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Hungary between East and West: The Ottoman Turkish Legacy

In terms of geography, Hungary, or, in a wider sense, the Carpathian Basin, is held to lie in the heart of Europe, insofar as Europe is conceived in the traditional way as stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural mountains. Yet it is also commonly said that the territory of Hungary straddles the “highway of peoples”, as the westernmost plain of the great Eastern Steppe, for it was through this area that the peoples passed on their way from East to West in the Middle Ages, some of them settling here only to disappear in the ruins of history (such as the Sarmatians, the Gepids, the Huns, the Avars and others). *Magyars* (Hungarians) are likewise a people of eastern origins, which, according to the most recent scholarly view, was formed sometime during the first half of the first millennium B.C., and thus can look back on some three thousand years of history. This ethnic group changed its way of life at least twice thereafter, undergoing a transformation first from a society of hunters and fishers into nomadic horsemen and then gradually turning from nomads into settled farmers. Their settlement area also changed frequently. Beginning with an original homeland beyond the Ural mountains, they spent a long time in the steppe area of present day Russia and the Ukraine before crossing the Carpathian mountains to settle in their present homeland at the end of the ninth century.¹ Their culture was accordingly exposed to multiple external influences, and as a result the people itself was profoundly transformed (in terms of material culture, music and religious beliefs) from Finno-Ugrian to Turkic nomad. (The memory of this change lives on in the most commonly used foreign name of the *Magyars*: Onogur being the root of term – more widespread in international usage than Magyar – Hungarian, Ungarn, vengerskij, Hongrois, etc.) As nomadic Turks they took hold of their ultimate homeland, where, as we shall shortly see, they were quickly converted into full-fledged Europeans. Yet despite these shifts and changes, Hungarians, as we shall now call them, have demonstrated an almost unparalleled continuity in terms of the basic

¹ TÜRK, A.: A korai magyar történet kutatásának új régészeti programja [= The new archaeological program of scholarship on early Hungarian history]. *Magyar Régészet* Online Magazin 2012 summer, 1–6.

characteristics that define a people. Over the course of some three millennia they have been able to preserve their common set of symbols (basically their language) and an ability to differentiate/separate themselves from other ethnic groups, an ability that has found manifestation in their own enduring self-denomination.² Peoples that came into contact with the Hungarians called them variously Bashkir, Onogur/Ungri, Turk, Madžar, or Schytian, etc., but in their own eyes the Hungarians always remained a separate people, whose name was first *Magyer* and then *Magyar*. This was achieved by only a handful of the many ancient peoples of the steppe, perhaps most noticeably by the Oguz-Turks, the founders of modern Turkey and its predecessor, the Ottoman Empire.

Although the Hungarians, who invaded and then settled the Carpathian Basin, occupied the geographical middle of Europe and have since been part of Western or European civilisation, over the course of the last millennium they have mostly been relegated to the margins of that civilisation. And they have generally been entirely aware of this. Before speaking about this frontier situation and experience, which profoundly influenced both the history of Hungary and the mentality of its inhabitants, it is worth pausing to offer a few words regarding what I mean by the West or Europe, and why I maintain that this eastern people has essentially been transformed into a European one. In order to answer this question, I invoke Rémy Brague, a French philosopher who in my view has offered one of the best interpretations of “Europe”.³ In his opinion, the uniqueness of European civilisation lies in its Roman roots, the Latinity that grew from these roots, and Latin Christianity. This model is based on the concept of repeated new starts, the constant rediscovery and reinterpretation of ancient cultural heritage, and the transfer of tradition between the past and the continuously changing present. Consequently, the history of Europe can be regarded as a series of renaissances over the course of which the West has expanded incessantly, both in a territorial and an intellectual sense, acquiring during this process an unparalleled capacity for self-reflection. This capacity for self-reflection in turn gave rise to a tendency towards constant spiritual and technical renewal, the creation of dynamic structures, and, most importantly, the separation of the spiritual from the temporal (in the long run, of the church from the state), which is its most

² RÓNA-TAS, A.: *A honfoglaló magyar nép. Bevezetés a korai magyar történelem ismeretébe* [= The conquering Hungarian people. Introduction to early Hungarian history]. Budapest 1996, 20ff; FODOR, I.: Az ősmagyarság etnikai tudata és a Csodaszarvas-monda [= The ethnic knowledge of early Hungarians and the legend of the miracle stag]. In *Csodaszarvas. Őstörténet, vallás és néphagyomány*. II. Ed. Á. MOLNÁR. Budapest 2006, 9–39.

³ BRAGUE, R.: *Europe, la voie romaine*. Paris 1993 (I used the Hungarian translation: BRAGUE, R.: *Európa. A római modell. Elsajátított önazonosság*. Piliscsaba 1994).

distinctive feature. It was to this Latin Europe, the so-called *Respublica Christiana*, that the Hungarians, having settled in the geographical middle of Europe, attached themselves after some hesitation (that is, a brief initial orientation towards Byzantium), soon becoming acknowledged members of this civilisation. Thereafter, Hungary partook of the continuous “renaissance” that is so characteristic of the West/Europe. Even if with some delay and less intensity and prevalence, all forms of Western cultural evolution appeared in Hungary and influenced its culture, including the Romanesque and Gothic styles, humanism and the Renaissance, mannerism and baroque, classicism, rococo, romanticism, and avant-garde.

Although the Hungarians and the peoples living together with them imported European civilisation into the Carpathian Basin fairly quickly, as noted above in reality the country has remained on the fringes of Europe ever since. This is true in two senses. First, it was here that Europe ended culturally: to the east and south lay the territory of Byzantine civilisation (or commonwealth), where the relationship between state and society, church and state was entirely different.⁴ Second, the Carpathians also constituted the political and military frontier of the *Occidens*.⁵ From beyond the Carpathians and the border rivers new waves of eastern peoples continued to assault the Kingdom of Hungary, which, as one of the strongest states of contemporary Europe, won considerable respect through the wars of defence against them. The Hungarian kings assumed titles such as “defender of Christianity”, “champion of Christ”, or “warrior of the Christian faith”, and their kingdom was regarded throughout Europe as its eastern “gate” (*porta*). The Hungarian Kingdom not only blocked the attacks launched from the East (for instance, the Mongol invasion or the raids of the Golden Horde), but, with the support of the papacy, it also led a series of “missionary” campaigns against the neighbouring countries and regions, the Patarens/Bogomils and Eastern Christians, who were regarded as “heretics”, “schismatics” or simply

⁴ OBOLENSKY, D.: *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500–1453*. Crestwood–New York 1982. Here I will not enlarge upon the on-going debates on the regional place of Hungary and the concept of “Central Europe”. I only mention that I fundamentally follow the “three Europe” model of J. SZÚCS (*Les Trois Europes*. Préface de F. BRAUDEL. Paris 1985), even if the notion of “Central Europe” as understood by him and other authors (cf. HOREL, C.: *Cette Europe que'on dit centrale. Des Habsbourg à l'intégration européenne 1815–2004*. Paris 2009) as a historical reality with a long history has attracted serious criticism. See, for instance, TODOROVA, M.: *Imagining the Balkans. Updated Edition*. Oxford 2009, esp. 140–60.

