Questions of “Origins” and National Consciousness*

1. Notions relating to the origin of people and state were already organic constituents of the “national” consciousness that had already begun to form in Europe around halfway through the Middle Ages; moreover—unlike the typically modern notions—they formed the chief ideological pillars of these structures. Nevertheless, in regard to the origin of peoples, these notions per se had very little to do with the actual ethnogenesis. The peoples of medieval Europe learned to believe in fictitious “prototypical peoples” that their lettered scholars constructed for them in the Middle Ages from remaining scraps of historical, geographical, and ethnographical information of late antiquity; to the extent that such beliefs took root, these theories of origin were subsequently transformed into myth. Only exceptionally, and then in a subordinated position, which was usually divested of meaning, was a genuine historical core or ethnic tradition preserved in these constructions which at one and the same time served the historical and logical integration of their own people into God’s plan for the universe, and the accentuation of differentiation, specific “function,” and identity within the Christian republic. This applies to virtually all the archaic “national” mythopoiesis of medieval Europe, from the Trojan origins of the French to the Hunnish origins of the Magyars.

The other question of genesis, that of the state, by its very nature posed itself again differently in the Middle Ages than it has done in modern times. Medieval man was preoccupied less with the origin of a “state” per se than with the

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genesis of a given kingdom (*regnum*) as a “national territory.” In theories of origin, which were rooted in a hypothesized autochthony, of course, legitimization converged with ethnogenesis, whereas in the other European subtype—the one to which Hungarian notions belong—prominence was given to the act of an ancient conquest. In just the same way as the original lands settled by the descendants of King Priam, following their flight from Troy, legitimized the possession of Gallia for the French, so did the conquest of Attila and his Huns buttress the “historical right” of the Magyars to the lands of Pannonia, subsequently validated by the “second coming”—what in Hungarian is called the *honfoglalás* (conquest)—by the Hun-Magyars. It is well known that while the figure of King (Saint) Stephen I of Hungary was indeed the source of diverse religious and legal myths in the Middle Ages, it still lost that “alpha” quality for a long time in the specific “national” structure of consciousness which was evolving at the end of the thirteenth century.

At variance as these ideas were with historical realities, they were all the more fitting for the ideological needs of the age; to the extent that they welded fictive elements into a unity, they served well the need for myths, and meanwhile, precisely through that combined ideological-mythical quality, they provided a cohesive power for group awareness. Jointly they incarnated a characteristic premodern structure of consciousness in which the beginning of “national” history—*historia gentis*—fundamentally served to legitimate the present. The mythical legitimizing power of ancestry acted as an ideological bridge—spanning the centuries and structures—to bind together the *origo* of people and state (national territory) with the reality or needs of the present.

After the eighteenth century, this broadly spanning ideological bridge broke down—in principle at least—under the burden of incipient modernist thinking. After the invention of the concept of historicity and historiography’s declaration of intent to become a science, as well as the simultaneous emergence of the nation as a collection of preeminently modern (civic) communal relationships from the jumble of projections (some of them mutually contradictory or overlapping) of the “national” structures of feudalism, the dimensions themselves, in principle, were also transformed.

Sooner or later the true course of ethnogenesis was clarified which, more often than not, proved to be a much more complex configuration than being reducible to a single “proto-people.” Sooner or later the true facts about the emergence of the state also came to light, a configuration which proved to be much more tightly bound to the given structure than to be capable, in and of itself, of
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providing a legal source under modern conditions. At the same time, national consciousness based on the emerging “civic relationships” (and in proportion to the extent to which they measured up to reality) found its cohesion primarily in existing linguo-cultural and/or politico-institutional factors to which history served more as a backdrop, as it were, by way of a historical infrastructure which was by now conceptually separating from the present. Inter alia the origin both of people and state took its place among the historical elements of the modern national identity construction. To put it another way, the unconditional, tight, and subordinate relationship of history and ideology was, in principle, broken. Of course, certain “historical ideologies” continued to live on, to some degree, in every national consciousness; in addition, new ones were also born, while the sphere of collective emotions naturally fomented historical motifs aplenty—but as elements of a consciousness of historical identity, and not of a meaningful national ideology.

