarians were rather reticent when Germany demanded troops and supplies. Even Bárdossy, principal architect of Hungary's entry into the war, opposed the High Command, who had already proposed increases before the Reich's express request. He complied in the end, for which he was dismissed in March 1942 by the regent, under pressure from conservative circles, notably the immovable István Bethlen.

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Főméltóságú Úr!

Szószegők lettünk – gyávaságból, – a mohácsi beszéden alapuló örökbéke szerződéssel szemben. A nemzet érzi és mi odadobtuk becsületét.

A gazemberek oldalára álltunk – mert a mondvacsinált atrocitásokból egy szó sem igaz! Sem a magyarok ellen, de még a németek ellen sem! Hullarablók leszünk! a legpocsékabb nemzet.

Nem tartottalak vissza. Bűnös vagyok.

Teleki Pál

1941 ápr. 3

Plate 39. Teleki's farewell letter. In the 'postscript' (right), he tenders his resignation to the regent, should his suicide attempt fail

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Főméltóságú Úr,

Ha cselekedetem
nem is sikerülne tel-
jesen és még élnék, azon-
nal lemondok.

Mély tisztelettel

Teleki

1941. ápr. 3.

Plate 39 (*cont.*)

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Plate 40. Hungarian soldiers in Kiev, February 1942

The appointment of Miklós Kállay to the post of prime minister is often interpreted as a change of direction, since Berlin had far less confidence in him than in Bárdossy. Indeed, the Hungarian historian Gyula Juhász writes that, initially, Kállay persevered along the same lines. On visiting Hitler and Ribbentrop, he reiterated previous promises and agreed to the recruitment of new Hungarian conscripts for the Waffen SS.

The first tentative steps towards the Allies were taken after Rommel's rout at El-Alamein, and after the Allied landing in Africa (November 1942) aroused speculation that a similar action in the Balkans might follow. Kállay envisaged the creation of a neutral bloc under the Turkish aegis, in which Hungary would occupy a leadership position in the Danubian basin. Henceforth, he adopted a more courageous attitude. He turned down German demands concerning the 'solution' to the Jewish problem – in other words, deportation. He selected the first diplomats charged with secret missions to neutral states, like Switzerland, Turkey, Sweden and the Vatican, as a way of contacting the Anglo-Americans. It was the beginning of Kállay's so-called 'seesaw' policy. After the destruction of the Hungarian Second Army at

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Voronezh near the Don, and the Battle of Stalingrad, the policy began to be pursued in earnest. The key idea was to get Hungary into a 'neutral' position, fighting Bolshevik Russia, but not the English and Americans it wanted to befriend.

Experience was to teach Kállay and his friends the illusory nature of this tactic, which aroused a degree of interest – as did any move likely to weaken Germany – but no more. For the German secret service, on the other hand, who suspected that Budapest was trying to extricate itself from the war and even defect to the other side, Kállay's intensive secret diplomatic activities became something of a joke. Horthy had to endure Hitler's violent reproaches and warnings. During a visit by the regent in 1943, he demanded Kállay's head, more soldiers at the front and . . . fewer Jews in the country. Horthy remained firm and Kállay kept his job. The Battle of Kursk on the Russian Front, the Allied landing in Sicily, Mussolini's fall and arrest in July, followed by the Italian armistice in September, encouraged resistance. All the more since one of Kállay's diplomatic agents in Istanbul, László Veress, received a message from Eden (unsigned) regarding the conditions that Hungary would have to meet in order to receive favourable treatment. British diplomatic documents concerning the Istanbul negotiations do not really support the idea that the British communiqué contained 'pre-armistice conditions'. The word 'armistice' does not figure and the basis of negotiation remained unconditional capitulation, with a small, yet significant, difference: the Allies were not demanding immediate surrender, because the latter, according to another Eden dispatch, could lead to the 'enforced installation of a German *Gauleiter* or a super-Quisling'. On the other hand, the British message – in agreement with the Americans and a rather sour-faced, but eventually consenting Molotov – imposed the preliminary condition that Hungary demonstrate through action its commitment to a change in course. In fact, apart from hinting at disengagement, the Hungarian government continued to procrastinate. On 29 September, three weeks after receiving the message, it recognised the counter-government of Mussolini, who had been freed by an SS commando, the very same commando of Otto Skorzeny who later kidnapped Horthy's son. British documentary references to Horthy and his prime minister often express understanding, while noting their lack of haste. The Tehran conference at the end of November 1943 put an end

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to any Balkan intervention plan, focusing instead on an Atlantic landing. Now, as the foreign office under secretary Alexander Cadogan commented: one cannot demand unconditional surrender from a country that one is unable to defend against the Germans.

As Gyula Juhász has pointed out on a number of occasions, the political ruling class was not only concerned about the country's fragile position but also with saving its own skin. Its project, which included the preservation of a parliamentary but undemocratic system, an attachment to the revisionist vision, continued alliance with Germany – if only to stop a 'Hungarian Quisling' from taking power – and a move over to the Allies but without calling a halt to the war with Russia, was indeed a fragile structure and doomed to failure. The Wermacht's occupation of Italy and, on the other side, Russian advance towards its future 'zone of influence' did not make reversal any easier for the Hungarians or for the British, who would probably have welcomed it. The latter, moreover, delayed bombarding Budapest until April 1944, persisted with negotiations and dropped English parachutists with the Hungarian government's agreement. But the latter was 'dragging its heels' and the British waited in vain for concrete evidence of its determination to 'deserve better treatment than the Germans'. Another show of strength from Hitler led matters hurtling towards a more tragic end.

German occupation and a leap in the dark

On 17 March 1944, Regent Horthy went to Klessheim-Obersaltzberg at the explicit request of Hitler, who received him the following day. Discussions were stormy. Hitler had already decided to occupy Hungary and wanted Horthy's approval. Horthy left the negotiation table in anger and was about to break off the talks but Hitler ran after him, and Horthy returned. At that point, preparations for occupation and the political measures which went with it were well under way, unbeknown to the regent. As far as the Germans were concerned, Hungary's bad faith was no longer in doubt and the aim of the invitation extended to Horthy was to paralyse the Hungarian government. Horthy was also subjected to similar pressure from Ribbentrop and by his own entourage. Did he finally give in? He certainly refused to sign, but, according to German sources, gave his verbal agreement late that evening. Be that as it may, occupation took place as Hitler intended.

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Plate 41. The German invasion of Hungary, 19 March 1944: Germans climb to the castle

When the special train, which had been deliberately delayed, left Salzburg station, the new, truly plenipotentiary, German minister, Edmund Veesenmayer was already on his way and eight German divisions had entered Hungary.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Kállay, Hitler's scapegoat, tried to organise resistance but without success. On 19 March, several opponents fled and an estimated 3,000 others – ministers, Communists, journalists and deputies – were arrested by the Gestapo: only one of them, Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, fired his pistol before being carried off wounded. Upon his return, Horthy accepted Kállay's 'resignation' and replaced him with Döme Sztójay who, in turn, formed a pro-German cabinet after prolonged haggling with Horthy and Veesenmayer.

Measures in all domains commenced immediately: in the army, in the counties, the press, even the Opera and National Theatre. The economy was restructured and put into the service of the Reich's war machine. To prepare the 'final solution' for the Jews, Eichmann arrived with a team of 200 collaborators. The presence of Horthy, however, and the smooth running of the administration, army and national police forces enabled Germany to reduce its occupation units to 50,000 men. The

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Reich needed its soldiers at the fronts. In Russia, the First Hungarian Army took over from the Second, crushed at Voronezh.

As for the 'solution' to the Jewish problem, Eichmann and his men were ready to begin deportations in May. With the collaboration of the Hungarian gendarmes, Jews were rounded up in ghettos and sent to Auschwitz.

Summer 1944 was a military turning point: on 6 June, the Allies landed in Normandy. In August, Warsaw, left to its own devices by a Soviet army so near at hand, took to the streets. On 23 August, Romania asked the Russians for an armistice and turned against the Germans. On 25 August, General De Gaulle entered a liberated Paris.

At this late hour, the beginning of the end, Miklós Horthy, pushed by those close to him, finally decided to take things in hand. He bungled them as always: even before acting, he informed the Germans of his intention to get rid of Sztójay and to entrust the government to a general of his choice. Despite repeated German protests, on 29 August, the four-star general, Géza Lakatos, formed a 'mixed' cabinet, partially faithful to the regent. Horthy believed that in this way he could re-establish a kind of status quo ante, in other words, writes the historian György Ránki, a return to performing acrobatics between the two warring camps. It would be unrealistic to reproach him for wanting to buy time before leaping into the dark. The British, too, while holding to their demands, were understanding. But the Hungarians were forever one war behind: in the months of August and September 1944, the country was on the brink of becoming the theatre for Soviet army operations. Yet in September, the Hungarian army set off to occupy southern Transylvania where it fought against united Romanian and Soviet forces, attempting to stop the offensive with the heroism of despair.

In fact, when the regent decided to send an armistice delegation which, in contrast to a first attempt, reached Moscow and was received, the Red Army had already set foot on Hungarian soil. Finally, on 15 October, Horthy announced on the radio that he had asked for an armistice and issued the order for fighting to stop. Bethlen's influence again proved crucial, although this *éminence grise*, who was never really listened to, held no office and even found himself underground in order to escape the Gestapo. Indeed, everything was set up for failure. The Germans, better informed than anyone, immediately took up strategic positions and a commando kidnapped the regent's son. Horthy, cor-

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nered and broken, capitulated: he signed a paper nominating the obscure Ferenc Szálasi, chief of the Hungarian Nazis – the 'Arrow Cross' – to the post of prime minister.

There was undoubtedly a degree of confusion surrounding the order of the day issued to the armies. According to the military historian, Péter Gosztonyi, Colonel Lajos Nádas and the chief of staff, János Vörös, issued a counter-order which overrode Horthy's. The decisive cause of the failure, however, was betrayal. Only a handful of generals obeyed Horthy, among them the commander of the First Army on the Russian front. The others fled towards the Germans. Consequently, the bulk of the army loyal to the 'supreme warlord' took an oath to Szálasi.

The quarter-century of the Horthy regime and the personal role of the regent, terminating in this disaster, remain controversial. In actual fact, under Horthy, Hungarian politics and society traversed three stages: consolidation under Bethlen, the slide towards Hitler and, lastly, the fatal spiral which began in 1938 and led to war and to disaster. Some historians consider that the continuity of conservative political and social structures and the continuity represented by the person of the regent amount to a period which, if not immobile, is at least sufficiently consistent to be considered as a whole. Others see it as a 'path under duress' interspersed by numerous attempts to find the country's way back into Europe. The often tormented events of these twenty-five years seem to show the complementary nature of these two interpretations: continuity through the persistence of a regressive political class and ideology on the one hand, and the changes that resulted from efforts towards recovery, modernisation and preservation of ties with the West, on the other. Similarly conflicting was the desire to keep a distance from Nazi Germany with the desire for its support even if it meant participating in the war. A more determined and clear-sighted policy would have doubtlessly saved the country from this disaster, but then German retaliation would have been inevitable. In any event, each country is responsible for its own fate and Hungary's political class proved lacking in clarity. The regent Horthy brought a degree of stability, which led to some progress and enabled the country to adapt to the painful aftermath of the First World War. However, despite proving sensitive both to the values of his education under the monarchy and to a vaguely perceived British model, while at the same time supporting National Christianity and anti-Semitism, Horthy remained incapable of climbing out of the

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rut. As for his periodic insights, to quote Thomas Sakmyster in his biography *Hungary's Admiral on Horseback, Miklós Horthy, 1918–1944* (Boulder, 1994), p. 391: 'skeptics might suggest that this merely demonstrates the truth of the cliché that even a stopped clock is accurate twice each day'. Far from having been a passive plaything of the main players, he had considerable influence on the politics of that quarter of a century and, through his decisions – or indecisions – he carries the responsibility for what can only be described as a massive failure.

With Szálasi and his 'ministers', power fell into the hands of the dregs of society. The Hungarians, who already had at least 40,000 dead and 70,000 prisoners-of-war at the front, found themselves dragged into a suicidal battle alongside a routed Wehrmacht. And as the Red Army headed towards Budapest, the Arrow Cross indulged in terror. In December, they captured the leaders of the military resistance and ordered the executions of General János Kiss, Colonel Jenö Nagy and Captain Vilmos Tartsay, followed by Bajcsy-Zsilinszky and scores of other members of the civilian resistance, individuals of all persuasions.

Designated victims of Nazi terror, the fate of the Jews was atrocious. To understand the scale of it, one has to go back to the Horthy regime. After Hungary's entry into the war in 1941, 63,000 Jews perished in 'labour service' on the Russian front or as 'stateless persons' deported as such. Horthy, no doubt under the influence of his family and friends, particularly Bethlen – and also, in all probability, out of personal repugnance – for three years withstood the Reich's demands to implement the Nazi 'solution'. After the country's occupation on 19 March 1944, he nevertheless gave free rein to persecution. Added to the 100,000 'racial' Jews (of Jewish origin or converts), there were then 762,000 Jews (460,711 on Trianon territory) threatened with genocide. At this moment in history, they represented the single largest Jewish community in Europe. Between 435,000 and 437,000 of them were rounded up in the ghettos and then deported between 15 May and 8 July 1944. A few thousand escaped persecution and approximately 100,000 survived the camps. The fate of those living in Budapest was suspended by force of circumstances.

It was then that, on 8 July, Horthy succeeded in halting the deportations; again, this was in response to a number of influences, but also because he was more concerned about the fate of the assimilated Budapest Jews than about the provincial Jews and the 'Galicians'. The

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latter, victims of relentless discrimination, had a three-month reprieve, until the Nazi advance on 15 October. After previous losses, there were still 230,000 Jews in the capital.

But to return to 8 July 1944, when Regent Horthy stopped the deportations which had already reached the Budapest suburbs: thanks to this decision, more than half of the 230,000 persecuted were saved, 119,000 according to statistics. The merit was the regent's, and those close to him who had some decency and finer political values – his son Miklós, for example; Countess Edelsheim-Gyulai, his other son István's widow; and a handful of loyal politicians, officers and collaborators. According to some of their testimonies, the regent was forced to send troops to keep the pro-Nazi gendarme units from the capital and to stop them from getting at their designated victims. Indeed, under the benevolent gaze of several ministers and army general officers, the unit was nothing more than the executive branch of the German Nazis. It was also the zealous and implacable organiser of extermination. After the pause, genocide began again in October with the arrival of Szalási and the low-lifes. For the next four months, during the liberation of the capital, Jews endured unimaginable trials: the ghetto, or at best, houses under the protection of neutral embassies, manhunts, torture for the captured, famine, a bullet in the head on the shores of the Danube, which carried away the bodies, and renewed deportations; scenes straight from hell. Fresh victims in Budapest (excluding previous losses, therefore) are estimated at more than 105,000, with 119,000 survivors and 25,000 survivors of the camps and of slave labour. According to statistics, 144,000 Budapest Jews were saved in total.

Switzerland, Sweden and the International Red Cross were most active in saving the persecuted, along with other neutral diplomats. From a long list of International Committee delegates of the Geneva Red Cross and diplomats, the best known is without a doubt the Swede, Raoul Wallenberg, who later died in mysterious circumstances in a KGB prison. But often forgotten are Hungarians in Budapest and in the provinces – peasants, workers, priests, resistance workers or simply neighbours who came to the rescue of the persecuted.