⁵ BEREND, N.: *At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims and 'Pagans' in Medieval Hungary c. 1000 – c. 1300*. Cambridge 2001, 6–41.

“rebels”. It was during one of these campaigns that the king of Hungary first encountered Ottoman troops (in 1375).⁶

Yet it was not only military activities that continued to attach the “westernised” Hungarians to the East. Hungary in the Árpád age (900–1301) continuously welcomed settlers belonging to various Eastern peoples in great numbers: Muslim Ismaelites, later also called *böszörmény* and *káliz*, who played an important role in the financial administration of the country, and also Pechenegs, Jews, Cumans and Yazigs (Alans).⁷ The Hungarians also remembered that part of this Hungarian people had not come to the new homeland, but had remained somewhere in the East, and on the eve of the Mongol invasion they were indeed sought out and visited by the king’s envoys. The story of the miracle stag, which is considered the legend of the origins of the Hungarians, has also preserved the memory of the role played by several eastern peoples (Onogur Turkic, Bulgarian, Alan) in the Hungarian ethnogenesis. Whether the Hungarians (especially one of their branches, the Székelys) or the ruling dynasty of the Árpáds were related or otherwise connected to the Huns and their great king Atilla, or, alternatively, whether they ever cherished such a tradition is a matter of constant and heated debate even today. Although most scholars regard the relationship as a late, thirteenth-century intellectual construction, the alternative view, according to which the medieval Hungarians were attached by an unbroken conceptual relationship to this people (which had a terrible reputation in the West) has recently won increasing support.⁸ The *Székely* script, for example, a type of the Western Turkic runic scripts, was apparently preserved during the Middle Ages in the eastern part of the country.⁹ What remains a fact is that most Hungarians had continued to believe firmly until as late as the end of the nineteenth century that they were indeed the descendants of the Huns and Atilla. Hungary was thus successfully and completely integrated into Latin Europe, while, so to say, culturally the country always kept an

⁶ FODOR, P.: The View of the Turk in Hungary: the Apocalyptic Tradition and the Red Apple in Ottoman–Hungarian Context. In *Les traditions apocalyptiques au tournant de la chute de Constantinople*. Actes de la Table Ronde d’Istanbul (13–14 avril 1996). Éd. B. LELLOUCHE–S. YERASIMOS. Varia Turcica XXXIII. Paris–Montréal 1999, 99.

⁷ GYÖRFFY, Gy.: *A magyarság keleti elemei* [= Eastern elements of the Hungarian people]. Budapest 1990; SZÉKELY, Gy.: Les contacts entre Hongrois et Musulmans aux IX^e–XII^e siècles. In *The Muslim East. Studies in Honour of Julius Germanus*. Ed. Gy. KÁLDY-NAGY. Budapest 1974, 53–74; BEREND (n. 5).

⁸ SZABADOS, Gy.: Attila-ós, a sólyomforma madár és a fehér elefánt [= Ancestor Attila, the falcon-shaped bird, and the white elephant]. In *Világügyelő. Tanulmányok Hoppál Mihály 70. születésnapjára*. Eds. J. CZÖVEK–V. DYEKISS–Zs. SZILÁGYI. Budapest 2012, 416–25.

⁹ BENKŐ, E.: *A középkori Székelyföld I.* [= The Székely Land in the Middle Ages]. Budapest 2012, 48–59.

eye on the East and refused to let this component of its identity fall into oblivion. Yet in all decisive situations and at all major turning points, the leaders of the Hungarians opted for the West, whatever the costs. This is what happened at the time of the Mongol invasion, when, by engaging the invader in defence of the country and the West, Hungary suffered a terrible demographic catastrophe. The Mongol invasion was a real turning point in the sense that it left an indelible mark on the mindset of the Hungarians, which, moreover, was later strengthened by new impulses. It was then that the belief according to which this great eastern invasion was a scourge visited by God upon the country and the Christian world in general on account of the sins of mankind (a belief that had a long tradition in Europe) first spread among the Hungarians. It provided a conceptual frame of reference within which the Ottoman Turkish raids, which began 150 years later, could be interpreted.¹⁰

Over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Latin West came to face again a major Muslim attack, the second after the great Arab invasion. This time, it appeared in the form of the Ottoman Empire. This great power was formed in the early fourteenth century and seems from the outset to have set three aims for itself to achieve simultaneously: 1. to restore, as completely as possible, the Islamic commonwealth under its own leadership; 2. to defeat and incorporate the Byzantine commonwealth; 3. to re-establish the universal Roman Empire by besieging the Latin world.¹¹ After Byzantium and the core area of orthodox civilisation had fallen by 1453 and some of the frontier states (Venice in the Mediterranean and Poland in the north-eastern front) had chosen the path of cooperation instead of conflict, by the early sixteenth century the burden of halting Ottoman expansion was borne primarily by Hungary and her Austrian–German–Czech–Moravian hinterland and also by the Spanish empire of Charles V. Hungary was hit by the first Ottoman attack in 1390, after which the country was never entirely free of war until as late as the treaty of Passarowitz in 1718. This obviously had very serious consequences that decisively influenced the fate of the country. But, before speaking about this and the relationship between the Hungarians and the conquerors, it is worth taking a moment to examine briefly the European dimensions of this new encounter of West and East.

Over the course of the past thirty–forty years, historians have made it clear that the traditional view of Ottoman expansion, which discerned nothing but sharp conflict between Europe and the Ottomans and spoke of

¹⁰ FODOR (n. 6) 104–105.

¹¹ See FODOR, P.: The Ottoman Empire, Byzantium and Western Christianity. The Implications of the Siege of Belgrade, 1456. *AOrientHung* 61/1–2 (2008) 47.

a struggle between two worlds equally determined in terms of ideology and religion, is no longer tenable.¹² Indeed, the formative role of the Ottomans in the birth of modern Europe is increasingly emphasized. The renowned specialist of Spanish history, John Elliott, opined for instance that the Ottoman menace had a twofold effect on the West. On the one hand, it prompted unity, since smaller states were compelled to seek the help of their larger neighbours. The leaders of the Habsburg Empire did not hesitate to profit from the opportunity in order to increase their authority. On the other hand, in return for the support that they needed in order to wage war against the Ottomans, both the emperor and the kings were obliged to make concessions to local forces and divergent confessions, which made possible, for instance, the survival of Protestantism. Thus “European history may be regarded as the history of a continuing dialectic between the aspiration toward unity and the pressure for diversity. The empire of Süleyman inserted itself into this dialectic at a critical moment in European development. The threat posed by Islam gave a powerful impetus to the yearnings for Christian unity ... But, the stronger the pressure for unity, the greater the resistance ... The European world that emerged from the sixteenth-century confrontation with Islam was a world set on the path of political, religious and cultural pluralism.”¹³ In other words, the pluralist structure (based on confessional communities and nation states) that gradually emerged in Europe in these centuries would probably have been impossible without the Ottomans. And this is not all. For, in a sense, by the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the Ottomans themselves, although still stigmatized as the “arch-enemies of Christianity”, had become part of the emerging modern European political system. Just as the Ottomans became interested in breaking Christian unity, so some European states began to use the Ottoman alliance as a means of maintaining the European balance of power. The Ottoman card was used first and foremost by France, but cooperation was profitable for the Ottomans as well. Of equal importance with regard to the birth of modern Europe was the economic cooperation that developed between the European trading nations and the Ottomans in the Levantine commerce. The trade that was carried out by the Genoese and the Venetians, and later the French, the English and the Dutch in the Near East provided a source of accumulation