In principle, that is. For in practice, ever since the nineteenth century transcending medieval reflexes and the transformation of the structure of consciousness tended to take place only where the existing state and the nation—as formulated in modern terms—more or less coincided, which is to say: where the nation-state arose, that could be declared as “national” without any substantial theoretical or practical difficulties. Putting it this way already signals that nevertheless a problem did still remain even in Western Europe, which the “ethnic renaissance” of our own day is starting to bring to the surface. Not even the transformation of structures of consciousness itself was always and everywhere clearly consistent, but that is not a matter that concerns us here. What does concern us is that in this part of the world, call it Central and Eastern Europe, the state and national frameworks have remained—or have become—to such a degree separated from each other during the process of state-formation in the modern and contemporary times that the state could only be declared “national” at the cost of the greatest theoretical or practical difficulties (or not even at that cost). In this region the medievalistic subordination of history to ideology remained, or rather was reproduced and in its own way modernized, in direct proportion to these difficulties. In other words, the broadly spanning ideological bridge which had once connected the origins of a people and state over the centuries and structures (indeed, by now, the facts of the past and the present) was rebuilt or even, in effect, newly built.

Bridge-building calls for a lot of material, time, and patience. Therefore, since the nineteenth century, the broadest-spanning of such ideological bridges
over which one may unreservedly move between the long bygone and the present have preeminently moved in the prevailing “successful” constellations, or else have sought to make the crossing between the two banks by other means. It is well known that since the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, the Hungarian national consciousness had been able to enjoy its own ambivalent sense of achievement, and thereby, after much genuine and deeply-felt frustration of which it had been mindful ever since the sixteenth century, wrung out a state structure in which it was able to formulate, both “upwardly” as well as “downwardly,” its own “nation-state ideology,” albeit at the price of no small difficulties. Historical genesis gained a dominant role in this ideology, although in a different way from the role it had played in the Middle Ages.

This ideology was constructed not without some precedents, not without, one could say, a historical infrastructure. To explain that, one must briefly revert again to the Middle Ages.

In medieval Hungary, indeed right up to the beginning of the eighteenth century, three different notions (and realities) of “nation” coexisted. For a start, a “Hungarian” (Hungarus), and thus, conceptually speaking, counting as one of the gens Hungarica, was anyone who was a subject of the kingdom of Hungary (regnum Hungariae). At the same time, the stance conceptually gave clear recognition to the separate identity of all who were differentiated as a group by virtue of their “nation,” which is to say by origin (natione) as well as by language and customs (lingua et moribus); in other words, precisely what nowadays we would call ethnic identity was not at all foreign to this stance. What counted as truly valuable, however, was for somebody to be considered as belonging to a third kind of “nation”—that is, fitting into the framework of a natio Hungarica, organized not simply by virtue of being a territorial subject, or even by linguo-cultural affinity, but in a feudal-corporate sense. The condition for this was belonging to a privileged political community of the country (the communitas regni), conceived as a “body” (corpus) and “represented” in the national diet or assembly, but not, it so happened, being able to speak the language. At least at the level of the nobility the existence of a multilingual feudal “state-nation” belonged very much to the sphere of a reality, which went back many centuries. In other respects, it was an essential feature of the structure that it did not contain any compulsion to make a decision. Everybody was, as it were, born into his own particular double or triple “national” status, while the divided identities got on well together.

It should be noted, however, that the historical charge of the archaic Hungarian “national” consciousness by its very nature proved not particularly suitable to
serve this feudally and ethnically organized harmony. Beyond the stubborn myth of origin which inhered in the historical suggestion, the “ethnic” notions of Hun-Magyar consciousness (according to these convictions, for instance, Attila’s Huns already spoke Hungarian) necessarily excluded from the community of “national” sentiment even the noblemen who spoke a different tongue and were of another natio even though otherwise, in their capacity as subjects by place of residence, they were “Hungarian” (of the gente Hungarus) and moreover belonged as members of equal rank to the political community of the feudal natio Hungarica. But the myth of the historical state was also unsuitable to inspire anybody who was obliged to accept that their ancestors had played no other role at the “second coming” of the Hun-Magyars than to be conquered. It is thus easy to understand why the burgeoning countermyths of the leading strata of the national minorities considerably antedated their political movements.