On Hitler's orders, the Wehrmacht and the SS held the city, besieged and kept in a pincer by Marshal R. J. Malinovsky's and Marshal F. I. Tolbukhin's armies. The Germans' relentless resistance transformed Budapest into a pile of rubble and condemned its inhabitants to famine

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Plate 42. The Suspension Bridge destroyed by the Germans. In the background, the castle in ruins

in the midst of winter. Under siege and bombarded from all sides, Budapest suffered huge human and material losses: at least 25,000 civilians perished under the bombs, and 10,000 houses – a quarter of all dwellings – were destroyed.

The left bank was liberated in mid-January. In mid-February, the last of the SS, hanging on to the ruined Buda castle, were defeated. By 4 April, the entire country had been liberated from the German invader. Meanwhile, in Debrecen – closely watched by the Soviets – a provisional, national government was formed.

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7

Under Soviet domination, 1945–1990

German occupation was over; Hungary now fell under Stalin's 'jurisdiction'. Contrary to a widely held belief, it was not the Yalta Conference in February 1945 which determined its fate, but the convergence of several previously existing factors. Among these were the bargaining between Churchill and Stalin in October 1944 in Moscow over zones of influence; President Roosevelt's 'informal' consent; and last but foremost, the belligerents' respective positions in the theatre of war.

The Italian armistice in September 1943 created the precedent (see works by Bruno Arcidiacono) for what Stalin would later explain to Djilas: whosoever occupies a territory, imposes its system. Put another way, according to the literary parable of a high-ranking British civil servant, Stalin could emulate Mr Jorrocks (a character from a nineteenth-century novel): 'Wherever I eat, I lay my head.' The Anglo-Saxons took over the Peninsula and later Japan; the Soviets would claim countries their army had occupied (vanquished enemy countries): Finland, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, East Germany and their zones in Austria, at Vienna, and Berlin. Stalin would additionally secure friends and allies, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

As for Hungary, the Allied Control Commission had to act according to the principle of division: its president, Marshal Kliment Voroshilov exercised the authority of occupation; the three other members took back seats. They protested on several occasions against violations of the armistice provisions, but in vain. Administratively, a national democratic government took over, under Allied control, which had to last until a peace treaty would restore full sovereignty.

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A REPRIEVE

For three years, Hungary lived in a limited and supervised democracy under Soviet occupation.

Following a staged election, a provisional National Assembly had been set up in Debrecen and on 22 December 1944 had appointed a provisional government, presided over by General Béla Miklós de Dálnok. Two of Horthy's other former generals joined the ministers of the National Independence Front, comprising the Communist, Social Democratic, Peasant and Smallholders' Parties. It was a skilful composition, constituted according to Moscow's directives: the Independents, originating from the Horthy regime, represented continuity, whereas the former opposition parties and the Communists stood for discontinuance. In accordance with Stalin's accommodating attitude towards the Allies, the Communists were still a discreet minority, officially holding two cabinet posts out of eleven, with the addition of a third, politically unlabelled one, as well as one or two 'crypto-'Communists.

The provisional government, first in Debrecen, then in Budapest, remained in office for nearly a year. It signed the armistice, declared war on Germany, set up a public administrative machinery, brought war criminals to justice, outlawed Fascist organisations and revoked racial laws. Life began again: supplies improved, people returned to work, trains started to run again and children went back to school.

One of the laws that was promulgated brought about a genuine revolution: the agrarian reform completely abolished the old system of land ownership. Properties over 100 acres – 40.5 hectares – were confiscated and distributed to agricultural labourers and the poorest peasants.

The provisional government – and subsequent ones – faced a plethora of economic problems. The Germans had blown up all the bridges on the Danube, seized public and private property, locomotives, wagons, carriages and horses. War damages were astronomical, the equivalent of five years' national product. The country had also had to provide for the Soviet army of occupation and was subjected to looting and to the abduction and rape of women by the soldiers. To cap it all, it had to pay heavy reparations to the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia – 300 million dollars altogether.

In November 1945, voters went to the ballot box in order to elect a

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new National Assembly. These were free elections, the first and last in forty-five years of Soviet domination. Thanks to Moscow's exceptional decision, the results were a serious disappointment to the Communists. While they took 17 per cent of the votes – as did the Social Democrats – the overall winner was the Smallholders' Party with 57 per cent of mandates. Its leader, Zoltán Tildy, then formed a coalition government out of the four National Independent Front parties, which consequently included the Communists. The latter occupied a disproportionate number of posts: four out of the eighteen ministerial seats; the Social Democrats held the same, while the National Peasant Party, which was close to the Communist Party, received one portfolio. Thus, the Smallholders' Party, which in principle could have governed alone, found itself with only half of the ministries. This arrangement was imposed by Marshal Voroshilov, president of the Allied Control Commission, and the party holding an absolute majority was forced to accept.

The party that came in from the cold

The Hungarian Communist Party's brief moment of power in 1919 conferred upon it a particular and paradoxical destiny. After the fall of the Republic of Councils, repression had decimated its cadres and during twenty-five years of clandestine existence, several hundred militants had been arrested, some sentenced to death and executed, others sufficiently intimidated to cut ties with the illegal party. The number of victims in Hungary was considerably fewer than victims of Stalin. Horthy's jails were less dangerous than the Gulag. Several party leaders, among them Mátyás Rákosi who served no less than sixteen years in prison, came out alive and well.

Rákosi and his comrade in misfortune, Zoltán Vas, had been handed over to the Soviets in 1940, in exchange for banners belonging to Kossuth's army carried off by Tsar Nicolas I's general as trophies of victory in 1849. In any case, the Hungarian Communist Party was completely marginalised and despite the courageous actions of a small nucleus, had no popular base. The future great leader of the party, János Kádár, secretary in 1943–4, recounts in an interview that after successive waves of arrests and defections, the party had been literally reduced to a handful of members.

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In the USSR, on the other hand, Hungarian émigrés, probably the single largest group, numbered several thousand people. Whereas German, Austrian and Czech prisoners-of-war had returned home after the war, thousands of Hungarians who had joined the Red Army remained on Soviet soil. Political émigrés swelled these figures, Communists who had fled to Moscow after the events of 1919, and also exiles fleeing Nazi Germany.

'Salami tactics'

Upon returning to Hungary, therefore, the Communist Party had to start from scratch. Thanks to circumstances and organisational methods, the party was back on its feet and, with Soviet support, enjoyed a disproportionately high political profile, though not as high as its ambitions. With the hand of cards distributed by Stalin, it was forced to play a 'moderate' game. There was no question of 'building Socialism'. The dictatorship of the proletariat was banned from its vocabulary and the memory of 1919 condemned to shameful silence. The party had to make do with building a 'popular democracy', without knowing – Rákosi himself admitted as much – what the term actually meant.

While it waited to find out in 1948, the party, a pawn on Moscow's chessboard and caught up in Stalin's larger game, played its game as best it could. To the extent that any Communist Party had room for manoeuvre, the Hungarian party was further restricted by Stalin's choice of lieutenants. Four Muscovite comrades – of Jewish origin – were appointed to head the Hungarian party and were instantly stripped of any authority in the country of St Stephen's Crown.

No one knows, in fact, why Hungary received such mild treatment. In Poland, democracy was bludgeoned to death from the beginning; Romania was put in its place from the first hour, as was Bulgaria almost as quickly. In allowing free elections to take place shortly after the Potsdam conference, perhaps Stalin wanted to prove his good intentions to President Truman and to Prime Minister Clement Attlee. Among other explanations, one could also speculate that, just as with Beneš's consenting Czechoslovakia, the Kremlin, confident of winning in the end, decided not to rush things. Hungary was not on the geopolitical strategy line. The argument put forward by revisionist American

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historians, however, that the cold war launched by the United States was what drove these countries into the arms of the Soviet system, simply does not stand up on the facts. Hungary's popular democracy was a system under surveillance and wired up, ready to explode at the appropriate moment. Its main device was the Soviet military and police presence, prolonged after the signing of the peace treaty in 1947.

The tactic was to plant mines – its methods and tools are well known. The first step was infiltration; the Communists planted their moles in other parties. In effect, several ministers under a bourgeois flag were secret Communist Party members. Former agents, informers and individuals with a 'slightly' Fascist or otherwise compromising past were an easy target. The Communist Party had them over a barrel. No wonder the Soviet organs and Communist leaders rushed to the archives to extract compromising files.

In the economic sphere, the Soviet Union, as well as receiving reparations, had seized German properties, created 'mixed companies', requisitioned factories and buildings. The list was long and the aim clear: these actions not only resulted in a handsome profit but also constituted a leverage of power.

Politically speaking, the Communist Party sliced up the opposition parties – the famous 'salami tactic' – starting with the Smallholders' Party. By inciting scissions, the Communist Party faced a fragmented opposition at the 1947 election, and with a bit of fraud thrown in, was able to secure a better result than in 1945: some 22 per cent of the votes. In order to break the hegemony of the Smallholders' Party Rakósi and his comrades excelled not only at intimidation, but also at organising demonstrations, and under the cover of a left wing which included Socialists and peasants. Initially, the party humoured the Church, despite the latter's far from sympathetic attitude. Nonetheless, in 1948, church schools were brought under state control and convents were shut down; close on the heels of the campaign that preceded Cardinal Mindszenty's trial, 225 Catholic priests and monks were arrested and sentenced. Two years later, the Churches, worried about being able to pursue their mission, signed a concordat and various agreements with the state, securing around fifteen *gymnasia* (sixth-form colleges). To avoid further offending the faithful, the party alternated the carrot and the stick. All this was coherent within a policy modelled on the Popular Front.

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The same was true for the economy. Capitalism on a small and medium scale was left to function alongside nationalisation of banks, mines and the giants of heavy industry. The introduction of the new currency in August 1946 added to stability. One forint was worth 4×10^{27} pengös in circulation, in other words 400,000 quadrillion pengös. Because of this staggering inflation, Hungarians literally worked for nothing in the eighteen months preceding stabilisation of the currency. For the state, the moment was ripe and a three-year reconstruction plan was launched on 1 August 1947.

Finally, a word about the role of the political police, the AVO and then AVH, the state security organisation. Modelled along the lines of the NKVD-KGB, it was in fact 'counselled' by high-ranking officers from Moscow. The Hungarian political police set to work immediately. In keeping with the Republic's international and legal obligations, its activities initially focused on war criminals and other Fascists. However, decisions about who fell into these categories were taken by themselves – and the Communist Party leadership. Consequently, little by little, 'enemies within' and 'suspects' were in danger of falling into their clutches. The AVO-AVH was fully operational from 1948. Among its 'precocious' actions, the discovery of a 'Hungarian community conspiracy' led to serious repercussions. Members of this undoubtedly clandestine organisation – but with no subversive intent – were recruited from a broad spectrum, partly from members or ex-members of the Smallholders' Party. The police put together an entirely fabricated file of accusations, implicating Ferenc Nagy, president of the Council (who succeeded Tildy, elected president of the Republic), and Béla Kovács, two leaders of the Smallholders' Party. The trial mounted by the police was intended to compromise and break up this great party and, ultimately, to drive Ferenc Nagy into resigning. The Soviet authorities gave their strong-arm support to the dismantling of their principal adversary. Béla Kovács was arrested – in the street, since the National Assembly refused to lift his parliamentary immunity.

On 25 February 1947, Kovács was taken to Russia. On 30 May, Ferenc Nagy, travelling in Switzerland, announced his forced resignation and party leaders who opposed the Communist takeover fled the country, resigned one after another, or found themselves imprisoned. The parliamentary façade was maintained but, from 1947, the semi-democratic

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regime had had its day. Should the beginning of Communist power be taken from this date, from the following year, or from the elections of 15 May 1949, when 96.27 per cent of electors 'obediently' voted for the candidates of an artificial Popular Front, nominated in reality by the Communist Party? Or much earlier, in 1946, when Churchill declared that the iron curtain had fallen? The question of the precise date has no real importance; the process had started from the moment the new regime began.

The free elections clearly demonstrated that at least 83 per cent of Hungarians mistrusted the Communists and voted for bourgeois democratic and Social Democratic parties. Indeed, despite Soviet occupation and Communist Party agitation, the new democracy did enjoy a solid credibility, mixed with the precarious hope that it would last . . . The people set to work; the reconstruction plan launched by the Communists and supported by the other parties, was an undisputed success. The country in ruins began to prosper: factories were running again at full pelt, artisans and small traders ran their workshops and businesses; intellectuals participated in a pluralist and lively cultural life. As has already been stated, the distribution of large estates among 642,000 agricultural labourers and destitute farm workers in a country like Hungary, which was 50 per cent agricultural, amounted to a revolution and entirely changed the country's profile. Not surprisingly, it raised as many fears as it did hopes, but only if the optimists' expectations were fulfilled, in other words, that the Soviets would withdraw after signing the peace treaty in 1947. This did not happen, and transition to a single party system put an end to a relatively free and prosperous era.

STALINISM IN ACTION

History has perpetuated the term 'popular democracy' for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. However, when Hungary became a single party state and proclaimed the dictatorship of the proletariat, it became a Soviet state which did not speak its name. There were intimations of this transformation at the Cominform meeting in September 1947 at Szlarska Poreba in Poland, when Zhdanov made his famous speech about the irreducible division of the world into two opposing

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camps. But Stalin's secret order to act was received by the Hungarians in late 1948, after a congress held in Warsaw. Despite at least two premonitory events, namely, the Prague coup in February and the Cominform's split with Tito, the Hungarian leadership learnt with utter astonishment that from now on, and even retrospectively, their 'popular democracy' was a dictatorship of the proletariat and a Socialist state in construction.

Thus both down- and up-stream, the party line had to be revised and Rákosi, Dimitrov and Bierut had to engage in self-criticism. The grotesque nature of this ritual, however, did nothing to soften the hard facts which followed at an accelerated pace: state control of the economy, enforced industrialisation plans, collectivisation of agriculture. Churches came under attack, there were mass purges and arrests, the intellectuals were brought into line and a campaign was launched to 'unmask traitors who have infiltrated the party'. Every possible method was put to use.

In the political sphere, the transition to brutality affected everyone: there were mass dismissals in the ministries, municipalities, army and publishing houses. The imprisonment of several Social Democratic leaders, added to the already numerous politicians and officers in prison, was an important stage. Via a range of manoeuvres the old Workers' Party had already been forced to merge with the Communist Party. In practice, the Social Democratic Party had been swallowed up by the Communist Party. In 1950, it was the turn of the collaborating architects of this forced union to be arrested, including György Marosán and Árpád Szakasits, head of state fallen from power into the lair of the political police. There he joined, among many others, his predecessor, Zoltán Tildy. Church men were also being expunged. Protestant and Catholic bishops were condemned to long prison sentences, including two archbishops, József Grösz and, before him, József Mindszenty in 1949.

The trial and execution in September 1949 of László Rajk with several other accused, and Communists, victims of trials in 1950 and 1951, ushered in a new phase of a different kind. Ordinary mortals were not really interested in the fate of Communists busy destroying each other. Tears were shed for a father, or a village neighbour taken away by the AVO-AVH, for a local priest treated badly, or a son who had disappeared in the Soviet Union ten years previously as a prisoner-of-war,

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never to be seen again. In any case, was not Rajk, former minister of internal affairs, the oh so dreaded 'right hand' of the party? Rajk's trial was the concern of Stalin, Rákosi, Duclos or Togliatti, and of fellow travellers of foreign Communist parties. It was also the concern of the 828,659 Hungarian members and candidate members (January 1950) of the Hungarian party, the subtle difference being that this time, terror had struck some of them too.