¹² GOFFMAN, D.: *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge 2002; İNALCIK, H.: Mutual Political and Cultural Influences between Europe and the Ottomans. In *Ottoman Civilization 2*. Eds. H. İNALCIK–G. RENDA. Ankara 2004², 1048–1089; *The Ottomans and Europe. Travel, Encounter and Interaction from the Early Classical Period until the End of the 18th Century*. Ed. S. KENAN. İstanbul 2010.

¹³ ELLIOTT, J.: Ottoman–Habsburg Rivalry: The European Perspective. In *Süleyman the Second and His Time*. Eds. H. İNALCIK–C. KAFADAR. İstanbul 1993, 161–62.

of wealth for the emerging European capitalist system the importance of which cannot be overemphasised. Closely related to this was the fact that Istanbul, the capital city of the Ottoman Empire, became one of the centres of early modern diplomacy where gradually all the major European states established standing embassies and where they fought not so much against the Ottomans as against one another for the resources available in Ottoman territories. It is worth remarking that, whereas according to the traditional view modern diplomacy (that is, standing embassies, etc.) was born in fifteenth-century Italy, according to a more recent opinion it evolved from the so-called capitulation system of the Ottomans, the basic structures of which can already be discerned in the fourteenth century.¹⁴

Yet the European integration of the Ottomans clearly had its limits. Although in the eyes of a minority (primarily French intellectuals such as Guillaume Postel, Jean Bodin and others) the Ottomans were highly praised, especially on account of their presumed religious tolerance, the great majority of Europeans firmly refused both intellectually and emotionally to accept the Turks as equals. Even the great Hugo Grotius, the father of natural law, was of the opinion that the fight against the Ottomans was the common cause of Europe. And it is exactly here that another important contribution of the Ottomans to modern Europe can be identified: eventually, the presence in Europe of this power and its long-feared military force helped maintain the idea of European unity and bring forth the concept of federalism. The majority of European thinkers – from pope Pius II (who in the fifteenth century referred to Europe for the first time as a “common hearth and homeland”) to those who dreamt up the great plans of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – imagined that European unity could be based on an alliance formed in order to ensure the expulsion of the Ottomans and the resulting victorious war. From the seventeenth century on this was closely connected to the idea of a worldwide Christian mission in preparation for colonisation, which already served both the realisation and the justification of European dominance.¹⁵ Consequently, the Ottomans were denied admission into the family of European peoples until as late as 1856, the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Crimean War. It is true, however, that the Ottomans themselves had laid no serious claim to such admission before the nineteenth

¹⁴ GOFFMAN, D.: Negotiating with the Renaissance State: the Ottoman Empire and the New Diplomacy. In *The Early Modern Ottomans. Remapping the Empire*. Eds. V. H. AKSAN – D. GOFFMAN. Cambridge 2007, 61–74.

¹⁵ BÓKA, É.: *Európa és az Oszmán Birodalom. Az európai egység gondolat politikai eszmetörténetének kezdetei* [= Europe and the Ottoman Empire. The beginnings of the political history of the notion of European unity]. Budapest 2004.

century, for they had been unwilling to give up an international policy based on jihad, that is, conquest, before they were fatally weakened. On the other hand, the presence and relations of the Ottomans in Europe encouraged Western debates on emerging absolutism. Its protagonists, such as Bodin, looked on the sultan's authority as a kind of model to follow, whereas others used the presumed despotism of the Ottoman state as an intellectual weapon to be wielded against the notion of absolute royal power. Either way, the Ottomans loomed large in the European mind throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the European attitude towards them was as ambiguous then as it is today (in other words the question still remains, "to grant them admission or not to grant them admission").

Naturally, the Ottoman problem concerned the Hungarians most directly, for they stood on the frontline and this time proved unable to halt the East at their own borders. The "East" is used here not in a metaphorical sense: we know from the writings of an Ottoman literate who took part in the decisive battle at Mohács (1526) that the Ottoman ruler had set out against Hungary as the representative of the East, the rising Sun, who wanted to bring the West to its knees.¹⁶ An Ottoman-Turkish scholar had already interpreted the Ottoman campaign that had ended with the capture of Belgrade five years earlier as revenge for the invasion of Asia Minor by the German crusaders.¹⁷ Having won the battle of Mohács and taken Buda, the capital city of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary (1541), the Ottoman troops occupied the middle parts of the country, some 120,000 square kilometres in all, and simultaneously made attempts to crush the Habsburgs, who had secured for themselves the Hungarian royal crown. The failure of the Ottomans and the ensuing stalemate between the two great powers led to a division of Hungary. The western part was retained by the Hungarian Kingdom of the Habsburgs, the middle was subjected to Ottoman rule, and in the east the Transylvanian Principality was born, governed by Hungarians under Ottoman overlordship. Consequently, the frontier between East and West now ran through the very heart of Hungary, splitting the Hungarian people and the area in which they had settled in half in the form of two opposing systems of border fortresses. Ceaseless violence and the complete militarisation of life caused immeasurable damage to the basic structures of Hungary. An important part of the infrastructure was destroyed, the medieval settlement structure was undermined, most of the former urban

¹⁶ SUDÁR, B.: A végítélet könyve. Oszmán elbeszélő forrás a mohácsi csatáról [= The Book of Judgement. Ottoman narrative source about the battle of Mohács]. *Történelmi Szemle* 52/3 (2010) 399, 403, 405, 410.