Even if the old structure possessed yet other, different inner contradictions, it could not be argued that the nineteenth-century concept of the “state-nation” was entirely devoid of a genuine historical basis. If it still proved to be a fiction, the reason for that was that the sociopolitical ground slipped irreversibly under the originally medieval “national” structures. In the nineteenth century, and especially after 1867, the dominant strand of Hungarian public opinion fell into the trap of a fatal illusion, namely imagining that the bonds over many centuries of being a Hungarus subject and member of the feudal “state-nation” could be fused by raising them to the level of modern citizenship; that is, somehow translated into a modern “state-nation” in much the same way as the English or French, over the course of around eight centuries, had fused diversities of provincial “nationalities” into a single nation. That was not only a vain illusion, but proved a folly insofar as it led to an awful loss of footing, as the theoretical postulate was inclined to resort to the practical compulsion of assimilation (even if that may, perhaps, seem relatively mild when viewed through the prism of recent developments in the region), whereas the national minorities began to formulate their own cultural-linguistic identity in the political categories of the age—and this was the age of nationalism. Contemporaneously with the ushering in of this age, the Hungarian national consciousness itself was faced with a new type of dilemma, falling into what one might call a chronic identity crisis from which, for a long time, it was incapable of extricating itself. The new age was by now characterized by an obligation to decide; everyone had to belong to a specific nation, and consequently the archaic compromise of divided and overlapping “national” identities ceased to exist. Who was Hungarian? Was it on the
grounds of one’s linguo-cultural identity that one was Hungarian, or could one, along with others speaking a different tongue but forming part of a virtual political nation (civic construct) that was being propagated, be “Hungarian”? Before 1918, at least in theory, the latter was the dominant of the two models in propaganda and in schooling, whereas on German-speaking lands the duality of “Kulturnation” and “Staatsnation” had been put forward as hypothetical constructs even before the turn of the century. The concept of a “Kulturnation” simply expressed the fact (and has been used in this sense to the present day) that the historically evolved national community, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, is frequently not identical with a civic community, but is organized on the basis of distinctively linguo-cultural features.

The greater the cost of theoretical and practical difficulties of adhering to the postulate of the “state-nation,” the greater the role given to the newly erected ideological bridge between the long bygone and the present.

The new ideological bridge around the time of Hungary’s millennial celebrations in 1896 no longer served so much to link ethnogenesis and the present day, and still less, in medieval fashion, the conquest and the present—even though the celebration of the foregoing thousand years was just becoming actual (nor did it want for fireworks)—as the by then updated motif of “historical right” had already been transposed onto the state of King (Saint) Stephen I. This is readily understandable without needing any further explanation given that the age already had clear historical concepts of the state, which were only outstripped by a well-developed (in some senses overdeveloped) sense of constitutional law, while in its system of values conquest was obsolete as a ground of self-justification and legitimization. But it is also understandable that the historical-ideological center of gravity shifted with great difficulty from ethnogenesis to the origin of the state. This happened not only because of the reality of an existing linguo-cultural construct, but because the fiction of a historicized “state-nation” required historical justification; and also because a certain loss of footing took place in clarifying the real ethnogenesis of the Hungarian people in a European field—to no negligible repugnance on the part of the prevailing public mood. The Finno-Ugrian origin of the Magyars, after a faint first dawning during the Reform Age of the 1830s and 1840s, only started to break through in the latter third of the century as a real slap in the face to the Hunnish conditioning which had taken root over the centuries. In the scales of the prevailing system of values no ideological advantage, and even more disadvantages, stemmed from the disillusioning knowledge brought by science. As a result, the
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“Turk” backers emerged who, stepping into the place of the Huns, emerged as the winners of the Ugrian-Turkish tussle that was fought out for nearly half a century after the 1870s in the media and the forums of public opinion which set the general tone, maybe not in a scientific sense, but most certainly in terms of sheer volume. Naturally, this was by virtue of its ideological charge, since in its national self-characterology it no longer sustained bellicose conquering qualities as much as a millennial “state-forming capability”—though the former was not completely eclipsed either. Apart from the romanticized vision of Árpád Feszty’s huge (15 meters high, 120 meters wide) circular panorama, The Conquest,* along with a few ornamented sabres unearthed around the same time and some rich grave furniture recovered from burial sites dating from the Age of Conquest, it was essentially the epic Gesta Hungarorum, composed around 1200 by an anonymous Magister P., which insisted on a conquest of “the inhabitants of the land” (i.e., Slavs).