Rajk finally confessed to everything as pre-scripted by the secret police, actively seconded by the KGB, and radio-controlled by the party leader himself, Mátyás Rákosi. For Stalin, the main purpose of the trial was to put Tito and his regime on the defensive. For Rákosi and his peers, it was the perfect opportunity to get rid of Rajk, a potential (though not real) rival, a former 'native' Communist (which he was, but without ever contesting Moscow's pre-eminence) and to eradicate the slightest hint of non-conformism within the party (something Rajk would have been the first to approve). The trial's hidden agenda also targeted the 'populist–nationalist' tendency within the party, a largely benign trend created by the People's College Movement, patronised by Rajk until its dissolution.

Alongside the sinister Gábor Péter and one of the four supreme leaders, Mihály Farkas, János Kádár also participated in the interrogations that interspersed torture sessions. Rajk's best friend, he also succeeded him as minister of the interior. In 1951, he was, in turn, imprisoned, tortured and condemned for fictitious crimes. Kádár survived to fulfil the role for which he is known. But evidence of his role as torturer remains in the form of an audio-tape of the Rajk interrogations which Rákosi astutely had made and kept carefully in his safe. This was his hold over Kádár. In the flood of trials following Rajk's, Ferenc Donáth, Géza Losonczy, Sándor Haraszti, Szilárd Ujhelyi and hundreds of militants belonging to the clandestine party of the pre-war period, underwent torture and prison.

The ordinary citizen witnessed the great trials with indifference: what mattered was the 'small ones'. In fact, Rákosi's regime excelled in that very area. The figures are staggering. In six years, between 1948 and 1953, nearly 1,300,000 people came before the tribunals, which issued 695,623 condemnations ranging from a fine to capital punishment, an average of 116,000 per year. It is worth remembering that this was a country of 9.5 million inhabitants. In just one year, 1952, 77,000 detention sentences

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were pronounced and thousands of people were interned on the basis of administrative decisions. The number of political executions and political prisoners incarcerated, beaten and tortured is not known.

One of the main victims of the 'People's State' was precisely the working class supposedly – as if in derision – the holders of power. They were deprived of the Social Democratic Party, of genuine trade unions and of decent working and living conditions. As badly paid and housed as under the regime of the lords of old, they were subjected to the pressures of 'production norms' and the harassment of factory cells when it was not imprisonment for 'sabotage' or for stealing five metres of wire.

As soon as the war was over, the nobility 'as a class' was liquidated. The fate for its members was decline, unemployment or factory work; for many of them, prison or internment camp. Women too were hit by the repression, as were children and old people: class enemies – bourgeois and noble – received orders to evacuate their homes in town and to move into shabby dwellings in the country. The expropriation of bourgeois property followed anti-capitalist laws, whether it were a factory, a business, an artisan's workshop or a private legal practice. A handful of cobblers survived to repair shoes, as long as there was no shortage of soles. Shortage was one thing there was plenty of. As economist János Kornai writes in his forceful analysis, 9 million Hungarians queued – both physically and metaphorically – in front of the shops; the factories in front of their suppliers; state enterprises in front of the coffers of the self same state.

Food shortages were of course linked to collectivisation. The expropriation of kulaks – the fate of all those possessing more than 12 hectares – was merely the tip of the iceberg. Both old and newly established peasants (thanks to the smallholdings created by the 1945 Agricultural Reform) were forced to abandon their 'capitalist' farms and to join the co-operative, the kolkhoz. And yet the results of the campaign instigated in 1949–50 were poor: it was the policing methods of collectivisation and its psychological and economic effects that created disruption in society. As a consequence of the Agricultural Reform, there were more peasants than ever before, 53.8 per cent of the active population against 21.6 per cent working in industry. The collectivisation campaign therefore affected more than half the population. Recalcitrants were often beaten, incarcerated and taunted as a way of forcing them to sign

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up as members of a co-operative. With or without kulaks, villages felt violated. Despite the construction of 'Houses of Culture', cinemas and libraries, an entire peasant tradition was under threat. Hence the significance, economically disastrous and politically counterproductive, of collectivisation.

The Lukács affair highlighted another facet of the regime. György (Georg) Lukács's controversial personality and work (1885–1971) spanned the century of Communism. Better known in Germany than in Hungary for his early writings, he came into the public eye in 1919 as one of the people's commissars of the Republic of Councils and, twenty-five years later, as the Communist 'pope' of literature. His book, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (1923), which was written in German and which so delighted the French left who discovered it a half a century later, was ignored by Hungarian readers. After 1945, on the other hand, Lukács's essays on Balzac, Stendhal, Zola and 'great realism' found profound echoes in literary circles. This was primarily because realism had solid roots in Hungarian tradition, but also because the 'subtext' of the message was understood loud and clear. Anything but Socialist realism, one read between the lines; do not trust the example of glorious Soviet literature and Zhdanovism. For all that, the 'Lukács line' rejected apolitical 'art for art's sake' on the right, while discarding both Stalinist–Zhdanovian literature and every strain of the avant-garde on the left. The 'Lukács debate' of 1949–50 and the 'Déry debate' of 1952 took place in the narrow cultural space which remained practicable until the year of the turning point.

What these debates made crystal clear was that the era of tolerance was over. Whosoever wished to be published would have to align themselves to the Soviet model. In his closing statement in the Lukács debate, the chief ideologue, József Révai, revealed the hidden political nub that lay hidden behind all the fuss. Lukács's line, he said, was one war behind: admissible before the watershed but not after. This was because since before the turning point, it had represented the policy of the Popular Front which – and this was the heart of the message – had been no more than a 'historical detour [underlined by Révai] which Fascism compelled us to take'. Henceforth it is clear that the party headed straight for its aim: dictatorship. The proof was in the criticism against Déry, down to its minutest details. Arts and literature were now in the line of fire.

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IMRE NAGY: THE 1953–1955 INTERLUDE

Stalin died on 5 March 1953. His heirs, the ten members of the Soviet Party's Central Committee Presidium, engaged in a war of succession which cost the life of the formidable and ambitious Lavrenti Beria, losing out to Georgi Malenkov initially, followed by Nikita Khrushchev. The party's new 'collective leadership' introduced a whole series of initiatives aimed at lightening the burden of Stalinism and the tensions in the popular democracies. The 'thaw' had begun; the title of Ilya Ehrenburg's celebrated novella became the symbol of an era. Hungary was one of the first to be invited to rethink its position.

From 13–16 June 1953, Mátyás Rákosi, leader of the Hungarian party and government, was summoned to Moscow, accompanied by Ernö Gerö and a few other high officials. On their return, Rákosi, though still general secretary, was no longer prime minister. Imre Nagy, a little known member of the Politburo, had taken his place according to instructions from the Moscow comrades. The reason behind this choice has never been clear. Imre Nagy, though a Communist since his youth and an erstwhile Red Army soldier in Russia, did not belong to the core leadership of the Hungarian party in Moscow. He had also fallen foul of the party and been turned down in 1948–9 because of his opposition to forced collectivisation. But perhaps it was precisely this that motivated his promotion, at a point when the agarian policy was failing and an economic crisis was seriously shaking the stability of Communist power. Furthermore, unlike the other four top leaders (two of whom fell from grace during the reshuffles of the summer of 1953) Nagy was not Jewish.

Nagy was given the task of implementing the orders from Moscow. Confident about these orders, Nagy presented his government's programme to Parliament as well as introducing a new cabinet – relieved of a few notorious Stalinists – on 4 July. Nagy's programme and the tone of his speech broadcast on radio emitted shock waves – of relief, after so many years of terror and deprivation. The programme set out key decisions which included the slowing down of frenetic industrialisation, the lifting of constraining measures against peasants, permission to dissolve the kolkhozes and release of detainees from internment camps. Nagy's patriotic warmth and his speech – part professorial, part rural – rendered him the first popular Communist politician. And since

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Plate 43. Count Mihály Károlyi in Nice, with Imre Nagy and Mrs Nagy, 1949

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promises were kept, he earned the trust of his compatriots and the hatred of the party apparatus, Rákosi in particular.

The eighteen months under the 'June programme' were months of relentless infighting between Rákosi's clan and that of Nagy – a man alone, rejected by party officials and without a governmental machinery worthy of the name. Confident of his position, Nagy relied on the power of the word and on public opinion. Until October 1954 he was able to count on Khrushchev's support, but the circumstances which until then had favoured his 'Communism with a human face' (his expression, long before the Prague Spring) had changed. The Paris Accords in October 1954 re-established the sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Germany, thus enabling it to join NATO. The Communist bloc, for its part, then set up the Warsaw Pact. Preparations led to Malenkov's demise, accused of having weakened his country through restricting heavy industry and, consequently, its military capability. For Khrushchev it was the ideal excuse to push Malenkov out of his prime minister's seat – on 8 February 1955 – and replace him with Nicolaï Bulganin.

BETWEEN RE-FREEZE AND REVOLUTION

Malenkov's dismissal – unlike Beria's in 1953– was Imre Nagy's *coup de grâce*. His enemies had no difficulty in dealing the fatal blow to the 'Hungarian Malenkov'. Nagy was ousted in April 1955. His refusal to subject himself to the ritual of self-criticism cost him his party membership card. He nonetheless became a providential figure whose return was eagerly awaited.

Nagy's fall was the signal for a re-freeze. Rákosi now held exclusive power. Though he could not entirely erase Nagy's reforms, he took back the reins and conducted a campaign of repression and intimidation on a large scale, despite a spectacular about-turn in the Kremlin. On 26 May 1955, Khrushchev and Bulganin went to Yugoslavia to present their apology to Tito, who had been excommunicated by the Cominform seven years before. This unexpected and dramatic event created a sensation all over the world and in Hungary relaunched the 'Imre Nagyist' opposition movement. Without delay, those close to the deposed president of the Council – Miklós Gimes, György Fazekas and Miklós Vásárhelyi – demanded the revision of the anti-Titoist policy and of the Rajk trial in a public session.

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In order to understand the mechanism, we need to return briefly to 1953, the beginning of the anti-Stalinist, 'Imre Nagyist' intellectual movement. 'The lone man', who in the summer of 1953 had announced a 'new phase' in party and government policy, found his first active followers among writers and journalists. Meanwhile, a spirit of revolt had overtaken most of the Communist intelligentsia: institutions of higher education, scientific research institutes, publishing houses and theatres, partly because reinforcements had arrived, straight from prison. Thanks to the policy introduced in 1953, survivors of the Rajk trial, and those that followed, were released and rehabilitated.

Unlike János Kádár and a few others, most survivors of the rigged trials unhesitatingly aligned themselves with the reformists. After the fall of Imre Nagy they formed a small circle of friends around him, and were among the rare visitors to his villa under AVH surveillance. This small group of determined individuals went on to lead the actions of 1955 and 1956 which ended up destabilising the regime.

All the more so, since the 'thaw' continued. During the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Party, 14–25 February 1956, Khrushchev delivered his celebrated speech concerning Stalin's crimes and the damaging effects of the 'personality cult'. From then on, Rákosi and the party *apparatchiks* were on the defensive against the accusations that rained on the party leadership and, more specifically, on the organisers of the rigged political trials. The Petöfi Circle, in full swing, organised debate after debate on the most sensitive issues, such as the economy, historiography, Marxist philosophy, the fate of the Spanish war volunteers who had been decimated and, lastly, on the press. The debate on the latter took place on 27 June 1956, with 7,000 participants who listened to the speeches broadcast to the street over loud speakers. After this, events gathered momentum.

The day after the meeting an entirely coincidental event took place, as unfortunate for the party leadership as it was decisive in the events that followed: the uprising of the Poznan workers. The intervention of the Polish security forces left at least fifty dead which led to a slow change of policy within the Polish Communist Party leadership. Reverberations from the Twentieth Congress were still being felt. Moscow interceded with the Hungarian party, which balked at the idea of changing course. In mid-July, Anastas Mikoyan arrived in Budapest to organise the dismissal of Rákosi, who subsequently had to go into

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exile in the USSR. A reshuffle took place within the Central Committee. The changes that ensued were far from radical, however, bringing to power instead the party's number two, Ernö Gerö, who during his last three months at the summit of power attempted to implement a half-hearted policy. A few AVH torturers went to prison, a few hundred of their victims, including 132 Communists and 151 Social Democrats, were rehabilitated. Archbishop Grösz and the Lutheran bishop Lajos Ordass were released and Cardinal Mindszenty was transferred from prison to house-arrest.

This entirely relative thaw did not appease the public mood. Anti-Stalinist opposition renewed its attack with demands abhorrent to the leadership: it wanted a state funeral for Rajk and the other trial victims who had been secretly buried following their execution. For the first time under a Communist regime, a crowd of 100,000 people demonstrated in silence in the streets near the cemetery. As for the funeral, it resembled a scene from Shakespeare's *Richard III* at the National Theatre. The public interrupted the performance regularly as they relived the crimes. At the cemetery, party representatives rubbed shoulders with surviving victims.

This surrealist and macabre event illustrates the collective mood. Despite not having been at all popular, Rajk was now surrounded by people, a message to those in power that enough was enough. But the message failed to get through. Whereas the Polish party learnt the lessons of Poznan, the Hungarian Communist leaders learnt nothing and had forgotten nothing. Ernö Gerö, former KGB commissar at the time of the Spanish war, top official of the Comintern and unshakeable Stalinist, believed he could carry on as if nothing had happened. He merely presented his apologies to Tito whom he was supposed to meet in Belgrade. The leadership no longer had anything or anyone behind it, apart from the political police, the machinery's last quadroon, and, as a last resort, the Soviets. The spirit of contradiction penetrated everywhere, even into the party apparatus, its training schools, the municipal police, military academies, and it reached into a small group of the Central Committee. The vast majority of 860,000 Communists wanted change.

As for the anti-Stalinist opposition, it already had a national audience, and its leader, Imre Nagy, enjoyed increased popularity, thanks to his obstinate resistance. He was in actual fact one of the most moderate of his political friends. During his internal exile in 1955–6, however,

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he had written his memoirs specifically designed to defend his cause before the party, but containing unorthodoxies and at times the voice of a rebel. In it, he condemned the destruction of the democratic coalition of 1945–8 and, consequently, the dictatorship of the one-party system. He also reiterated his opposition to agricultural collectivisation and elsewhere developed his ideas around the 'five principles of Bandung', that charter for the non-committed. What distinguished him from his peers was the patriotic cadence of a man of the land, attached to his national culture.

Some members of his 'group' shared his attitude, while others, on the contrary, chastised him for his narrow-minded 'party spirit' and his refusal to act outside the legal institutional framework. In the eyes of some European historians, the reformists were close to the Yugoslav model, Tito's 'national Communism', and his system of workers' self-management. In reality, there is no trace of any such tendencies. Titoism never caught on in Hungary. The reformists nurtured hopes of a 'Communism with a human face' – as evidenced by one of Nagy's essays – but for them, the Yugoslav model did not seem to hold that promise. Lastly, there were the most radical of the galaxy, headed by the journalist Miklós Gimes, who did not believe (or no longer believed) in a renewal of society without a decisive break with Communism. This was also, undoubtedly, the general feeling among the Hungarian people, who wanted above all to shake off Soviet domination, wanted a better life and freedom.

Events in Warsaw gave new impetus to the Hungarians.