¹⁷ LEWIS, B.: *The Muslim Discovery of Europe*. New York–London 1982, 165.

centres declined, the gravitational points of economic development shifted, and the whole process was topped by a real demographic catastrophe (with a loss in some regions of 70 to 90 per cent of the population). The Hungarian population suffered dire losses and the ethnic groups that had hitherto lived on the marches of the medieval kingdom gained ground. The proportion of Hungarians within multi-ethnic Hungary sank from 75–80% to below 50% by the end of the period of Ottoman rule. It is thus not without reason that some people detect in this period the roots of Hungary's post-World War I dismemberment. Similar damage was suffered by the centres and institutions of the Hungarian cultural and religious network. Hundreds of noble courts and monasteries were destroyed, both in the territory of Ottoman and Habsburg Hungary, and the number of parishes decreased sharply as well.¹⁸ Yet in the long run the greatest and almost incurable harm was caused by the fact that with the accession of the Habsburgs the royal court was removed from Hungary. This deprived the Hungarians of the organisational centre that elsewhere in the West shaped the framework of the nation state in the early modern era by homogenizing territory, population and language, and by supporting culture. To give but one example, whereas in France it was decreed as early as 1539 that French, the language of the court, should be used in state administration as well, in Hungary Hungarian became an official language only in 1844.¹⁹

The serious losses described above were clearly perceived by Hungarians at the time, who, consequently, experienced the Ottoman conquest from the outset as something that threatened them with the loss of their identity. From the fifteenth century on, all social factors in Hungary, from the king at the top to the peasants at the bottom, regarded the conquerors as savage, pagan, and natural enemies, the persecutors of the country and of the Christian faith, and later as archenemies or primal foes. The anti-Ottoman struggle was conceived partly as self-defence, partly as a war that protected the entire Christian world (the West). Through the popes, Europe recognised these efforts by granting first to the king of Hungary and later to the whole country the title of “bulwark of Christianity”, although little effective

¹⁸ SZAKÁLY, F.: Die Bilanz der Türkenherrschaft in Ungarn. *AHistHung* 34 (1988) 63–77; RÁCZ, I.: *A török világ bagyatéka Magyarországon* [= The legacy of the Turkish world in Hungary]. Debrecen 1995; DÁVID, G.: *Studies in the Demographic and Administrative History of Ottoman Hungary*. Analecta Isisiana 25. Istanbul 1997, 1–88; PÁLFFY, G.: The Impact of the Ottoman Rule on Hungary. *Hungarian Studies Review* 28/1–2 (2001) 109–32.

¹⁹ For the first phase of the Hungarian capital city's transfer “abroad”, see PÁLFFY, G.: *The Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy in the Sixteenth Century*. Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications 18. Boulder/CO–Wayne, NJ 2009, 53–69.

support went with the title to facilitate resistance. Hungarian historiography, secular and religious literature, art and folklore throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries attest clearly to the fact that the Hungarians clung to this role during the whole Ottoman period, sometimes even attempting, somewhat paradoxically, to justify anti-Habsburg revolts and pro-Ottoman political initiatives with the defence of Christianity.²⁰ It is important to remark, however, that it was not only because of their religion that the Ottoman Turks were rejected by the Hungarians, but also on account of the “oriental” system of their state, society and customs, implying the lack of personal freedom and land ownership, both highly esteemed in Hungary.²¹

This explains why, despite long cohabitation and occasional political cooperation, Hungarian and Ottoman Turkish cultures influenced each other only superficially. The Ottomans adopted almost nothing from Hungarian culture, and instead built up on Hungarian soil a high culture of their own, which became part of the present-day Hungarian cultural heritage. The most durable and conspicuous elements of this culture are the products of Turkish architecture: mosques, minarets, public baths, mausolea, schools, caravanserais, dervish lodges and well-houses. These are the northernmost relics of Islamic art from the early modern period, yet they failed to exert any influence on Hungarian architecture (even Turkish bathing culture had only an indirect influence). On the other hand, Hungarians learned a lot from Turkish tanners, potters and armourers (boots, for instance, footwear of Turkish origin, became part of the Hungarian national costume), and a couple of Turkish vestments were also integrated into Hungarian dress. Turkish carpet weaving and ornamental art mainly enriched Hungarian embroidery and ornamentation with various motifs, and Turkish tiles from Iznik and Anatolian carpets were sometimes used in aristocratic and ecclesiastical circles. The most durable influence can be detected in gastronomy and horticulture: it was via the Turks that the Hungarians became acquainted with coffee, egg-barley, pie, stuffed cabbage, apricot, maize, some species of pear and vine, and flowers. Some of the basic cooking utensils, such as the *tepsi* (oven pan) and the *bogrács* (cauldron), are also of Turkish origin.²² In the sphere of high culture poet Bálint Balassi was an exceptional phenomenon. One of the founders of secular poetry in the Hungarian vernacular, Balassi learned

²⁰ IMRE, M.: “Magyarország panasza”. *A Querela Hungariae toposz a XVI–XVII. század irodalmában* [= The *Querela Hungariae* topos in the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries]. Csokonai Könyvtár 5. Debrecen 1995, 160–62.

²¹ RÁCZ (n. 18) 53.

²² RÁCZ (n. 18) 67–82; DÁVID, G.: Osmanlı Kültürünün Macaristanda’ki Yayılışı ve Etkisi. *Bilig* 20 (Kış 2002) 89–100.

Turkish, acquainted himself with Turkish mystical poetry and translated Turkish poems into Hungarian. Yet it is highly characteristic of the situation that it was also Balassi who wrote the most beautiful and influential poems about the heroic struggle of Hungarian soldiers against the Ottomans, and he himself died fighting against the conquerors.²³ Nor did the Ottoman presence involve any durable linguistic influence, for Hungarian contains a mere handful of Turkish words that were borrowed during this period.²⁴ Here, on Hungarian soil, everything concurred to produce a rather closed cultural frontier between West and East.

While the Turkish *heritage* in Hungarian culture is thin, there is a *legacy* of the Ottoman period that is of crucial importance if one is to understand the Hungarian mentality. The Ottoman conquest resulted not only in serious material and cultural losses to Hungary, it also caused a psychological break. It completely destroyed the self-confidence of the Hungarian political and cultural elites. The religious and political leaders of the period were virtually overwhelmed by a mixture of a sense of guilt and self-reproach. They proved unable to digest the fact that a country that had previously been “the star of Europe”²⁵ had become the plaything of other states. Nor were they able to forgive themselves for having lost an “empire”. It was then that the mental reflexes that are so familiar to the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe began to emerge: the sense of loneliness (Hungarians started complaining about this already in the fifteenth century!), the sense of the uniqueness of the tribulations suffered, the turn towards the glorious past, the assumption of the role of the victim (we defend Europe but receive nothing in exchange), extenuating the actions and, as a sort of recompense, adopting the sense of being chosen, which partly derived from Protestant apocalypics. That the sense of inferiority also appeared at this time is evident from words written by eminent poet and army commander Miklós Zrínyi in the middle of the seventeenth century: “We are not inferior to

²³ SUDÁR, B.: Egy Balassi-vers török háttérére [= The Turkish background of a Balassi poem]. *Keletkutatás* 1995/ősz [1997] 67–79; KÓSZEGHY, P.: *Balassi Bálint. Magyar Alkibiadész* [= Bálint Balassi. The Hungarian Alcibiades]. Budapest 2008, 318–36.

²⁴ KAKUK, S.: *Recherches sur l'histoire de la langue osmanlie des XVI^e et XVII^e siècles. Les éléments osmanlis de la langues hongroise*. Bibliotheca Orientalis Hungarica XIX. Budapest 1973.