Instead of an obsolescent Attila and his Huns, St. Stephen was made the alpha of the ideology of a historical state, indeed a state myth, which determined the Hungarian national consciousness. At the time of the 1867 Compromise with Austria this was all the more natural in that the first enduring compromise with the house of Habsburg, during the eighteenth century, already preceded it with a version of the medieval religious and legal myth of the “holy king” that had been projected onto a state perspective, albeit with what at the time was still a one-sidedly Roman Catholic Church complexion. As these aspects are generally familiar, the particulars of the thinking around “one thousand years of existence as a state” may be dispensed with here. I do not suggest that this line of thinking was built upon a fiction in the way that the “historical state myth” of medieval Hungary had been, let alone the crops of fresh myths of this nature, which subsequently blossomed in the region. The historical state of Hungary at the time was genuinely about one thousand years old even if in the limited sense that it was overwhelmingly responsible for creating, down the centuries, the very nationalities which then set about eradicating from memory even the historical reality of this historical frame. All the same, this way of thinking was shot through with fictional elements, and not because of any doubts about the uninterruptedness of the one thousand years of continuity of Hungary’s exis-

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* Painted in 1894 and originally put on display in Hősök tere (Heroes’ Square) in Budapest before being shown in London for eleven years from 1898, and then returned to Hungary. Since 1995, the restored panorama has been placed in the National Historical Memorial Park at Ópusztaszer, north of Szeged.
tence as a state (though after 1526 the continuity of Hungary’s existence as a state was one-sided in that it applied only to the feudal polarity), but because there was such a large disparity in the dimensions of the first millennium and those of the present. The famous injunction in King Stephen’s Admonitions to Prince Emeric (His Son): “Nam unius linguae uniusque moris regnum, imbecille et fragile est”—the country which has but one language and one custom is weak and frail—for instance, was less suitable for the purposes of legitimizing a multilingual nation as a postulate in the nineteenth century. Nor were the accomplishments of the institutions of state organization capable of rousing the enthusiasm of national minorities towards an institutional system that they already found insufficient in the nineteenth century. The further “constitutional” myths that were tacked onto the concept of the state, such as the theory and mysticism of the Holy Crown, or the doctrine of ancient constitution, also proved outworn in the face of modern constitutionalism and parliamentarism.

It is fair to say that the dominant thrust of the Hungarian public thinking on constitutional matters had jammed up at some point during the process of modernization of the mental structure; in many respects it reproduced the medievalistic structure of “history,” as a system of reasoning spiked with fictions and myths.

This structure survived the breakup of historical Hungary caused by the 1920 Treaty of Trianon; indeed, it was reinforced by it inasmuch as the postulate was then addressed not to the apostrophized “nation” of a by then non-existent civic state framework, but to a historical state which had lost more than two-thirds of its land. However, after 1918–1920, the mythical charge of “St. Stephen’s idea” not only gained in strength and in proportion to the extent to which it was placed into the service (partial or total) of territorial revision, but as was inherent to the “bridging” role, it also came to the forefront in another projection. For as an ideological bridge, by virtue of its inherited function as it were, it was called upon to bridge with its own great ideological arch not just the real deficiencies of the idea of “one thousand years of statehood” but, at one and same time, the serious and unsolved social problems of ever-present reality (above all the execrable heritage of the “thousand-year” system of latifundia, “the country of three million beggars” as Hungary was called at the time). To put it another way, the symbiosis of this way of thinking with Hungarian conservatism appeared unbreakable; indeed, between the two world wars, the symbiosis is widely known to have become ossified. At the same time, however, it seemed that the dual ideological nature of the event of the foundation of the
state divested of its real historical dimensions was unchangeable, which would in itself have been enough to cause confusion in the consciousness.