NATIONAL UPRISING

On 19 October 1956, the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party (LEMP) co-opted the 'dissidents', who had been kept at arm's length, headed by Wladislaw Gomulka, the Kremlin's *bête noire*. Warsaw ignited Hungary's gunpowder. On 23 October, students organised a demonstration in support of the Poles. The Petöfi Circle led the cortège, which began at the feet of a bronze statue of Petöfi; writers made speeches and an actor recited Petöfi's poem, *Rise, Magyar!*, which 108 years previously had signalled the beginning of the 1848 democratic revolution. Just as in Petöfi's day, the crowd was able to read the twelve points formulated by the students – or sixteen, to include the demands

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of the day: national independence, Russian withdrawal, free elections, Imre Nagy in power. The party leadership held a continuous session throughout the morning. It banned the demonstration, refusing to listen to reason. 'And what if the people refuse to obey?' asked one journalist. 'We will give orders to open fire on the crowds,' replied József Révai. But he had neither the troops nor the courage to stop the demonstration.

The procession moved off across the city and at every crossroads was swelled with tens of thousands of workers. The number of demonstrators has been estimated at 300,000, which would be equivalent to 1.5 million protesters in Paris. The atmosphere was light-hearted; popular songs were intoned, the 'Marseillaise', sometimes the 'Internationale'. Slogans encapsulating their demands were at times cruder than before. Similarly, the Communist symbol was cut out of the tricolor flag.

Perhaps a simple gesture, a tiny concession by those in power, would have sufficed to appease the public mood, as in Poland with Gomulka. But no such response was forthcoming. During the night, the country teetered on the verge of civil war – which was not a civil war since apart from the party leadership shut away in its headquarters and a handful of political police units, there was no one to fight for a regime that had been so disastrously discredited. One section of the crowd laid siege to the radio station, another, to the party newspaper, a third set about dismantling the symbol of tyranny, the immense statue of Stalin. The night had barely begun and the regime, armed to the teeth, collapsed like a pack of cards.

Ernö Gerö and the president of the Council of Ministers, András Hegedüs, then turned to the only force that could save them: the Soviet army. Two divisions stationed close by arrived in the capital. An insurrectional army had been organised. It resisted and retaliated; Russian tanks were blown up with 'Molotov cocktails'; in the suburbs, a disarrayed Hungarian army was involved in a few skirmishes. For the rest, soldiers and sometimes entire units joined the insurrection. It was the beginning of a national revolution and uprising, supported by a civil population. For five days, the battles raged in Budapest and provincial towns.

The once one-million-strong party was reduced to a handful of leaders in a state of panic. In the circumstances, they had no other choice but to call upon Imre Nagy, who accepted, without conditions

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and on the morning of 24 October formed a cabinet that was barely different from the previous one. Nor was his policy: the continued fight against the insurrection. The only thing he refused to do was to sign an official request the Russians demanded to legitimise their intervention. Public disappointment was proportional to Nagy's weakness. The day after his investiture, however, he began to move. Gerö was fired and replaced as general secretary of the party by János Kádár. Then, on 27 October, Nagy reshuffled the government. Among the twenty-five ministers were a dozen new faces, like Lukács, former president of the Republic Tildy, and former general secretary of the Smallholders' Party, Béla Kovács, who had been arrested by the Soviets and had just returned to his country after eight years in the gulag.

The tone of Nagy's messages on the radio also shifted. He promised amnesty to the insurgents if they laid down their arms, without realising that he was one war too late. For the fighting going on in the streets of Budapest and major towns was no longer his own fight for a softer Communism, but a fight for freedom. For the first time in a Communist system, a revolution to end the regime was taking place. An anti-totalitarian revolution, according to Raymond Aron. An unprecedented revolution, too, because communication between the government and other players took place via the mass media of the time – the radio waves. In another respect, it was a nineteenth-century style revolution. Barricades, armed civilian insurgents, the third estate on the move, tricolor flags displaying liberty, equality, fraternity – and above all, national independence.

After five days of hesitation, Imre Nagy finally understood – too late for public opinion and the insurgents; with too much haste and zeal in the eyes of the Stalinists. According to one correspondent, Nagy had been held prisoner until then by the political police and forced, by kalashnikovs, to keep to the Bolshevik line. *Pia fraus*. A venial lie to restore his image tarnished by five days of procrastination. In reality, Nagy was prisoner of himself, his militant past, his belief – against all odds – in the possibility of reforming Communism without abandoning it. On 28 October, however, the other side of his personality took over. Forbidding the hard-line Stalinists from attempting another military adventure, he declared a unilateral ceasefire and announced the immediate abolition of the AVH security police, as well as the commencement of negotiations for the withdrawal of Soviet troops and

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other radical measures to bring an end to the fighting. The Communist Party disbanded; the most compromised members of the former leadership fled to Moscow and a directorium of six members, which included János Kádár (president), Imre Nagy and Ferenc Münnich, took over, aided by a reduced cabinet formed on 30 October. A pluralist cabinet was formed and, within forty-eight hours, two other crucially important decisions were announced by Nagy: the denunciation of the Warsaw Pact and the proclamation of neutrality.

But let us return to the events of 28 and 29 October. From then on, changes could not have been more radical: the multi-party system was reinstated and the new power rallied to the revolution. The fighting stopped immediately, but the insurgents demanded guarantees from the head of government that promises would be kept. Who were they?

In a dozen provincial towns, heavy fighting had taken place; in Budapest, a genuine insurrectional war had erupted between armed groups and Soviet tanks who arrived without infantry. The urban guerrilla fought back with whatever was to hand, notably the famous 'Molotov cocktails' – often thrown by fifteen- and sixteen-year-old adolescents – which immobilised the tanks. The hard core of the resistance comprised half a dozen groups, barricaded at various points, the most famous in a small square in front of a cinema, another in a barracks where an army colonel, Pál Maléter, took command.

The groups of insurgents, who went on to become legendary, were sometimes led by officers or sub-officers, more often by civilians from a variety of professional backgrounds: the son of a former civil servant who had lost his position; an ardent Communist foreman; or an ordinary worker like 'Uncle Szabó'. There were certainly 'hooligans' too, rubbing shoulders with medical students and poets, but the fact remains that the vast majority of insurgents treated in hospital for wounds were workers.

Figures are only approximate: 2,000 according to some, two or three times that number, according to others. Numbers were undoubtedly far smaller during the fighting prior to the ceasefire than after 4 November, when the Soviets intervened for the second time – of which more later. Whether there were 2,000 or 4,000 during the first conflict, the fact remains that this small urban-guerrilla band held off the Soviet units for five days. In terms of defeating the most powerful army in Europe, it was certainly not enough, but it sufficed to create a mood of intoxication

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and, more curiously, to drive the Kremlin into withdrawing – or appearing to be willing to withdraw and to seek a political solution.

For 150 hours – from the moment Imre Nagy announced the changes on 28 October until the first Russian canon fire at dawn on 4 November 1956 – the Hungarians experienced the illusion of being free. Two members of the Soviet Communist Party Presidium, Mikhaïl Suslov and Anastas Mikoyan, in Budapest from 27–30 October, sanctioned the decisions taken by Nagy and his colleagues, including the move to a multi-party system. Notes relating to debates within the Party Presidium concerning the Hungarian situation have recently been discovered in Moscow archives. They attest to a state of indecision and confusion which reigned for several days. Old Stalinists like Molotov and Voroshilov would not hear of a withdrawal of troops and pushed for military intervention. Others, on the other hand – initially even Marshall Zhukov – favoured negotiations towards a political agreement with Imre Nagy. Mikoyan, one of the emissaries just back from Budapest, was the most conciliatory, while his colleague Suslov withdrew into silence. On 30 October, the leadership supreme, despite everything, made the celebrated declaration which acknowledged Moscow's errors *vis-à-vis* Hungary and the other people's democracies. The text, published in the columns of *Pravda*, announced that 'the Soviet government was ready to enter into negotiations' concerning 'the presence of Soviet troops on Hungarian soil'. It was a huge step . . . but did not mean approval of Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact which Nagy announced the following day, on the afternoon of 31 October. At the time, it was believed that the Moscow emissaries, Suslov and Mikoyan, had ratified these decisions, but eyewitness accounts leave room for doubt. There is no conclusive documented evidence and Nagy's speech merely announced the beginning of negotiations on this subject and his desire to see it through. At that moment, the two Soviet emissaries back in Moscow were in discussions with their colleagues in the Presidium. The fate of the Hungarian revolution was settled in a reception room in the Kremlin where, this time, the Soviets and visiting Chinese leaders opted for military intervention.

In any event, Imre Nagy left party headquarters on 29 October, moved to the Parliament, to government offices, and fell increasingly into line with the demands of the revolution. As for the latter, it organised a return to freedom with a speed and determination that were

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probably unprecedented. In the space of 150 hours, a new political and social system was born.

The forces of order, meanwhile, were also reorganised in a spirit of 'continuity and discontinuance': the army, the municipal police and insurgents together ensured that order was maintained against all provocation because the forces of disorder were also present, and on both sides of the barricades. In late October, security forces' machine guns fired into a peaceful crowd assembled in front of Parliament, leaving two hundred dead and numerous wounded. A seriously bloody incident also took place at the entrance to the Communist Party Budapest headquarters where Imre Mezö, secretary of the Central Committee, was killed, as were the army officers who were just leaving a meeting with him. Photographs of their appallingly mutilated bodies were splashed across the pages of the American magazine *Life*, but despite numerous inquests, the exact circumstances of the crime remain confused. Street lynchings also took place – three or four AVH officers were hanged from lamp posts.

From 1 November, however, the mixed army forces took the situation in hand, and order was restored so that the inhabitants of Budapest and of most other towns went back to their routines – but not to their work.

One of the unique characteristics of the change was the spontaneous creation of self-governing bodies. Calling themselves national committees, revolutionary councils or workers' councils, they sometimes took on administrative tasks – especially in the small towns, sometimes the management of institutions or factories. Foreign press correspondents focused on the workers' councils, which in Budapest were significant both in number and importance. It would be incorrect, however, to look upon these as workers' self-management bodies and, therefore, the events in Budapest as a revolution of councils. Several works present this leftist romantic-revolutionary interpretation, despite it being belied by the diversity of the forms of organisation and their agendas. For the moment, councils were organising strikes rather than production. This momentum was leading towards a pluralist and policed civil society. Of course, no one had even heard of a civil society and yet, from the most isolated village to the large factory, via associations of writers or believers, everyone seized a particle of the power that belonged to them as citizens.

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Among the forces involved, pride of place belonged to the Churches, especially the Catholic Church and its prelate, József Mindszenty, Archbishop of Esztergom. The cardinal, who had just been freed by a Communist officer originally from the upper aristocracy, took up a position against the current government (of the moment). That he immediately demanded the restitution of huge Church properties is untrue. He did, however, persist in referring to the government as 'heirs of a deposed regime' and he articulated his own conservative vision of society and of 'cultural nationalism'. His speech was broadcast on 3 November at 20.00 hours. At dawn, two thousand Russian tanks invaded the country. Free elections never took place. One can only speculate as to the future prospects of these ideas.

The same can be said for the various tendencies on the left and the Democratic Socialist perspective. After a brief short-circuit, Imre Nagy wins back his popularity and credibility. But for how long? In what circumstances? Above the fray? At the head of a party? Which party? There are any number of unanswered questions. It is extremely unlikely that the Social Democratic Party would have accepted to march alongside any Communist group so soon after having extracted its historic leaders – among them the charismatic, loyal and inflexible Anna Kéthly – from prison. As for the post-Stalinist party created during the revolution, it did not carry much weight. What about the workers' councils? We have already spoken of the uncertainties governing this new-born movement. It should be said, however, that all things considered the general trend was not moving towards the re-establishment of capitalism, but rather towards a 'mixed' regime, a kind of 'third way'. It was a way that had been discredited by the experience of the forty years after the Hungarian revolution, but it seemed to correspond to the general mood among a large section of the population – and to the geopolitical circumstances of the time.

The initially small anti-Stalinist opposition was also part of this trend. Contrary to impressions at the time, it was not swept away by the wave of insurgents but identified with the revolution and held key positions throughout the revolution and afterwards. At the time of the major trials under a restored Communism, its front ranks, led by Imre Nagy, paid for their metamorphosis with their lives. What would have become of them had the revolution taken a different turn? It is another

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question that remains without an answer. In early November 1956, the time for questions had not yet arrived.

On 1 November, Imre Nagy announced Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and proclaimed the country's neutrality, soliciting the protection of the four great powers, the United States, the United Kingdom, France and the Soviet Union. The second decision completed the first. Hungary declared its neutrality the moment it left the pact, indicating that it had no intention of moving over to the Atlantic alliance. The request for support from its Soviet neighbour for its neutral status was intended as a reassurance of its loyalty to Moscow.

The Budapest government was driven to desperate measures. During the night of 31 October, Soviet units which had left the capital turned round and, reinforced with more troops, moved towards the heart of the country – contrary to all assurances that had been given.

Moscow responded to pleas from Budapest – via its ambassador in Budapest, future KGB boss and future first secretary of the party, Yuri Andropov – with the customary assurances that no threat was intended. The last ten hours or so of freedom were spent in anguish. Even at the very last hour, the Soviets pretended they had every intention of keeping within the agreements. They invited Imre Nagy to send a political delegation to Warsaw in order to conclude the terms of the agreement and for their part dispatched a military delegation responsible for determining the modalities of withdrawal. In the afternoon of 3 November, after an apparently fruitful meeting, the Soviet generals arranged to meet their Hungarian interlocutors, including General Maléter, minister of defence, at the Russian headquarters at Tököl, near Budapest, with a view to pursuing negotiations. It was an ambush: the Hungarians were arrested by the KGB. Meanwhile, the noose of the Soviet army tightened around the capital with preparations for a dawn attack.

The events unfolding in Budapest made the front page in newspapers worldwide throughout the entire thirteen days of the revolution. Public opinion was moved, diplomatic bodies bewildered. Sympathy aside, however, Hungary did not receive any political support, let alone military aid. In the light of documents now available, the position of the powers is absolutely clear. The United States, the only one with enough muscle, immediately shied away. President Eisenhower's position was

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established in advance: basically, the status quo. The United States would not act. Furthermore, to avoid any misunderstanding, they charged the American ambassador in Moscow, Charles Bohlen, to convey the message. The rest is history. The Soviets were reassured.

As for the British and the French, the Kremlin had nothing to fear: without Washington, any action against the Soviet Union was unthinkable. Besides, Paris and London had other worries, namely the tripartite action with Israel, against President Nasser's Egypt in the Suez Canal Zone. The question as to whether the second Soviet aggression in Hungary would have taken place if there had been no Suez crisis is another of history's unknowns. We can reasonably suppose the answer to be yes. Be that as it may, the Suez affair served the interests of the Soviets, just as the Budapest events were welcomed by the French–English–Israeli allies. Deliberately or not, both parties used the diversion offered by the other. As for the minutes of the secret tripartite conference at Sèvres which put the final touches to the launch of the Suez campaign, there is no trace of them in the archives.

Discussions at the UN Security Council could only reflect the positions of the five permanent members, the USSR, China, the USA, the United Kingdom and France. The only procedure that would have avoided a Soviet veto would have been to present Hungary's case before an extraordinary session of the General Assembly. Yet it was only from the 5 November that the matter was fully discussed by the General Assembly, and resolutions taken demanding the withdrawal of the troops. It was in vain, of course. Having crushed the revolution on 4 November, the Russian army installed itself in Hungary and stayed for thirty-five years.