²⁵ These are the words of the soldier-poet Ferenc Wathay from 1604; see *Wathay Ferenc énekeskönyve* [= Ferenc Wathay's songbook]. Eds. L. NAGY–Gy. BELIA. Budapest 1976, 118 (transcription), 92 (facsimile).

any other nation.”²⁶ While a heroic pathos prevailed (I quote Zrínyi again: “here you either have to win or die”),²⁷ action was paralysed by confusion, inconsistency, and internal strife. After the Ottoman conquest divided the country, the conflicts between the political leaders of the various parts often degenerated into civil wars. The renewal of the faith (Reformation) resulted in disastrous religious divisions within Hungary, and the various confessions blamed one another for the collapse of the country. And in the end, the Hungarian leaders sought refuge in an utter paradox: in order to escape the terrible daily consequences of the Ottoman conquest, they made alliances with the Ottoman state itself.²⁸ Thus Ban Péter Zrínyi, who translated his brother Miklós’ epic entitled *Szigeti veszedelem* (The Peril of Sziget), the apotheosis of Hungarian military bravado, as well as his work entitled *Adriai tengernek Syrenája* (The Siren of the Adriatic Sea) into Croatian and who must have known by heart his brother’s injunction against accepting the “Turkish opium” (that is Ottoman alliance), and who, in the translations, condemned the demonised Ottomans much more severely than had his brother, paid with his life for his intention to submit to the Turks.²⁹ And to cite another example, at the end of the seventeenth century, when half of Europe was united in an alliance to liberate Hungary, the largest Hungarian contingent fought with the Ottoman army, and Hungary, the “bulwark of Christianity”, was consequently stigmatized by European public opinion as an “enemy of Christianity”.³⁰ It was then that internal divisions within Hungarian society, divisions characterized by a twentieth-century historian with a metaphor about the separation of an Eastern Hungarian temper from

²⁶ ZRÍNYI, M.: Ne bántsá a magyart. Az török áfium ellen való orvosság, avagy az töröknek magyarral való békessége ellen való antidotum [= Do not maltreat the Hungarian. A remedy for the Turkish opium, or the antidote to the peace between the Turks and the Hungarians]. In *Zrínyi Miklós hadtudományi munkái*. Budapest 1976², 322.

²⁷ ZRÍNYI (n. 26) 318.

²⁸ PAPP, S.: Movements of the Hungarian Estates and the Ottoman Empire at the Turn of the 17th and the 18th Centuries. *Mediterrán Tanulmányok/Études sur la région méditerranéenne* 11 (2002) 125–36; PAPP, S.: Ottoman Accounts of the Hungarian Movements against the Habsburgs at the Turn of the 17th and the 18th Centuries. In *Frontiers of Ottoman Studies II*. Eds. C. IMBER–K. KIYOTAKI. London–New York 2005, 37–48.

²⁹ R. VÁRKONYI, Á.: A Wesselényi szervezkedés történetéhez [= On the history of the Wesselényi machinations]. In *Tanulmányok Szakály Ferenc emlékére*. Eds. P. FODOR–G. PÁLFFY–I. Gy. TÓTH. Budapest 2002, 423–460; BLAŽEVIĆ, Z.–COHA, S.: Zrínyi Péter, A hősteremtés irodalmi modelljei és stratégiái [= The literary models and strategies of hero making]. In *A Zrínyiek a magyar és a horvát históriában*. Eds. S. BENE–G. HAUSNER. Budapest 2007, 137–164, in particular 144.

³⁰ KÖPECZI, B.: *Staatsräson und christliche Solidarität: Die ungarischen Aufstände und Europa in der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts*. Budapest 1983.

a Western Hungarian one (Catholic vs Protestant, pro-Habsburg [*labanc*] vs independentist or pro-Transylvanian [*kuruc*]), began to harden.³¹ Just as the Ottoman military advance drove a wedge into the body of the country, so the miserable situation brought about by the conquest split the Hungarian soul in two and pushed the Hungarians towards the East more than ever before.

This duality and ambiguity of the Hungarian attitude to the Ottoman Turks also prevailed in the periods of the baroque and romanticism. In the era of nation-building (from the end of the eighteenth century on), the memory of the Mongol invasion and the century-long struggle against the Porte were important elements of identity and, even more so, foundation stones of the emerging national consciousness. The two most influential poems of the Reform Era (1825–48), Ferenc Kölcsey's *Himnusz*/Hymn (1823, the national anthem of Hungary, set to music by Ferenc Erkel) and Mihály Vörösmarty's *Szózat*/Appeal (1836, a kind of second Hungarian anthem), are direct successors to seventeenth-century Zrínyi's works in themes and phraseology: they all refer to the Turkish "yoke", ill fate, punishment and atonement, and all entreat God for help. Like Zrínyi, both Kölcsey and Vörösmarty confront the Hungarians with the fateful injunction: "here you must live, here you must die" (to cite the concluding line from Vörösmarty's *Appeal*). At the same time, unlike in the western countries where efflorescent Orientalism mainly affected the elites, the Hungarians found the gradually opening East more and more familiar.³² The conviction that Hungarians had not simply originated in the East but were indeed the "People of the East" *par excellence* spread rapidly. This was the title given by Count István Széchenyi, the main representative of the European spirit and the greatest modernizer of the country, to his famous book of 1841. In it he wrote, "All the Hungarians must do is to represent their so-far latent, never exposed ... specificities hidden in their Asian cradle."³³ The relationship with the Huns and Turkic peoples came to the fore, and one of the most intriguing personas of the age was that of the scholar (such as Alexander Csoma de Kőrös and

³¹ SZEKFŰ, Gy.: *A magyar állam életrajza. Történeti tanulmány* [= A biography of the Hungarian state. A historical study]. Budapest 1988 (reprint, first edition 1918), 116.

³² STAUD, G.: *Az orientalizmus a magyar romantikában* [= Orientalism in Hungarian Romanticism]. Budapest 1999², 25–26; FÜLEMILE, Á.: Gondolatok az orientalizmusról Marastoni Jakab Görög nő című képe kapcsán [= Thoughts on orientalism in connection with the picture Greek Woman by Jakab Marastoni]. *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 44/1–2 (2005) 109–24.

³³ SZÉCHENYI, Count I.: *A Kelet népe* [= People of the East]. *Fontes Historiae Hungaricae Aevi Recentioris*. Gróf Széchenyi István összes munkái, 5. Ed. Z. FERENCZI. Budapest 1925, 220.

others) in search of the original homeland of the nation. Parallel with this development, Hungarian (historical) science paid increasing attention to the Ottoman Empire and produced more and more reliable and unbiased works on it.³⁴ One of the elements of the Ottoman Turkish heritage, the *tárogató* (originally called the Turkish pipe, developed from the Turkish *zurna*) rose to the rank of national instrument, and in 1839 it was already used in a stage play as the symbol of the Hungarians of eastern origins.³⁵

In this atmosphere there came a slow change in the assessment of the Ottoman Turks and their domination of Hungary. The opinions were also deeply influenced by the great political events of the century: the suppression of the 1848–49 revolution and war of independence and the fact that many of the leading personalities and participants in the revolution found asylum in the Ottoman Empire, as had Ferenc Rákóczi, the leader of the 1703 uprising. After the Crimean War (1853–56), rapprochement began between the Ottoman Empire and the Monarchy, first and foremost between Turkish and Hungarian intellectuals.³⁶

³⁴ For some works of the period that had a strong influence on the Hungarian views of the Turks, see DECSY, S.: *Osmanografia az az: A' török birodalom' Természeti, erköltsi, egy-házi, polgári, 's hadi állapotjának, és a' Magyar Királyok ellen viselt nevezetesebb hadakozásainak summás leírása. Második, és imitt amott meg-jobbított ki-adás. 1–3. Rész* [= Osmanographia, or a description of the natural, moral, religious, civil and military state of the Turkish empire and the most important battles against the Hungarian kings. Second, corrected edition. Parts 1–3]. Vienna 1789; FÉNYES, E.: *A török birodalom leírása, történeti, statistikai és geográfiai tekintetben... A török birodalom földabroszával* [= A description of the Turkish empire from a historical, statistical, and geographical perspective.] Pest 1854; LÁZÁR, Gy.: *Az oszmán uralom története Európában I–II.* [= The history of Ottoman rule in Europe]. Budapest 1877.

³⁵ SUDÁR, B.–CSÖRSZ RUMEN, I.: *“Trombita, rézdob, tárogató...” A török hadizene és Magyarország* [= “Bugle, copper drum, Turkish pipes...” Turkish military music and Hungary]. Enying 1996, 95.

³⁶ Cf. CSORBA, Gy.: *Az 1848–49-es törökországi magyar emigráció története* [= The history of Hungarian emigration to Turkey in 1848–49]. *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 112/2 (1999) 352–97; HERMANN, R.–JOÓ, A.–MÉSZÁROS, K.–SERES, I.: *Török menedékjogot kapott magyar emigránsok rövid életrajzi összefoglalója / Türkiye’de Kendilerine Sığınma Hakkı Tanınan Macar Mültecilerin Özyaşamlarından Özetler* [= A brief biographical sketch of Hungarian émigrés who were given refugee status in Turkey]. Budapest 2010; NAZIR, B.: *Macar ve Polonyalı Mülteciler. Osmanlı’ya Sığınanlar.* İstanbul 2006. For the outstanding role of Arminius Vámbéry in Hungarian–Ottoman–Turkish rapprochement, see HAZAI, Gy.: *Vámbéry Ármin életútja* [= The Life of Ármin Vámbéry]. In HAZAI, Gy.: *Vámbéry inspirációk.* Dunaszerdahely 2009, 342–48; KUSHNER, D.: *The Rise of Turkish Nationalism 1876–1908.* London 1977, 9–10, 44–45, 53; BARTHOLOMÄ, R.: *Vom Zentralasien nach Windsor Castle. Leben und Werk des Orientalisten Arminius Vámbéry (1832–1913).* Arbeitsmaterialien zum Orient 17. Würzburg 2006, 10–13, 45–49.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the stress on the oriental traits of the Hungarians acquired an important role in nation-building strategies as well. Representatives of two rival conceptions were struggling for dominance in Hungary at the time. One was a conception of the state-nation that took into consideration the multi-ethnic composition of the country's population and regarded all nationalities, not only Hungarians, as constituents of the Hungarian nation. In other words, the stress was laid on citizenship in their definition of nationhood. The other view regarded the nation as a cultural community with a common ethnic origin and identical language. The latter conception ascribed great significance to recently discovered peasant culture, alleging to recognize in it the imprint of ancient oriental culture.³⁷ This was reinforced by a sense of aloneness that had strengthened since the Ottoman conquest and a fear of the stronger western nations (including the Austrians) and the increasingly aggressive pan-German and pan-Slav ideologies. Hungarian patriots who felt they lacked relatives in Europe turned with great enthusiasm and curiosity towards the East, where they sought support and asylum and where they were intent on finding the ancient forms of the Hungarian character and soul. This was behind the rising popularity of the so-called Turanian or pan-Turanian ideas, which began to gain ground around the turn of the twentieth century and which can be traced back to the famous orientalist Arminius Vámbéry.³⁸ This idea inspired the hope that threatened and solitary nations might also find a group of peoples with whom they constituted a community, or – in more daring visions – they could create a large Eurasian empire. The pan-Turanian or Turkist ideology was most popular in the Ottoman Empire where, alongside so-called Ottomanism (a state-nation conception similar to the Hungarian ideology and partly developed under its influence) it was the official ideology of the ruling elite up to the end of World War I.³⁹

All this added up to a strengthening of pro-Turkish views as of the last third of the nineteenth century in Hungary. Contributory factors were the experiences of the oriental crisis (1875–78), the series of defeats of the

³⁷ HOFER, T.: Construction of the 'Folk Cultural Heritage' in Hungary and Rival Versions of National Identity. *Ethnologia Europaea* 21/2 (1991) 145–70.

³⁸ FARKAS, I.: *A magyar turanisták* [= The Hungarian touranists]. PhD thesis. Budapest 2002, 23–28 (this is one of the best treatment of the subject that has attracted a good deal of interest in Turkey, too; see, for instance, DEMIRKAN, T.: *Macar Turancıları*. İstanbul 2000; ÖNEN, N.: *İki Turan. Macaristan ve Türkiye'de Turancılık*. İstanbul 2005). See further, SZENDREI, L.: *Turanizmus*. Máriabesnyő 2010. For a new summary of Vámbéry's role, see BARTHOLOMÄ (n. 36) 86–90.

³⁹ KARPAT, K. H.: *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*. Oxford 2001, 276–407.

Ottomans and the advance of the Russians in the Balkans, which triggered passionate shows of pro-Turkish and anti-Russian sentiments. The process culminated in the legation of the Hungarian students in Constantinople in January 1877, on the eve of the Russian-Turkish war, when they presented an ornamental sword to the commander-in-chief of the Turkish army. The visit was demonstratively returned in the spring of 1877, when on behalf of Sultan Abdülhamid II a Turkish delegation brought back 35 medieval manuscripts that had once belonged to the famous library of King Matthias Corvinus until they had been taken to Istanbul by the troops of Süleyman in the early sixteenth century. At the same time, a team of private Turkish persons also arrived to establish friendly relations directly with members of Hungarian society. They toured the country and were received everywhere in the spirit of Turkish–Hungarian kinship and brotherhood, which was surprising and new to the Turkish side.⁴⁰

This pro-Turkish leaning in Hungarian public discourse was also manifest in the great scientific dispute of the late nineteenth century, the so-called “Ugrian–Turkic war”. The goal of this linguistic polemic was to decide whether the Hungarian language was of Finno-Ugrian or Turkic origin. The basically scientific question assumed contemporary political dimensions: support for the notion of the Turkic language relation had an anti-Habsburg overtone, expressing dissatisfaction with Hungary’s constitutional role within the Habsburg Monarchy and the supremacy of Vienna.⁴¹ Some historians hurried to support this national and eastern orientation, using scholarship to project contemporary exigencies onto earlier centuries. In their works they polished the sixteenth–seventeenth century into a romantic epic of chivalrous, brave and honest Hungarians in conflict with the similarly valiant Turks and the “oppressive” Habsburgs. These historians often called the Ottomans the promoters of Hungarian national sentiments.⁴²

This growing penchant for the East elicited harsh criticism from those orientated towards the West, and the concepts of East and West again assumed symbolic significance in the dispute. In the wording of poet Endre

⁴⁰ ERŐDI, B.: *Csok jása! A török küldöttség látogatásának emlékkönyve / Çok Yaşa. Türk Heyetinin Ziyareti'nden Hatıra Kitabı* [= Çok yaşa! The memorial album of the visit of the Turkish delegation]. Budapest 2001.