The 4 November invasion

In the Communist world, the Hungarian cause was from the very beginning a target for attacks from the German, Czechoslovak and Romanian parties. The Poles were cautiously sympathetic, while the Chinese did a volte-face. Peking's initially benevolent attitude towards Poland and Hungary changed on 31 October when Mao Tse-tung and Zhou Enlai dropped Hungary, and incited Moscow to intervene.

The only possible ally that remained was, consequently, Tito's

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Plate 44. The 1956 Revolution: after the defeat

Yugoslavia. Understandably, the Belgrade leadership would have willingly welcomed the fall of the Hungarian Stalinists and a move to national Communism. Not, however, to political pluralism. So when Khrushchev arrived unexpectedly at Brioni Island to persuade Tito to co-operate, he found an interlocutor who was not only consenting but zealous to boot. In changing sides, Tito dealt the Hungarians the death blow.

On his return to Moscow, all that was left for Khrushchev to do was to give the start of the invasion the green light. On 4 November at 4.00, a huge Red Army swept across Hungary, with 'the obvious intention of overthrowing the legal government', as the president of the Hungarian Council declared in his last radio speech. In order to escape arrest, he then went to the Yugoslav embassy, accompanied by close friends and

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four other members of the party leadership. Meanwhile, the only minister left in the Parliament building, István Bibó, wrote a brief aide-memoire of the situation. A handful of broadcasters transmitted the final messages, while armed resistance continued in various places for a few more days.

The victory of a defeat

Thus, 'the first anti-totalitarian revolution' ended in a blood bath. The free world did not lift a finger to stop it. In the scenario of a bipolarised world, war against the Soviet Union would have been unthinkable in any case and no sensible Hungarian would have wanted the country transformed into the battlefield of the Third World War. Does this mean that no other means of pressure existed besides military ones – diplomatic, multilateral, economic – to push Moscow into a reasonable compromise, and that consequently the cause was lost in advance? Nothing is less certain: the claim that 'what happened was meant to be' is an idle justification. Events could have unfolded differently.

Having said that, and God being on the side of the big battalions, Hungary's chances were indeed slim. To say, however, that the sacrifice was not in vain was, in the circumstances, more than just a platitude. The uprising was an affirmation of selfhood and provided Hungarians with moral capital, though without dividends. National identity had been rescued. Indeed, beyond its frontiers, this act of resistance, however inordinate, demonstrated for the first time that totalitarianism was not an empire destined to last for a thousand years. It is in this sense that it is legitimate to talk of the victory of a defeat.

THE KÁDÁR REGIME

The regime of János Kádár had a rather fantastical beginning. On 1 November, Kádár announced on the airwaves that 'the uprising of the Hungarian people has achieved freedom and independence' . . . and promptly left. A Polish correspondent described how 'he disappeared from the scene just as soon as he arrived'. In fact, Kádár went to the Soviet ambassador in Budapest, Yuri Andropov, and from there, fled to Russia, returning on 7 November in a Red Army lorry as the head of a puppet government.

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The age of bargaining

Initially – and very briefly – the new masters adopted chameleon tactics. They presented themselves as upholders of the revolution whose only purpose was to redress its mistakes. There was no talk of a 'counter-revolution' or of punishing the guilty. The uprising was declared just and the 'old regime' – in other words Rákosi and his co-responsibles – were largely blamed for having provoked it. Kádár even declared that Imre Nagy, who had taken refuge in the Yugoslav embassy, was free to return to political life whenever he chose to. This overture was nothing more than a sham and Nagy, with the approval of the other members of the party's executive body (rebaptised the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, MSzMP), refused any compromise. Since Kádár was the only member of the leadership who had his freedom, the situation was rather embarrassing. What Kádár would have liked was not Nagy's return to political life but his approbation which would bestow a semblance of legitimacy upon a puppet government. The Yugoslav hosts who had granted him asylum also tried their best to extract an endorsement from Nagy – who was unaware of the pact between Tito and Khrushchev (a pact which was revealed in the *Memories* of the latter after his demise and also by the Yugoslav ambassador Veljko Micunovic). The double-dealing carried on for three weeks. The extradition of Hungarians protected by the right to asylum was negotiated between Belgrade's emissaries and Kádár; at the same time, the Hungarians were pushed by Belgrade to relieve the embassy of their inopportune presence. To cover themselves, the Yugoslav government obtained from Kádár a safe conduct for the refugees.

The Kremlin cut the Gordian knot in its customary fashion. On 22 November, as Nagy and his friends, reassured of their safe-conduct, left the embassy and stepped onto a bus which was to take them home, they were kidnapped by the KGB and taken to Romania, where they were forced to accept the hospitality of their new hosts. The deportees were then subjected to continuous harassment in the place of their detention, disguised as a holiday resort, ending up in Hungarian prisons, followed by trials and executions of the principal defendants in 1958. For the rest of the country, in a state of shock, the time for bargaining was over. Serious matters were about to begin.

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The age of repression

In a country overrun by tanks, resistance continued for many long weeks. The Workers' Councils upheld the order to strike and economic life was paralysed. A committee in Györ presided over by Attila Szigethy kept a 'free zone'. In Budapest, associations of intellectuals, with writers at the forefront, pursued their protests. On 21 November a revolutionary council of intellectuals took over under the presidency of the maestro, Kodály. Even journalists working at *Népszabadság*, the Communist Party's official organ, went on a protest strike; pamphlets criticised the new regime; the journalist Miklós Gimes published a clandestine newspaper; there were also demonstrations in the street. In other words, despite bans and increasingly frequent arrests, rearguard action did not stop. On 9 December, the government dissolved the Workers' Councils and National Committees, and arrested their leaders, thus cutting the last fictive tie with the revolutionary events. In January 1957, associations – including that of the writers – despite being entirely legal, suffered the same fate.

Among numerous attempts to stop the machine of repression and to find a political solution, István Bibó's were notable for the courage and intelligence of their author. He wrote an essay putting forward proposals for a compromise between the people and the masters in power and also originated a memorandum in the same vein, addressed to the Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Several other intellectuals participated in the action, including the journalist Miklós Gimes and the current president of the Republic, Árpád Göncz. The memorandum was handed to Nehru's emissary, ambassador K. P. S. Menon, but created more smoke than fire. The great Indian statesman, no doubt genuinely shocked by the Russian invasion of a small country, confined himself to sending a complaint to Moscow, to which the response was a simple *niet*.

The curtailment of a rebellious Hungary continued. The trial and execution of Imre Nagy and four co-accused in June 1958 provoked new waves of protests, notably in France where several Communist intellectuals and fellow-travellers broke with the French Communist Party following Soviet intervention and persecutions. Free spirits such as Albert Camus and François Fejtö fought a tireless campaign supporting the

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triumph of truth, which had been distorted by Communist propaganda. *The Truth about the Nagy Affair*, published in Paris in 1959, edited by Pierre Kende and his collaborators with a preface by Albert Camus, provides several trustworthy documents and a series of eyewitness accounts: the book exposes the regime's iniquitous procedures, the extent of Kádár's responsibility, and attempts made to distort it emphasising the pressure that was being exerted by the Chinese and the Soviets. Most of all, it is Nagy's personality which emerges from the truth about the trial. He defended his ideas and actions with extraordinary steadfastness, while refuting accusations which completely distorted the truth and went to the scaffold without renouncing the revolution in any way. Decades later, it came to light that at the time of his emigration to Moscow, Imre Nagy had probably collaborated with the KGB services of the time, under what constraints and for how long, we do not know. For all that, he remains an admirable figure.

Trials against writers guilty of participating in the revolution caused a general outcry. Tibor Déry, István Bibó, Gyula Háy, Domokos Kosáry, and dozens of other writers, poets and scholars, spent long years in prison. In 1959, the Tibor Déry Committee presided over by Jean Cassou listed forty-six Hungarian intellectuals who had been executed, had committed suicide, had disappeared or were imprisoned – six of them were fortunately released. However, survivors had to wait for the amnesties, first partial then general, of the early 1960s, before they could enjoy physical freedom. Besides, this was merely the tip of the iceberg. Historian János M. Rainer compiled a register in 1986 of more than 300 executions and 16,000 convictions. There were almost as many executions following the 1956 revolution as the total in the three historic years of repression, 1849, 1919 and 1945. After this sad record, the Kádár regime undertook the change in direction which made it the champion of Communist freedom in the Western press.

The age of consolidation

The general amnesty in 1963 closed the period of repression and marked a phase of consolidation. Kádár, endowed with a sharp political mind and the duplicity necessary to manipulate others, was capable of thwarting political intrigue on all fronts. With the right broken or at least muzzled, Kádár found himself up against the machinations of an exiled

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Rákosi, as well as those plots being hatched within his own party's Central Committee. With the support of his powerful protector, Khrushchev, he was able to overcome every obstacle – until the ousting of the latter in 1964. The removal of Khrushchev undoubtedly left Kádár in a difficult position, though this did not stop him giving expression to his bad mood when faced with Leonid Brezhnev. He was even known to have 'sulked' at a congress and this certainly did not fit his image as Communist leader independent from the Kremlin. Be that as it may, his position seems to have been solid. The Communist Party, re-christened the Socialist Workers' Party, had to build upon the ruins of its predecessor: in late 1956 it had 37,800 members; in 1966, half a million. Meanwhile, having eliminated his rivals and opponents, Kádár held all the reins of power. As for the Soviet leaders, they no doubt appreciated the fact that he had succeeded in pacifying a rebellious Hungary, even at the price of discarding a few differences with the Soviet model.

One example was the re-collectivisation of agriculture. In the early 1960s, the regime again adopted old Stalinist methods, forcing recalcitrant peasants into the kolkhoz. The venture was more successful this time than in the Rákosi era, and only a few private farms remained: practically all peasants joined a kolkhoz or worked in a state farm – a sovkhoz. So far, there was nothing unusual; but after a brutal collectivisation, co-operatives were given considerable managerial, productive and commercial autonomy, so much so that former kulaks were admitted, sometimes as managers, in order to utilise their experience. It became the exception in the Socialist universe: the system worked, food shortages disappeared and several kolkhozes could have displayed the slogan, 'Get rich!'

The age of reforms

The Kádár regime inherited a planned economy, modelled on Soviet lines. Its predecessors had built up heavy industry without the technical means, the know-how and the raw materials, and which was managed by a central planning office that was in turn subject to party political directives. The brief reformist interlude under Imre Nagy attenuated the immediate effects to some extent, but was unable to eliminate altogether, in such a short time, its consequences for the general state of the country and for the poverty of the population. Behind the spectacular

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statistics concerning increases in steel, machinery or chemical fertiliser production, real growth was minimal and purchasing power lower than before the advent of the Communist regime. Shortages in consumer goods brought about a familiar phenomenon under Communism: long queues in front of shops. Food shortages dropped thanks to the agricultural products market, but it was left to János Kádár's government to remedy inefficient industrial production and an almost non-existent service sector. In the artisan sector, permission to reopen the ludicrously nationalised workshops soon bore fruit. Restructuring large state enterprises proved a more complicated task and indeed was never achieved during the two decades of Kádárism. Its beginnings were nonetheless promising and crowned with appreciable successes.

The first attempts at economic reform date back to Nagy's government when he assembled experts to sketch out some projects. Ten years went by before the experiment was renewed, this time inspired by the Czechoslovakian example, but also due to the political will of the Hungarian leadership and to the competence of a host of high-calibre economists. It resulted in an ambitious restructuring plan which came into force in 1968, cautiously called the 'new economic mechanism'. Such circumspection soon proved fitting since in August 1968, the 'Prague Spring' suffered the same fate as the Hungarian revolution twelve years previously: it was crushed by tanks. Hungary participated in the kill, albeit in low numbers and without enthusiasm. There was nonetheless the fear that Hungary's 'new mechanism' would founder, along with Alexander Dubček's reformist course. But in the end it would seem that Brezhnev considered the stability of the Hungarian regime more important than Budapest's economic disparities. Thus the reform was launched and pursued, though not without hitches, for four years.

Its aim was simple: a profitable and competitive economy. But in order to achieve this in an interventionist system, planning had to be dismantled, structures decentralised, prices freed and enterprises given a margin of autonomy enabling them to manage production, administration, salaries and marketing, as close as possible to 'market principles'. However, things never work in practice as they do in theory. Theoretically, the new mechanism should have led to the dismantling of 'industrial feudalism' controlled by the 'big barons', in other words the directors of the fifty largest state enterprises. The latter controlled

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80 per cent of industrial production and had close ties with the party leadership, thus constituting a very powerful lobby. The profit principle could not be applied: the state coffers were forever rescuing enterprises in difficulties.

The 'mechanism' nonetheless continued until around 1972, at which time the 'left-wing' opposition within the party raised its head and secured a slowing down of the process. In the opinion of several experts, this marked the end of the reformist experiment before its partial relaunch towards 1980. Be that as it may, the economy continued to develop appreciably better than in other Socialist countries, with the exception of East Germany due to its special relationship with Federal Germany, and perhaps also thanks to the work ethos among German workers. Progress in the private and semi-private sector, on the other hand (where small contracted groups were self-employed within a state company), was a unique feature of what was becoming known as the 'Hungarian model'. Altogether, this sector comprised 200,000 people. Adding the 150,000 artisans, the sector represented 7 per cent of the active population, not counting private farming activities such as the kolkhoz peasant with his plot of land worked for personal use, and the hundreds and thousands of tiny allotments belonging to workers and urban employees. According to some economists, up to 30 per cent of domestic product came from these different sectors. Even if an exaggerated estimate, this very modest 'capitalism' contributed significantly to the country's development.

Economic expansion also depended on agriculture, the 'successful branch', fiercely defended by the 'green barons' lobby against the industrial barons. Conflicting interests led to a bargaining system over state subsidies, import permits and supplies of materials. The Socialist market economy was in fact neither Socialist nor market nor, argued some, an economy worthy of the name. Apparent results, however, belied these summary judgements. In twenty years, national revenue doubled, the agricultural sector fell to 19 per cent to the advantage of the industrial and service sectors, and real income per capita certainly shot up (a phenomenon which will be discussed further). This idyllic picture was soon overshadowed, however, first and foremost by the single-party system which the Kádár government had no intention of reforming, much less abandoning. The economy, therefore, came up against insurmountable political limitations. The other shadow

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hanging over the idyll was that of debts. By the mid-1980s, Hungary had already overtaken Poland in terms of debt per capita, with 7 billion dollars of foreign debt. Within five or six years, the net debt had trebled; by the end of the regime (1990) it had reached the astronomical figure of 20 billion 390 million US dollars. The leaders had resorted to this dangerous palliative, with the agreement of János Kádár, whose main concern was to preserve his much needed popularity, in order to compensate for the slowing down of the economy. The index of real income of wage earners, at 100 points in 1980, began a breathtaking fall: minus 5 points by 1984, minus 10 by 1990. Peasants' real income fell even more drastically: close to 20 per cent in ten years. The mountains of borrowed dollars were used to stop up holes in the state budget and to slow down the drop in private buying power. Regardless of the ratio between the two, the loans did not go towards productive investments: between 1980 and 1990, the latter's overall volume fell by 18 per cent, according to the Office of Statistics. The least one can say is that a very high price was paid to support the well-being of the 'barracks'.