⁴¹ On the debate, see VÁSÁRY, I.: Vámbéry és a magyar őstörténet [= Vámbéry and early Hungarian history]. In *Vámbéry Ármín emlékezete*. Keleti értekezések 2. Budapest 1986, 19–25.

⁴² See DÁVID, G.–FODOR, P.: Hungarian Studies in Ottoman History. In *The Ottomans and the Balkans. A Discussion of Historiography*. Eds. F. ADANIR–S. FAROQHI. The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage. Politics, Society and Economy 25. Leiden–Boston–Köln 2002, 314–16.

Ady, writing in 1905, Hungary was a “ferry-land”, tossed to and fro between the shores of East and West – heading East again with Turanism.⁴³ The politicians and intellectuals advocating the state-nation concept supported the Habsburg kingdom and a western orientation. Historians loyal to the Habsburgs adduced historical arguments against oriental romanticism. Gyula Szekfű, for example, an intellectual whose influence was felt throughout the period from the pre-World War One years to the aftermath of World War Two, regarded the struggles that Hungary had faced in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries as part of a clash between “East and West”, between two civilizations that diverted the Hungarian nation and state from the “right track” of development. His final conclusion was: “Turkish rule was the greatest, perhaps the only disaster of Hungarian history”.⁴⁴ This dual evaluation of the Ottoman Turks and their domination of Hungary was also reinforced by authors of fiction of the day. Generations of Hungarian readers were “taught” by the immensely popular adventure stories set in the Ottoman period by Mór Jókai, who presented a fairly unbiased picture of the Turkish people as early as the middle of nineteenth century. The historical novels (*The hero of Buda* by Ferenc Donászy and *Eclipse of the Crescent Moon* by Géza Gárdonyi) that were published around the turn of the century, however, described the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Ottoman Turks as the greatest enemies of the nation – a view that still prevails.⁴⁵

This did not prevent the Hungarians from showing sympathy for their Turkish contemporaries. At the end of 1910, the adherents of the Turanian concept founded the so-called Turanian Society, and their scientific programme, the aim of which was to gain better knowledge of the East, included the intention of securing the Hungarians a leading role “in science and economy within the Turanian family of peoples.”⁴⁶ This sense of shared affinities grew even stronger when the two countries fought in World War

⁴³ ADY, E.: Ismeretlen Korvin-kódex margójára [= In the margins of an unknown Corvinus codex]. *Figyelő* October 1905, 15.

⁴⁴ SZEKFŰ, Gy.: *Magyar történet. A tizenhetedik század* [= Hungarian history. The seventeenth century]. HÓMAN, B.–SZEKFŰ, Gy.: *Magyar történet* 5. Budapest s. a., 108.

⁴⁵ Nineteenth-century Hungarian historical painting had a similar effect, see GALAVICS, G.: A történeti téma [= The historical theme]. In *Művészet Magyarországon 1780–1830. Kiállítás a MTA MKCS és a MNG rendezésében, Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, 1980*. Budapest 1980, 63–72; SZVOBODA DOMÁNSZKY, G.: *Régi dicsőségünk. Magyar történelmi képek a XIX. században* [= Our departed glory. Hungarian historical pictures in the nineteenth century]. Budapest 2001.

⁴⁶ ABLONCZY, B.: *Teleki Pál* [= Pál Teleki]. Budapest 2005, 92; SZENDREI (n. 38) 16.

I as allies⁴⁷ and both suffered a similar fate after the cataclysm, losing a considerable portion of their territories and population. This also contributed to the establishment of extensive economic and cultural cooperation between the Hungarian and Turkish states in the interwar period.⁴⁸ The traumas that the two peoples had endured, the reorganization of the two countries (in Turkey a rapid and merciless Europeanization) and the search for their place in the grip of Nazism and Bolshevism elicited very similar responses among members of Hungarian and Turkish society. The Hungarian government took up the old notion of the bulwark of Christianity once again, this time referring to the defence of Europe against Bolshevism (and soon, after World War Two, Hungary became the western wall of the communist world). From time to time leading intellectuals asked and still ask: What is Hungarian? What is Turkish? Do we belong to East or West?⁴⁹ Instead of citing further volumes of studies, let it suffice to refer to the oeuvre of Nobel Prize winning Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish writer who stubbornly and indefatigably analyses this “ferry-land” mentality, this troubled identity manifest in the drift to and fro between two shores.⁵⁰

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In 1853, four years after the defeat of the revolution and war of independence against the Habsburgs, author Mór Jókai, of whom I made mention above, published his novel *Török világ Magyarországon* (The Turks in Hungary), a sequel to *Erdély aranykora* (The Golden Age of Transylvania), a novel

⁴⁷ For an emotional document of the alliance between “cross” and “crescent”, see *Magyar–török almanach a Vörös Félhold javára* [= Hungarian–Turkish almanac to the advantage of the Red Crescent]. Ed. I. MEZEY. Budapest 1915.

⁴⁸ DÁVID, G.: Modernizáció magyar részvétellel [= Modernization with Hungarian participation]. *Korunk* 1996/6, 61–65.

⁴⁹ *Mi a magyar?* [= What is Hungarian?] Ed. Gy. SZEKFŰ. Budapest 1939; *Mi a magyar?* [= What is Hungarian?]. Eds. I. ROMSICS–M. SZEGEDY–MASZÁK. Budapest 2005; GÜVENÇ, B.: *Türk Kimliği Kültür Tarihinin Kaynakları*. İstanbul 1993; KAFADAR, C.: A Rome of One’s Own: Reflections on Cultural Geography and Identity in the Lands of Rum. In *History and Ideology: Architectural Heritage of the ‘Lands of Rum’*. Eds. S. BOZDOĞAN–G. NECİPOĞLU. Special Issue. *Muqarnas* 24 (2007) 7–25. – On the very similar dilettante kinship theories in the two countries flourishing even today, see DOĞAN, I.: Dilettáns nyelv- és néprokonsági nézetek párhuzamai Törökországban és Magyarországon [= Parallels between dilettante views in Turkey and Hungary concerning linguistic and ethnic kinship]. In *A nyelvprokonságról. Az török, sumer és egyéb áfium ellen való orvosság*. Eds. L. HONTI–S. CSÚCS–L. KERESZTES. Segédkönyvek a nyelvészet tanulmányozásához 104. Second, enlarged edition. Budapest 2010, 80–86.

⁵⁰ PAMUK, O.: *Beyaz Kale*. İstanbul 1985; PAMUK, O.: *Kara Kitap*. İstanbul 1990; PAMUK, O.: *Benim Adım Kırmızı*. İstanbul 1998; PAMUK, O.: *Kar*. İstanbul 2002; PAMUK, O.: *İstanbul: Hatıralar ve Şehir*. İstanbul 2003.

published in 1851 that enjoyed tremendous popularity. Essentially the novel, which is set in the second half of the seventeenth century, examines how one can lead a life of integrity in a world in which individual and state sovereignty are drastically limited (traces of independence were preserved only in the small principedom of Transylvania). In the preface to the novel Jókai makes it clear that he is seeking answers to the dilemmas of his day: “I could perhaps have chosen a more lustrous moment of Hungarian history...; but a nation is characterized not by its good fortunes, but rather by its misfortunes.”⁵¹ One of the episodes of the book (which is based on a historical work by János Bethlen of the seventeenth century⁵² and constitutes almost a self-standing novel within the novel) recounts how at the time of the rule of Mihály Apafi (1661–90), following the Battle of Saint Gotthard (which for the Turks was a significant defeat) and the Peace of Vasvár (1664), the Ottoman empire sought to arrest the prince of Wallachia, who was made a scapegoat. He, however, fled to Poland, and his wife, who was soon to give birth, found refuge in Transylvania. The Turks immediately demanded that she be turned over to them, at which a great debate broke out in the prince’s court as to whether to give acquiesce to this demand or not. The consort of the prince and the wives of the noblemen took up the refugee’s cause, and Miklós Bethlen took their side as well. Trusting in the rest of Europe to support him, he argued against turning the woman over to the Turks: “...well do I know that fortunately Transylvania lies in Europe, where the countries take care of one another, and it is in the interests of every prince of Europe that an independent country remain between them and the Ottoman power, even if it is as small as Transylvania.”⁵³ In a long and influential speech, however, councillor Mihály Teleki tore this naïve view to shreds, showing that there is no such thing as cooperation founded on shared values, only interest, and anyone who does not recognize his own interests is doomed to fall. This speech, with which Jókai gave voice to his own perception and to the sentiments of numerous Hungarian intellectuals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who shared his views, is worth citing at length because it gives forceful expression to the idea according to which, if it is in the interests of the country, then one should pursue alliances even with the forces of the East: “– I must speak bitter things to your graces, my lords! I am compelled to awaken you from a pleasant dream to a very

⁵¹ JÓKAI, M.: *Török világ Magyarországon I.* [= The Turks in Hungary]. Jókai Mór munkái. Gyűjteményes díszkiadás. Budapest 1995, 5.

⁵² BETHLEN, J.: *Erdély története 1629–1673* [= The history of Transylvania, 1629–1673]. Transl. J. P. Vásárhelyi. Ed. J. JANKOVICS. Budapest 1993, 245–48.

⁵³ JÓKAI (n. 51) 181.

harsh reality. That we survive is Europe's most trifling care; we only have allies when our allies need sacrifices; if we plead, then no one knows us... It is true that once I said quite the opposite, but time is such a fine master that sometimes in a single day it teaches one more than he learned in nine schools. As a consequence of the Battle of Saint Gotthard a peace has been reached between the two emperors, I have read its conditions, there was not a single provision regarding us, the Hungarians, not a single comma, we are forgotten, left out of the whole thing like a nation that needn't be taken into consideration. Though the French envoy was there, the English envoy, the Polish envoy, and I could add, not one member of our court is paid as much as they were paid by us. If we are needed for war, oh, then we are a great and honourable nation, when the peace is concluded, they do not know we exist. In the battle we can be at the forefront, when the spoils are divided we needn't come. ... – Oh gentleman, let us confess amongst ourselves that we play the role of lord in this land, but in truth we are no longer its lords. To trust in our strength, the rely on the justice of our cause will no longer help us, we have no patrons, neither to the left nor to the right, only rulers: whichever one we may turn to, we merely change rulers, we do not make an alliance. It is good to whisper this secret to ourselves, but even better to guard it, so that no one else may know, and if our rule is mere semblance, this semblance is worth a great deal to us, and we should take care not to cause it to wane. The power that looms above us is simply waiting for a reason to put its plan into effect, and no one in Transylvania would do greater service to this power than the man who would be the first to lift his gaze against it... We have one duty: know what little we have and be sure to keep it, and if the time should come, we can annex new possessions to it. We have no friends, and we should be friends to no one. If we bow before compulsion, will the world scorn us? And if we break ourselves standing up against a greater power will it not also scorn us? The world asks magnanimity of us; was it ever magnanimous to us, was it even simply just? Yes, while the sword was in our hand we used it to defend all of Europe, but this sword has been broken, our country rent asunder; the pagans trampled us down for all the peoples to see, we bled for a century-and-a-half, and no one came to our aid, the gates to our country are guarded by our enemies, and like the scorpion surrounded by a ring of fire, we can only turn our bitterness on ourselves! Are we to blame for the fact that we no longer can defend the exile who has sought refuge among us? Fate and the world have finished reckoning with us; the country no longer owes anything to anyone, only to itself. So, things being as they are, if we do not deliver the Wallachian princess to Olay Bey for whatever reason, even if it is merely to wait for the return of the envoys we have sent to ask for mercy, he has orders to summon the armies of the Pasha

of Buda and the Pasha of Várady into the country to make it an attendant domain of the Porte; here all compassion, all human regard wanes, only one duty remains: self-preservation, and this orders us, whatsoever we cannot change, to do willingly...”⁵⁴

In Hungary and the European Union today some people have observed the turn in contemporary Hungarian foreign policy towards the “east,” the occasionally quite visible turn away from western allies and their expectations, with some bafflement. The new “oriental” romanticism that has emerged in some circles of Hungarian society has caused similar surprise and garnered similar international attention, for instance the “Neo-Turanism”, which has been associated by many (probably incorrectly) with right-wing political forces only.⁵⁵ However, given the situation in which Hungary has found itself for over one-thousand years, on the border of East and West, not to mention the reflexes that evolved as a consequence of the period of Ottoman occupation, it would perhaps be even more surprising if this orientation towards the east were not to rise to the surface from time to time, if the Turkish legacy, albeit an ambiguous one fraught with contradiction, were not to be felt at all in Hungary today. The lines cited from Jókai’s novel perhaps offer a better explanation for the endurance of this attachment to the East more elegantly and profoundly than would any longwinded historical explanation.

⁵⁴ JÓKAI (n. 51) 181–83.

⁵⁵ AKÇALI, E.–KORKUT, U.: Geographical Metanarratives in East-Central Europe: Neo-Turanism in Hungary. *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 53/5 (2012) 596–614.