János Kádár: a brief portrait

It is extremely difficult to sketch a portrait of a man belonging to the party machinery, hauled to the summit of power by Moscow in 1956, executor of a violent repression who, during the last twenty years of his exclusive reign, became the most popular Communist leader. Born in 1912 at Fiume (Riyeka), an illegitimate child, self-taught worker, secretary of the clandestine Communist Party 1943–4, one of Rajk's torturers in 1949, imprisoned by Rákosi 1951–4, he climbed back in 1956 and then changed sides overnight. Not a straightforward tale. But this individual, who spent thirty-two years at the summit of power, is even more elusive. No one, however lacking in objectivity, could deny his capacity to choose the most appropriate course of action at the most opportune moment. Getting rid of Rajk; betraying the revolution; having Imre Nagy executed; maintaining a reign of terror and then granting an amnesty at the right time; crushing the peasants and then cajoling them; promoting an audacious reform, then withdrawing; loyally serving the cause of international Communism while at the same time keeping his distance: the entire list of his advances and retractions would be too long. One very important element he can be given credit for is that

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Plate 45. János Kádár

Kádár could have confined himself within a static orthodoxy, like Gomulka. Or he could have played a role similar to Gustáv Husák, who restored the eternal order of the party after the crushing of the 'Prague Spring'. In contrast to his opposite numbers, Kádár was able to learn from the lessons of 1956 and turn them to his advantage. In other words, he applied a policy which was socially beneficial and initiated modernisation to enhance his personal power and image.

He successfully combined rigidity with apparent *bonhomie* and loosened the reins when the party's ultimate power interests were not under threat. Thus, though basically anti-intellectual, he left the control of literature to György Aczél, an opportunist like him, but

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unlike him, a cultured one. Aczél steered the cultural boat with undeniable ability, flattering some, punishing others when necessary, but generally adopted a laissez-faire approach, within the relatively broad limits of the regime. Indeed, the regime was corrupt through its own duplicity. This is where János Kádár excelled. If he was able to forestall any hint of opposition by using the – admittedly brilliant – slogan, 'who is not against us is with us', he also had to walk over the hot coals of his past. There were too many skeletons in his cupboard. Astute as ever, after having led the repression and the propaganda which denounced the 'counter-revolution' of 1956, it was Kádár himself who, one fine day, announced that in his view it would be more appropriate to speak of a 'national tragedy', thus enveloping torturers and victims alike in the same mantle.

THE REIGN ENDS

It may be that duplicity and pragmatism are the two virtues necessary to succeed in a Communist regime. Kádár possessed both. But they backfired. Pragmatic to an extreme, lacking in broadmindedness, when the castle in the air that was his Socialist market economy collapsed, he clung to his old recipes. Despising Gorbachev, an inflexible Kádár refused to change any aspect of his policy. When in 1988 he was ousted by the Young Turks of the party, he was left to drink the dregs of his own betrayals.

Life in the Hungarian 'barrack'

Political vicissitudes and statistics do not convey social realities and a portrait of Kádár is not a reflection of the public mood. The 'Kádár generation', though disillusioned, accorded the regime and its leader an unarguable but elusive consensus. There were no free elections nor reliable opinion polls and the press was as servile as in other Communist countries, until the system began to disintegrate. And yet, a regime initially held in contempt does not elicit the relative contentment that has been observed in Hungary, and a leader as detested as Kádár does not become popular for no reason. The peculiar phenomenon of 'goulash Communism' can only be explained through its ambiguities and contradictions.

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To these peculiarities must be added the fact that during the regime's fifteen or twenty quite prosperous years, living in the Hungarian 'barrack' was not difficult. Life also provided satisfactions, material pleasures and even the prospect of social promotion – if not for the father, at least for the sons and daughters. The number of schools and pupils increased appreciably at every level, the number of graduates relatively so. In 1970, 61,760 secondary school students received their baccalaureate; in 1988, 69,760. Vocational courses multiplied. In higher education, 18,220 students obtained degrees in 1970, nearly 24,000 in 1988. Though not an excessive figure for a country of 10 million inhabitants, the general level of education improved nonetheless, and in some cultural domains such as publishing (7,562 books published in 1988, including 970 literary works, against 4,793 in 1970, 670 of which literary), the country preserved its good traditions. Hungarians remained avid readers.

Comparisons of living standards are always problematic; even significant statistics like the GNP per capita leave out so many imponderable elements. In the 1970s, Hungarian living standards seem to have been around 80–90 per cent of the European average. Compared with the past, this figure represented considerable progress. Real income and individual consumption tripled compared with the pre-war, as well as Stalinist, periods. The average Hungarian had an income which allowed him to satisfy dreams like buying a Trabant (in 1989 there were 164 vehicles per 1,000 inhabitants, against 56 in the USSR and 403 in France); building a 'shack', preferably on the shores of Lake Balaton, or travelling to Italy or Paris. The physiognomy of villages changed: rustic dwellings with thatched roofs, authentic, picturesque but without modern comforts, were replaced by pretty brick houses, often with bathrooms and enclosed with wrought iron fences. Towards the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, Hungarians were fairly satisfied with their living conditions. It was said that Hungary was the 'most cheerful barrack in the concentration-camp system of the Communist world' – all the more so since political constraints on individuals, their private and social lives, had relaxed. No one feared being themselves – nor did they fear saying so. It was not freedom, but it was far better than the social and moral slavery of the past.

Opponents, however, argued that this result was obtained to the detriment of national spirit and political participation. The regime

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infantilised people, reduced them to vulgar consumers of material goods. There is undoubtedly a lot of truth in these statements. A consumer society – though a third-rate one – had developed under 'Kádárism', but who could blame the consumer for being happy to consume? Improvements reflected on social composition. Large sections of the population rose from the level of proletariat in the classic sense to become petit bourgeois. Hungary was in the process of becoming a middle-class society, the regime's expressed objective, and in this it met the aspirations of the majority.

A Trabant or a house was no substitute for freedom; it only made non-freedom more tolerable and the soft banality that had replaced hard-line dictatorship less suffocating. The fragility of this ersatz liberalism soon became apparent as the first cracks began to show. Since the much praised political stability and 'consensus' relied on increasing purchasing power and the relaxation of constraints, rumbles of discontent began at the first signs of a downward turn. The events that followed showed that Hungarians had not lost their cultural identity nor their desire for freedom or their civic aspirations.

The collapse of Communism in Hungary came about in a world context which would require an analysis beyond the scope of this book. Without the decline of Soviet economic and military power and the disintegration of its ideological foundations, the bipolar system and the 'order of Yalta' would perhaps have lasted a while longer. The author of the present study, however, is convinced that the great tremor came from the depths of the societies of 'real Socialism'.

The year 1989 is engraved in memory: the entire Communist system collapsed like dominoes. Analyses by specialists caught unawares were singularly inapposite. The 'Kremlinologists', used to scrutinising changes at the top of the Communist hierarchy without ever studying the societies, could only endlessly repeat their astonishment. Others confined themselves to attributing the changes entirely to Gorbachev – and justly so, to the extent that, involuntarily, the general secretary had undermined what remained of the system's foundations. Predictions that the empire would collapse because of the national factor on the 'peripheries', however, proved false: dismemberment came about as a consequence of decay at the 'centre' of the system, which therefore 'imploded' – another recurring word which explains nothing if not the relentless nature of the economic crisis.

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The study of Hungary's case does not provide answers either. It is too small and too specific to deliver the key to the collapse of a gigantic and – despite its apparent uniformity – diverse system. If the 'Gorbachev effect' had not precipitated it, the end of the regime in Hungary would certainly have been different, but the conditions for it had been in place since at least 1985, not to mention congenital causes. Among the most immediate factors, stark economic deterioration, which has already been described, undoubtedly played a role, if only as detonator. This explanation seems rather short, however – necessary but not sufficient. The Hungary of 1989 was no more a stage for hunger marches or a 'subsistence crisis' than the other popular democracies. What led to the final crisis – slowly and by process of accumulation – was a transformation in the mentality and behaviour both within the Communist elite and across the country, in society as a whole – two parallel and inextricably linked phenomena. It was the interrelationship between the authorities and civil society that had changed over time, pushing the one to run ahead and the other to augment the pressure till the system's defences blew up.

The most perspicacious observers of totalitarian systems, such as Hannah Arendt and Raymond Aron, had already been struck by this process. The moment Stalin fell from his pedestal, Arendt had warned that the regime 'could collapse [in a totalitarian system] at any time'. Raymond Aron predicted that 'the democratic spirit of compromise' could 'be mortally threatening'. In more concrete terms, the Kádár regime's transition to its 'liberal' phase already bore the seeds of this 'corruption through liberty', which ended up escaping control because the controllers themselves became contaminated. Communism is only Communism by remaining Communist. Since the 'Hungarian model' was not a genuine alternative, it only gnawed at the party from within and allowed a civil society, awakened from hibernation, to flourish. Interaction between the two changed the rules of the game. The autonomy acquired by so many figures in public life – in politics, the economy, religious life, the media, publishing and in the party itself – rendered governance within the framework of existing institutions impossible. As for ideology, it was reduced to shreds. 'Why didn't they shoot?' asked Elemér Hankiss, the Hungarian sociologist who first developed the concept of a 'second society' in opposition to the 'first', in other words the powers that held the guns. In answer to this question, we quote

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Miklós Németh, the last president of the defunct regime's Council of Ministers. 'Very simply', he said, 'there was nothing we could do.' The exhausted regime could no longer 'normalise' in its traditional manner, and its escape forward ended with 'power being seized' by a civil, multifarious society, inarticulate but united in the desire for change.

Among the many characteristics of the 'second society', it is important to remember that it was no longer an underground society. Once it had escaped control, the press no longer cared about the remaining taboos – Soviet domination, the supremacy of the party, Marxist-Leninism, the authority of a supposedly charismatic leader, embodied by János Kádár, and, finally, the stigma of the 'counter-revolution' which had blackened the events of 1956 and its martyrs. As for the economy, the failure of 'Socialism' was no longer a secret for anyone and nor was the modest but conclusive success of private enterprise. In literature, not one writer thought to put the heroes of the party on stage. Historiography, which had been hijacked and held captive by a historicising ideology, now calmly pursued its investigations and interpreted the evidence as truthfully as possible, according to individual professional consciences. This last element was particularly important precisely because of the stifled memory of the 1956 revolution. So much so that the 'rehabilitation' of this event became a political stake even within the party leadership.

After János Kádár was removed from power in 1988 (definitively consigned to the scrap heap of history one year later), the new general secretary, Károly Grósz, tried to rescue the situation through a hardening of tone and discipline. Then one of his rivals, Imre Pozsgay, set a cat among the pigeons by declaring that the 1956 revolution had been a popular uprising and not a counter-revolution. Grósz soon retaliated and went as far as reiterating the position his party had always adopted, according to which Imre Nagy's referral to a tribunal had been justified.

This controversy among Communist leaders came at a time when opposition to the regime had spread beyond the confines of semi-clandestine groups. Indeed, for over a decade a group of anti-establishment intellectuals had been fighting for their ideas, publishing samizdats and mobilising sympathisers, while braving police intimidation. Among them, philosophers János Kis and György Bence were at the forefront, as was László Rajk – son of the executed Rajk – and Gábor Demsky – who undertook samizdat publishing. The circle also included writers

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like György Konrád, Miklós Haraszti and János Kenedi, who found close allies among anti-establishment philosophers and sociologists like Iván Szelényi, István Eörsi and Ágnes Heller, former disciples of György Lukács and ex-collaborators of the former prime minister András Hegedüs, now on the opposite side. Survivors of the repression against Imre Nagy and his close friends were still active. Among the latter, Ferenc Donáth and Miklós Vásárhelyi, who were in contact with all shades of opposition, multiplied their efforts to give coherence to a much larger movement, including the national-popular movement called, as already mentioned, 'populist'. Writers Sándor Csoóri and István Csurka were the best known among them. As representatives of a trend originating in a long tradition, they found allies and an audience among the 'reform-Communists', notably in the person of Imre Pozsgay.

The activities of the opposition, all tendencies considered, did not run smoothly nor without dissension. The populists, after having collaborated with the others, separated themselves and met one memorable day at Lakitelek where Pozsgay was also present. Nonetheless, the movement as a whole had a national appeal and a decisive impact on the events which precipitated the end of the regime. On 21 May 1989, the government of Miklós Németh, with its foreign affairs minister Gyula Horn, took the historic decision to dismantle the iron curtain between Hungary and Austria. In September, they opened the route to German dissidents on their way to West Germany via Austria. On 13 June, meanwhile, negotiations began between the party in power and opposition representatives. The outcome of these round-table discussions was the dissolution of the Communist Party, the introduction of a multi-party system and the transition to democracy; but between May and October another major event signalled the beginning of a new era: the rehabilitation of Imre Nagy and the solemn funeral of the victims of repression.

The 'Committee for Historic Justice' which had been in full operation for over a year, its efforts focused on exposing the truth and extracting a recognition of guilt from the authorities, organised the funeral. It did so without letting the Communist Party exploit the memory of the revolution to its own ends – a measure of its moral authority. So much so that the party was not represented at the funeral. Its members, including Imre Pozsgay, participated as private individuals or as representatives of other institutions. The last belated tributes were made on 16 June 1989 in front of a crowd of close to 250,000 people.

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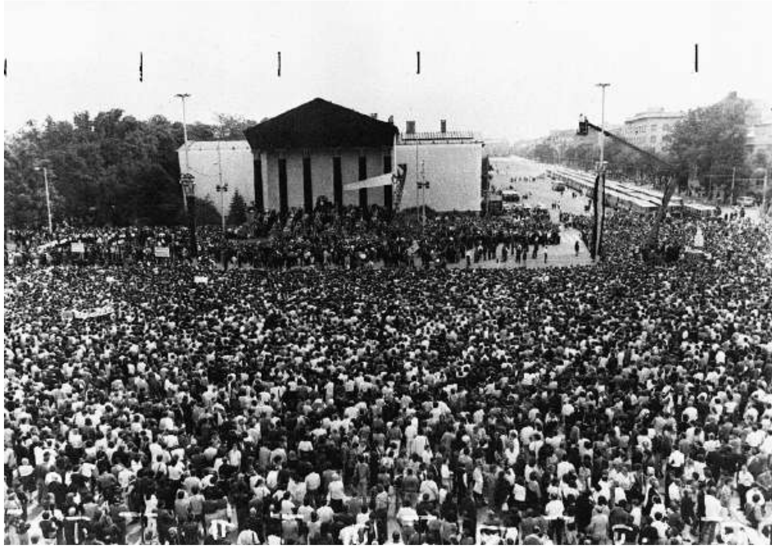

Plate 46. The funeral ceremonies for Imre Nagy and other victims of the 1957–8 repression, 16 June 1989

Plate 47. Miklós Vásárhelyi, a close friend of Imre Nagy, speaking at the 1989 ceremonies

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This event marked the second death of János Kádár who, having sunk into dementia, was a few days away from his third – biological – death. There is no doubt that he had been dropped by Moscow the day of his political death in 1988. However, in this regard, the question often arises as to Gorbachev's attitude and that of his political allies to the final crisis of Communism in Hungary. Research so far suggests that the Moscow leaders initially encouraged Kádár's successors to hold out. What seemed dominant was the hope that something could be salvaged via 'reform-Communism' – an unrealistic idea as we now know. There is no evidence, on the other hand, of any intention to use force in order to preserve the status quo. The 'velvet revolution' thus occurred without major conflicts. In the case of Hungary and Poland, it was also a 'negotiated revolution'. The Hungarian Republic was solemnly proclaimed in Budapest, on 23 October, anniversary of the 1956 revolution. Miklós Németh's government carried on faithfully until spring 1990 when, on 25 March and 8 April, citizens decided their future, in complete freedom, via the ballot box.

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8

1990, a new departure

After forty-five years of Soviet domination, the election was essentially – and predictably – a sanction against the former regime.

A CHANGED LANDSCAPE

What remained of the Communist Party's (MSzMP) former electorate was divided between its two successors: one list, donning a new skin under the Socialist label (MSzP), took 10.89 per cent of the votes in the first round; the other preserved its old name and programme, taking 3.88 per cent, below the 4 per cent mark which would have allowed it to enter Parliament. The Socialist Party's position on the new landscape was consequently modest, with thirty-three deputies in the National Assembly. Attempts to revive the former Social Democratic Party more or less failed, due to the absence of the old leaders and the blunders of their successors. The party did not achieve the 4 per cent mark and has failed so far to re-enter the scene, much to the satisfaction of the MSzP post-Communists who have worn the Socialist label.

Among traditional parties existing prior to the Communist takeover were the Christian Democrats, who obtained twenty-one mandates, and the Smallholders' Party with forty-four parliamentary seats. They joined the overall winner of the election, the Democratic Forum, with 165 mandates out of a total 386. Apart from a small organisation and independent candidates, the remaining votes went to the League of Free Democrats (91) and their allies, the Young Democrats (21).

Four years later, new elections reversed this balance of power, but the

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parties who got through in 1990 still occupied the key positions, thus ensuring stability within alternations.

The two liberal parties constituted a not insignificant opposition to the governmental coalition. The Forum eventually made a pact with the Free Democrats concerning election procedures (and indeed the person) of the future president of the Republic as well as the principle of a two-thirds majority for voting in any fundamental legislation. For the first time in a century, the liberals became significant players on the political chessboard. Their result was essentially neither a triumph nor a failure. Thirty per cent of the electorate voted liberal (this included Young Democrat votes), a mark of respect with regard to the struggle of the Free Democrats against the former Communist regime. Their radicalism was a disadvantage, however, promising more upheaval than the majority of citizens – who desired change, but also the preservation of the social stability of the past – were prepared to support. The fundamental and intractable problem of the transition to democracy was reflected in this election. Despite being unknown to most until the late 1980s (except for a few writers, Sándor Csoóri, for example), the Forum, with its eclectic programme and composition, presented a more reassuring image. Thus the Forum, who liked to think of itself as national, Christian, liberal, social and anti-Communist, was invited to lead the coalition government – barring accidents – for four years.

Hungary's fifty-eighth government was led by a historian, József Antall, who died of illness before his term was over, and portfolios were distributed between the coalition parties.

In a closely fought referendum, the well-known and popular reform-Communist leader Imre Pozsgay was marginally thwarted in his attempt to be elected president of the Republic by popular suffrage by the Free Democrats. In the end, a president was elected by the Assembly and the highest office went to Árpád Göncz, to preside over the state for five years. Trained as a lawyer, a practising writer and translator, Göncz had spent five years in Kádár's prisons. He became the country's most popular statesman and was re-elected in 1995 for a second mandate. A constitution was drawn up to last until the creation of a new fundamental law. Without listing the institutions, it is safe to say that the Republic's foundations were now solid, based on the principle of a division of powers. An additional and very important institution was created, the Constitutional Court. Its role was to scrupulously monitor

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respect for the letter and the spirit of the fundamental laws, and even those of the 'Invisible Constitution', in the absence of a definitive charter.

Local self-government completed the new state structure. The traditional county councils now played a less significant role compared to the past. The 3,000 or so rural councils, towns and villages, on the other hand, were given substantial autonomy, while the activities of associations, important elements of a civil society, were less apparent.

POLITICAL LIFE

Hungarian democracy, now a solidly legal state, reached maturity under József Antall's government, the first to move from Socialism to democracy and capitalism; in other words, in the opposite direction to that of its predecessor. Its task was an arduous one, was undertaken seriously, and delivered results as far as the consolidation of the institutional system and respect for public and individual freedoms were concerned. Its foreign policy, resolutely European in outlook, was far from flawless, but one should distinguish between diplomatic conduct and the rhetoric that accompanied it. In terms of conduct – low-profile rather than hyper-active – there were blunders and hiccups, whereas the rhetoric was responsible for serious errors. Of course, the distinction is arbitrary since the state is one body, but in the circumstances, these errors will have to be attributed to the national ideology professed by the head of government – and shared by his minister – rather than those of everyday business.

The difficulty in distinguishing between professional mistakes, and those which were a consequence of excessive ideological intervention by the first government and its leader, exists in all domains. Antall, catapulted into his post by the leaders of the national–popular trend of the Democratic Forum, had to perform a balancing act between the different tendencies within his party and at the same time with the other components of the government majority. Thus, under pressure from the Smallholders, Antall undertook a double action to transform agricultural property structures in favour of a social class which had still to be invented, that of independent farmers. This consisted in two measures; firstly, the distribution of compensation coupons to enable former farmers to buy land; secondly, the introduction of a policy aimed at

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dismantling agricultural co-operatives. Both ended in failure. Compensations, extended, and rightly so, to other injured parties, disrupted the economy without really repairing the damage, and created chaos in the villages. Compensation coupons were often bought up by intermediaries, and few peasants were able to stay on properties acquired in this way. Moreover, the kolkhozes suffered huge damages without decreasing significantly in number: approximately 200 disappeared out of a total of 1,300. As for the net agricultural production index, it fell from 101.6 points in 1990 to 76.2, according to the 1993 statistics. This reduction can undoubtedly be attributed to the drying up of exports to the Soviet Union compounded by the financial burden of – now surplus – manpower. The national–popular wing of the governing party, claiming to draw upon the tradition of 'village explorer' writers, did not speak out against the decline in peasant living standards either.

Government action contributed to internal dissension in the Democratic Forum. Though József Antall had surrounded himself with trusted – and subordinate – ministers, the same compliance did not exist in the rest of his heterogeneous party, with its aspirations to be a rallying point. The right was far from being under his authority. One could even say that the contrary was true: it demanded the government's submission. In any case, both words and deeds seemed to slide increasingly towards authoritarianism. Profiting from its clear majority, the government set about aligning society as a whole to its own ideas – the media, culture, relationship with the Church, the fall in secularism, and the rise of intolerance towards alternative points of view. The future minister of the interior, Imre Kónya, adopted this position and a virtual war of attrition ensued against the director of radio, Csaba Gombár, and of television, Elemér Hankiss, to bring them into line – or boot them out. President of the Republic Árpád Göncz refused to countersign their letters of dismissal but, under pressure, the two men decided to resign anyway. It was only the beginning of this particular war. Antall's successor, Péter Boross, redoubled his zeal: undesirable collaborators were dismissed and replaced by a group of journalists from the former Communist regime converted to the extreme right's nationalist ideology.

To return to an earlier period, Antall found himself faced with the Forum's extreme right wing, especially its guiding force, the writer

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István Csurka. The latter professed nationalist, anti-Semitic and anti-liberal ideas, incompatible with the party's national-liberal image and the more moderate views of its majority. The prime minister took a long time to distance himself and put his house in order, however, due to political necessity and probably also to confused loyalties. Despite his weaknesses, Antall was a sincere democrat and would never have allowed his regime to be submerged by extremists. In the end, and perhaps this was Antall's best move, it was Csurka who, unable to get a hold over the Forum, broke away in order to develop his own movement, a Fascist party that would not speak its name.

The issue of punishment for those responsible for crimes committed under the Communist regime also occupied political centre stage and remained unresolved, perhaps unresolvable. The process hit legal obstacles, the statute of limitations in most cases, difficulties with defining the notion of crimes against humanity or simply the disappearance of the guilty party from the land of the living. Indeed, the incriminating facts dated back a long time and the men serving under the two decades of the Kádár regime, however responsible and morally guilty, were legally innocent. As in all post-Communist countries, the arm of justice reached as far as accusing the handful of officers who gave the orders to open fire on runaways or, in this case, 1956 demonstrators. Meanwhile the real delinquents, if they were not dead, lived out their retirement peacefully – secular justice could not touch them. As for settling scores with the *agents provocateurs* and other informants of the political police, neither the government nor the new security organisation ever made their list public. This did not fail to arouse cross-party and therefore widespread indignation, tempered, however, by an absence of the desire for revenge and softened by the passage of time or lenience. The loud demands for justice faded away. In the end, the aim of their protests was less to do with justice being done than to exploit the issue against their political opponents.

Another episode in this turbulent chapter was the war of attrition conducted against the president of the Republic and the Constitutional Court. Árpád Göncz enraged the head of government by refusing to sign certain laws, decrees and nominations considered constitutionally inadmissible. The Court often backed him, which in turn provoked a general outcry among supporters of the strong-arm tactics, thwarted by its judgements. Attacks against the president of the Republic went

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further: he was accused of participating in an 'International Jewish plot' against the nation.

Though such slander did not stop Parliament and government in pursuing their generally positive legislative and administrative programmes, political life was perturbed, and sometimes poisoned, by them. Parliamentary debates broadcast live on television often consisted in rows, sometimes prolonged on the small screen by no less edifying debates, interviews and commentaries. The seizure of the mass media proved counter-productive; it discredited the authorities rather than earning public approval. With the exception of a few newspapers, a free press continued to support the opposition rather than government action, engaging in generally justified criticism which, however, was often personal and unfounded. This in turn provoked lively responses from the people and parties affected, leading at times to the denigration of the independent press and journalists. All this was perhaps nothing more than froth on the surface of the sea; nonetheless, the insinuations and manifest intolerance damaged the political class as a whole.

OLD DEMONS AND NEW FEARS

This decline in public life nearly overshadowed more positive developments: the on the whole successful shift to a legal and democratic state in four years. It also damaged Hungary's image abroad, the reputation and respect it had gained through the 1956 revolution and the no doubt overrated but impressive 'liberalism' of recent decades. At the height of the turbulence, Hungary almost came to be seen as a nationalist and anti-Semitic country in the grip of its old demons. József Antall's ambiguity, and that of several ministers, compounded this impression – an aspect we will return to. However, though it was more than a storm in a teacup, the ripples made by a small group of right-wing intellectuals were excessive. They tarnished the country's image rather than reflecting the public mood and people's real concerns and fears. Fast-forwarding slightly, the extreme right's bitter defeat and the Democratic Forum's loss of credibility in the 1994 elections proves this indisputably.

At the heart of the debate was a spurious problem, that of 'Magyarity': since society was broadly homogeneous and its relations

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with small minorities, with the exception of the Gypsies, fairly unproblematic, questions about 'Magyarity' clearly related to one group (the Jews), one ideology (the alleged cosmopolitanism of those who were 'not Magyar enough'), and one policy (economic liberalism). Lastly, there was still the issue of Hungarians separated by frontiers.

Magyar minorities in neighbouring countries

This last issue, apart from its diplomatic aspects, had preoccupied three generations of Hungarians since the Treaty of Trianon and it was no different for the present one. Evidence of society's unceasing concern for them was everywhere: from the welcoming of refugees from Transylvania and Serbian voïvode, to organised fundraising and especially the value attributed to the human and cultural heritage which Hungarians on the other side of the frontier represented. The concern, both legitimate and enduring, had also probably been refined by experience. When it became apparent that the old frontiers would not be restored, the political solution seemed to be for all the region's countries to move towards a Europe with permeable boundaries, good neighbourliness, cultural and if possible territorial autonomy for minorities, and respect for individuals. It was a road that was long, full of obstacles and required both patience and assiduity. It was this state of mind that was troubled for some time by the ill-timed agitation on the part of the nationalists, brandishing the painful memory of Trianon like the banner of a crusade which, if not military, was certainly political and spiritual. Moreover, the spectre of an irredentist Hungary appeared on the horizon, inopportunely reinforced by certain actions and gestures on the part of the government. What is more, the nationalist revival was accompanied by an ideological campaign against the more moderate ideas, immediately branded as anti-patriotic. Whoever disagreed was denounced as not being a 'true Magyar' – one step away from being a 'traitor'. In this artificially overheated environment, the 'bad guys' included Jews, freemasons, cosmopolitans and liberals. The true issue became a political football.

It was to counter this instrumentalisation of reactionary ideologies that intellectuals of high moral and cultural standing, like György Konrád, Miklós Vásárhelyi, Miklós Mészöly and many others, created the 'Democratic Charter'. It became a vast movement of public opinion,

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notably protesting against campaigns directed at the president of the Republic or the liberal directors of radio and television. It was not only extremist circles that wanted to silence the Charter but the government too: the president of the National Bank, György Surányi, was fired on a false pretext but in fact for having signed the Charter.

Others taking part in this propaganda, apart from István Csurka, were fellow national-popular writers, populist-demagogic journalists of the radio and television, the World Society of Hungarians, presided over by the poet Sándor Csoóri, including eminent figures like the Protestant Bishop of Transylvania, László Tökés. Though a number of criticisms can be levelled at the Society, its natural vocation, apart from its cultural mission to converse with all Hungarians of the Diaspora, was on the whole to watch over the fate of geographically separated Hungarian minorities.

The problem of anti-Semitism

In the general cacophony, anti-Semitic voices were clearly audible despite virtuous protestations to the contrary. If anti-Semitism was not a social phenomenon it was to the credit of the Hungarians and not of the nationalists, who did their utmost to fan the flames, not realising perhaps the harm being caused to the nation. Rather than citing the distasteful remarks that were unfortunately aired by the international press, it needs to be restated that the false debate about 'Magyarity' was to do with questioning the Magyar identity of the Jews, a community historically integrated into the Hungarian nation and its culture. For a while, in the name of culture, the opposition between 'populists' and 'urbanites' was revived, clearly marked by anti-Semitism from the beginning. The flames soon died out and common sense prevailed. Anti-Semitism seems to be dying out; the bulk of the population are not receptive to it, the younger generation even less so. Anxiety about the future is undoubtedly a factor, but it is justified to believe that growing tolerance, respect for others and openness to the world have also played their part. It is this evolution, more than the law, which protects otherness, though legislation is also no doubt necessary in order to curb manifestations of racism. Unlike France, however, Hungary does not need to engage in court actions against aberrant 'negationist' university theses and other expressions of universal stupidity. Society seems to

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prefer dealing with extremist excesses through the effects of its political culture and the civilisation of mores, rather than deferring them to the penal system. Such an approach would in any case be as ineffectual as it is in other countries of the world.

The Gypsies

Such optimism is belied, however, by Hungarians attitudes towards the Gypsies. Whereas there is practically no discrimination towards Slav, Romanian and German ethnic minorities, the Gypsies are often despised and ill-treated. They are certainly by far the largest minority group. Compared to 30,000 Germans, 10–12,000 Slovakians, equal numbers of Romanians, a few thousand miscellaneous nationalities and a Jewish community of around 80,000, Gypsies officially number 142,000 according to 1990 statistics, though the real figure is probably twice that if not more. Apart from the numbers, which is inevitably a factor creating animosity, their way of life and customs contribute to this discrimination, as does a high rate of delinquency and begging. In this kind of situation everything explains all and nothing. The solution can only be a long process of education and adaptation on the part of the Gypsies, a process as lengthy as that of changing the public mentality. In the meantime, Gypsy delinquency continues to arouse hostility and sometimes violent racism. Conversely, the racist contempt dealt to them does not facilitate Gypsy integration and the efforts of their political and intellectual elite to achieve it. A vicious circle indeed.

JÓZSEF ANTALL'S ROLE

Upon his designation to the presidency of the Council of Ministers, József Antall went from being an unknown figure to dominating the cabinet which he formed in May 1990 and led for three years, until he was struck by illness, then death. For some he was a high-calibre statesman and a charismatic individual; for others, a mediocre politician without exceptional qualities and an able manipulator, compulsively self-important. His true nature is no doubt inscrutable, but if his words and deeds are anything to go by, Antall believed his was a special vocation and that he was chosen to fulfil the destiny which conjunction of circumstance bestowed upon him: that of leading the transformation of

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the system. He went about it with the courage of his convictions and the narrow-mindedness that characterises missionaries of every age.

Modernity and anachronism

As soon as one tries to extract the meaning of his actions, one comes up against a complex, diffuse and even confused picture. As the cliché puts it, Antall wanted to be all things to all men: nationalist, Christian, liberal, social, democratic, populist and elitist. Behind the cliché, however, was the vague outline of a genuinely conservative and at the same time nationalist society. To see a return to a 'Horthy model', as some of Antall's detractors did, is excessive. The prime minister's politics, shaped, it is said, within the bosom of his family – his father was a politician known for his enlightened attitudes – and his knowledge of contemporary Europe makes such a mistaken perspective on his part unlikely. Moreover, the social basis for such a turn did not exist and the government leader's resolutely pro-European stance would have made an anachronism of this kind unthinkable. He initially seemed to brand his governmental policies with a liberalism tempered by conservatism, following the example of nineteenth-century Hungarian reformers. André Reszler highlights his attachment to this tradition and the inspiration he received from the writings of Wilhelm Röpke and the chancellors of the revived Germany, Konrad Adenauer and Ludwig Erhard. It is nonetheless true that Antall did try to shape the country, subtly by words and deeds, using an anachronistic and imaginary model, and ignoring the reality of Europe and of Hungarian society. According to Sándor Révész, he was the government leader of a 'virtual society'.

The government has often been chastised for having burnt its bridges in its otherwise legitimate haste to eliminate the vestiges of Soviet occupation as soon as possible. This might well have lost them a market impossible to quantify. In fact, nothing irreparable was done with respect to Moscow and this huge eastern neighbour was soon no longer Russia but the Ukraine, with which Budapest concluded its first bilateral state treaty in the region, apart from Austria, a friend from the start. Less welcomed, on the other hand, was the 'accompanying speech' which was aimed at the Soviet Union's role, down to its role as warmonger. Forgetting that Hungary had been Hitler's ally and had also been at war with America and England, Hungarian aggression was

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dressed up as an anti-Bolshevik crusade in its political-ideological discourse. The purpose of the speech was certainly in part an attempt to pay tribute to the soldiers who died at the front (which Sándor Sára had already done through his films without resorting to political justifications). However, it was also a veiled bid to rehabilitate Hungarian participation in the war. Hungary was entirely alone in attempting these justifications, while at the same time protesting against being designated Nazi Germany's last satellite. All the other countries, led by Germany, aligned themselves with the new order of the victorious side. This anti-Bolshevik and passé Don Quixotism would have gone unnoticed if other events had not inopportunely acted as reminders.

One such case was the repatriation of Horthy's ashes, thirty-five years after his death in exile, a humanely irreproachable act. However, despite the family's dignity and discretion, it was exploited by the right in order to stage a political demonstration. Antall simply sent a wreath but it was one wreath too many laid at Horthy's feet. The right-wing press paid homage and several cabinet members filed past his tomb – avowedly as private citizens.

Ambiguous arguments

The same ambiguity characterised Antall's attitude towards neighbouring countries where 3 million Hungarians lived. It would not be sagacious to accuse Hungarian diplomacy and its leader, Géza Jeszenszky, of professional errors – at worst, they committed a few gaffes. The treaty with Ukraine had been prepared by diplomats, who were prepared to bear the brunt of reactions to the clause which renounced territorial demands, in accordance with the United Nations Charter. In their relations with other neighbouring countries, the interests of the Hungarian minorities were always at the centre of diplomatic concerns, and indeed it was an issue strongly supported by public opinion, always sensitive to the problem. The 'accompanying speech' with its nationalist overtones, on the other hand, was rather more than society bargained for, not to mention its damaging repercussions on nearby countries and beyond. Hungary was certainly in a position to ask for reparation for the wrongs committed against Hungarians in Romania, Slovakia and Serbian voïvode and the failure to respect European regulations. The noisy evocation of the injustice of Trianon, however,

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tended to have the opposite effect, as did József Antall's celebrated speech in which he declared that in his soul he felt like the prime minister of 15 million Hungarians, 3 million of whom were, let it not be forgotten, Romanian, Slovak, Serbian, Croatian, Ukranian and even a few Austrian citizens.

József Antall also misread the patriotic feelings of the majority and adopted the image of a man of the past. The prime minister reinforced this impression of being stuck in the past by giving moral and history lessons at events commemorating the 1956 revolution and on other occasions. The lessons were protracted, heavy and peremptory. A people attached to their country, cultural identity and traditions do not like being lectured. The message did not get through.

József Antall's numerous qualities attenuate this judgement, of course, but a certain arrogance coupled with anachronism were a considerable impediment in Hungary's progress towards Europe and modernity. An honest man, deeply attached to his values, Antall created in his own mind 'a particular idea of Hungary' and perhaps missed the opportunity of shaping an idea that was better adapted. As Miklós Vásárhelyi has pointed out, in one respect, Antall remained above reproach: a true democrat, the former prime minister left the field open to the voice of the people and for alternations of power. A putsch under Antall? 'Unthinkable', states one of his biographers, hardly an indulgent critic in other respects.

After Antall's death in December 1993, Péter Boross led the government until the legislative elections in May 1994 and the formation of another coalition under the presidency of the socialist Gyula Horn.

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

When the Communist regime came to an end, Hungary was one of the front runners. Despite the fall in its GNP and other negative indices, it was considered the best prepared among Socialist countries for the transition towards a market economy. In reality, the glass was half full, half empty; real progress existed alongside a good deal of sham. Superficial flash was being financed without any provision for paying back the debt: 21 billion dollars at the end of the Communist regime, 2,000 dollars per capita, including newborns. The fiction of full employment was maintained; a dilapidated industry was kept afloat by subsidies as

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was a flourishing but expensive agriculture. The macro-economic imbalance was nonetheless manageable, with sufficient reserves of hard currency and, thanks to Hungary's reputation, its credit rating was intact. The importance of private enterprise is difficult to quantify, but it constituted without a doubt a large and dynamic sector. So much for the past.

From 1990, through an economic policy resolutely geared towards the market, Hungary could have maintained its lead and come out of the transformational throes at least as rapidly and as well as Poland. At the outset, Antall's government took the right direction with (insufficient) measures aimed at stabilising public finances, the launch of privatisation and other reforms which involved, certainly unpopular, restrictions. On the other hand, its policies went against economic objectives, notably because of reparation costs and a lack of courage in tackling an over-developed social security system, bureaucracy and state expenses. Timid measures to free prices met with predictable consumer resistance, causing government to fear an explosion of discontent and ensuing social instability. In other words, 'classic' problems of transition arose. One well-publicised incident illustrates these hesitations: during a strike by taxi drivers protesting against the rise in petrol prices, the government, faced with traffic paralysis, panicked and decided to use force, then changed its mind – subsequently reducing the price increase.

Just as indecisive was their handling of privatisation and of foreign debt. In four years, the Antall government had added 8 billion extra dollars to this debt, bringing the total owed to more than 30 billion and a huge budgetary deficit, almost 7 per cent of GNP. Privatisation certainly succeeded in attracting foreign capital – with an influx of 7 billion dollars of direct investments, the best figure among former Socialist countries. Here too, the glass was half full, half empty: state or council ownership remained dominant. The state spent four out of every ten forints, GNP fell 30 per cent, unemployment was at 12 per cent of the population, inflation fluctuated at around 30 per cent.

Everywhere one looked, living conditions were deteriorating; enormous sacrifices were demanded of the population, with no evidence that the high price of transformation would lead to the state's financial recovery, to structural reform and, lastly, to growth. It would be erroneous to attribute all the responsibility to the government entirely. Apart

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from the inherited burden, world recession was also a major contributory factor. It is also understandable for a government to try and navigate between Scylla and Charybdis, in its best political interests: the necessary restrictions and the threatening social crisis. If it did not take draconian measures, it would soon be accused of being lax and populist. If it did, it was accused of being a lackey of the International Monetary Fund. The road from Socialism to capitalism had never been explored before. As the most respectable economists pointed out, you could make fish goulash out of an aquarium but no one had ever succeeded in doing the contrary.

It would have been difficult to do better than the first free government. Its economic balance was nonetheless mixed until mid-term and frankly negative during the last two years. Until c. 1993, exports kept the economy afloat and the entry of foreign capital helped maintain a balance. Furthermore, the dynamic development of the private sector was full of promise. There was an apparent slowdown, however, and the threat of insolvency hovered in the air. Then the landslide elections of May 1994 changed the political landscape completely.

RETURN OF THE SOCIALISTS

The verdict of the ballot box was unequivocal, it was a vote of censure. The discredited Democratic Forum lost more than half its electorate and obtained only 38 mandates. Of the two other conservative parties in the coalition, the Christian Democratic Party won an extra seat (22), while the Smallholders (26) lost almost half of theirs. The semi-majority system enabled the overall winners – the Socialists – to gain an absolute majority in Parliament (209). The Free Democrats remained slightly below the 20 per cent level of votes (69 seats) and their former allies, the Young Democrats – for a long time ahead in the opinion polls – won 20 mandates. The extreme right and the Communist Workers' Party were literally swept aside, along with most of the smaller parties (two seats). As in the 1990 election, the Social Democratic Party was practically absent.

The fact that the same six parties shared the 384 seats in the Assembly demonstrated a degree of stability, with one major difference: the Socialist MSzP, with its absolute majority, could have governed alone. Gyula Horn, its leader and future prime minister, decided otherwise.

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The Free Democrats were invited into government by the Socialist Party, if only in order to share responsibilities. This unnatural coalition of two former mortal enemies was formed in June 1994. There was nothing innovatory about the Horn government's political programme. On the other hand, its audacity in economic matters was, for a Socialist party, astonishing. Its 'hard and sharp' stabilisation programme was rather more liberal in tone than Socialist, despite being the brainchild of the socialist László Békesi, finance minister. However, the Békesi programme remained on paper. For eight months, no serious measures were introduced. Gyula Horn even got rid of his finance minister, creating doubts as to his political commitment to recovery. Then, against all expectations, the unenviable and vacant post of chancellor of the exchequer was filled by a neo-liberal economist called Lajos Bokros. At the same time, another liberal, György Surányi, fired by Antall's government, returned to the presidency of the National Bank: it was a dramatic turn of events.

On 12 March 1995, the new finance minister presented a programme of restrictions to Parliament called the 'Bokros package'. For some, it was the first time that the restoration of the budgetary balance had been seriously addressed. Among the many measures was the reduction in social loans from a providential state, soon provoking a general outcry, and Bokros became, without a doubt, the most hated man in Hungary for four decades. His 'package' had nonetheless been approved by Parliament, with predictable reticence on the part of several Socialist deputies and of the unions.

The Bokros package was duly carried out, going beyond even the monetary measures prescribed by the IMF: a rehaul of the tax and customs-duty systems; 11 per cent devaluation of the florin, with devaluation on a sliding scale; deregulation; reform of the health service and pensions; plans for the reform of state finances. Considerable savings were made but these measures weighed heavily on the population at large: real income fell by 11 per cent, along with social benefits and provisions. Dissatisfaction grew, as did a nostalgia for the 'good old days' or relative (and artificially maintained) prosperity under Kádár. However, people did not take to the streets. From 1987, pensioners and other underprivileged sections of society began to feel the benefits of economic growth, a growth largely due to the dynamic privatised industries (80 per cent), to the hundreds of billions of florins gained from

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Plate 48. President of the Republic Árpád Göncz (centre) at the official formation of the new government, 8 July 1998, with, on the left, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and, on the right, President of the National Assembly János Áder

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privatisation, and to the influx of foreign capital. The state was able to spend 8 billion DM on reorganising the economy and repaying foreign debts. The foundations of growth were in place, but this did not alleviate the poverty of about 20 per cent of the population, among them the gypsies. And the none too rich, but satisfied, lower middle classes of the Kádár era disappeared.

Social and national problems came into focus alongside the economic reforms: anti-Semitism, corruption, public disorder. The capital, and other cities to a lesser extent, became headquarters to the underworld. In four years, 140 bomb explosions (allegedly perpetrated by the mafia) remained unsolved. Public opinion accused the police of complicity. Budapest, once known as a 'safe' city, was being taken over by organised crime imported from Russia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia.

The government's four years in office were studded with corruption scandals – obscure bank dealings, assignments of public funds, mafia connections. Leading the opposition was FIDESZ (who would win the 1998 elections). FIDESZ represented a new force on the political stage. Its image was national and bourgeois, tinged with anti-Semitism, though throughout the ten years of change, the main instigators of these tendencies was István Csurka's extreme right-wing party, MIEP. FIDESZ proceeded to exploit the weaknesses of the government, even succeeding in turning the Socialist party's few merits – its ideological neutrality and economic pragmatism – to its disadvantage. In addition, the already declining popularity of the SZDSZ was severely tarnished by its involvement in a major scandal.

Though the Horn government fell at the 1998 elections, it lost only part of its support: of 4.5 million votes it received 1.5 in the first round and 1.9 in the second, nominally little more than FIDESZ. However, the extremely complex, part proportional, part majority electoral system went in favour of the latter. Of 388 mandates, FIDESZ gained 148, its ally, the Smallholders' Party 48. The rest of the parties preferred to support FIDESZ in Parliament, including 14 MPs from the right-wing MIEP, led by Csurka.

ELEVEN HUNDRED YEARS ON THE BANKS OF THE DANUBE

A country's history has no conclusion but carries on. The sediment of past centuries, however, goes with it. The Magyars came from the

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steppes and settled on the great route of invaders from the east. The armies of the Roman Empire passed through long ago and Pannonia was subsequently the extreme eastern limit of the Carolingians, until Hungary itself became the ramparts of the Roman Christian European civilisation it had adopted. A country of armies and fronts, it paid a high price in order to maintain its geopolitical position against the winds and the tides.

Apart from the military and political consequences, demographic, economic and social evolution in Hungary also bear the marks of several centuries of struggle for independence and a national identity. While being at the heart of geographical and cultural Europe, it missed out on the extraordinary development of modern and contemporary Western Europe. It adopted a particular social model, a kind of 'third Europe' between the West and the East, so ingeniously described and analysed by the historian, Jenö Szücs. Its struggles, followed by the close links it wisely established with Austria, were not entirely to Hungary's advantage. Two great wars and their catastrophic consequences completed a history of ancient greatness and centuries of tribulations.

The Hungarians undoubtedly have a tendency to see all their misfortunes as originating elsewhere – with some justification. The catastrophes that descended upon the country have more than once broken their prodigious capacity for facing adversity and making up for lost time. But perhaps they too easily forget the shortcomings of their own society, and of their collective mentality, which István Bibó called 'distorted Hungarian conformity, the impasse of Hungarian history'.

The author of this work has tried to trace *sine ira et studio* this long history, omitting neither the troubles that came from elsewhere nor those created by its own distortions. If he did so without hiding his feelings of affection, then let he who is immune throw the first stone.

In 1996 Hungary commemorated its eleven hundred years on the banks of the Danube. Let us hope that this splendid anniversary will turn out to have marked a truly new and auspicious beginning.

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