This confusion was intensified by two further burdens on the statics of the ideological bridge. Since the undisputed basic gesture of St. Stephen’s undertaking to persuade the Hungarian people to turn to the West became linked after 1920, in the terminology of conservative historiography and propaganda, to the unfortunate topos of a “Christian-German cultural community,” the topos itself and its background won a false overtone and a possibility of distorted interpretation in proportion that, on the other hand, Nazism, too, stepped forward clothed in an obscure “medieval” symbolism and showed a partiality for alluding to a false analogy to the likewise “thousand-year” Holy Roman Empire of Germany (the “Third Reich”). The second burden is that the symbolism inherited by the cult of St. Stephen from the eighteenth century (“the country of the Virgin Mary”) fitted well even with legitimism, as in its origins it had been conceived of as a compromise with the house of Habsburg. As a result, for any Hungarian who was dissatisfied with society’s immobility, feared the danger of German fascism, or rejected restoration of the Habsburgs, the false ideological symbioses and crossed lines which proliferated between the two world wars had virtually discredited the very memory of the foundation of the state, and not simply as an “ideological” riverhead that was burdened with myth but also, before long, as a natural historical element of national consciousness.

The confusion was further deepened by the increasingly frustrated condition into which the Hungarian national consciousness plunged after 1920, having long left behind the (in any case ambivalent) sense of achievement of the era after 1867. Trianon was far from the exclusive source of that frustration; indeed, the more removed from conservatism the major groupings who represented public consciousness in society were, the more tormenting it was that they experienced other problems at least as keenly as they did the disintegration of historical Hungary, as a historically determined, peculiarly national sense of failure—whether it was the failure of the revolutions or, more generally, the burial of the democratic hopes of the early years of the century, or the pressing need to find a solution to the agrarian question, and the problems of peasant existence in Hungary. On this side it was not customary, of course, to seek compensation in the remote historical past, but in opposition to the present day and a search for ways of tackling the problems which were of present relevance. At the same time, however, these groupings did also, albeit involuntarily, measure themselves against history and, to some degree, the distant past, though they were greatly
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irritated by the “compensatory” character which undoubtedly also inhered in
the historical myths as has just been outlined. It is understandable that for any-
one to whom the legacy of “one thousand years” of feudalism caused the great-
est anxiety, the millennium of St. Stephen could not offer much historical sol-
ace; indeed, the king who founded the state would hardly have been congenial
as a historical symbol, even had the aforesaid ideological symbiosis not encum-
bered it with Hungarian conservatism. Besides that, the problem of the West
also added a significant weight to reflexes on this point. Conservative historical
ideology was “pro-Western” in the sense that it absolutely required integration
of the Hungarian people in the state system and culture of the West as a domi-
nant idea linked to the founding of the state. However, anyone who kept their
eyes fixed primarily on the position of the peasantry could not find many “West-
ern” achievements, to be sure. It is easy to understand from these contrasts that
by around 1900, when thinking of the problem of genesis, certain streams of the
progressive movement—including eventually the movement of populist writers
which emerged during the 1930s—sought “historical” compensation for their
own “nationally” experienced sense of frustration in a diametrically opposite di-
rection to traditional Hungarian political nationalism.

What was paradoxical about the situation, and equally a grotesque symptom
of the distorted way of thinking characteristic of the times, was that after 1920
similar reflexes were reinforced not just to the left of traditional conservatism,
but also in ideological realms falling well to the right. The nebulous myths on
the “Eastern” origins and “racial” character of the Magyars had already been
lurking well before then. Their denouement, however, was most likely hastened
by—over and above the immanent propensity which resided in the thinking of
the extreme right—the sense of failure of that social milieu aroused both by dis-
enchantment with the “West” linked to Trianon and by the subsequent politi-
cal marginalization which occurred during Hungary’s post-World War I con-
solidation under Prime Minister István Bethlen.

It is a fact that during the interwar period there was an antinomy of Magyars
not being a “Western nation” but an “Eastern people” (or in its extreme form: a
race) which had sprung from widely separated ideological soils at the turn of the
nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and came into leaf in ways which were simi-
lar in many respects. If ideas of ethnogenesis in the national consciousness had
been subordinated to the myth of the state at around the time of the millennium,
then after 1920 the myth became uncoupled from the historical state on the
aforementioned tracks to move toward the idea that the Hungarians are “the
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people of the East.” Nothing could be more mistaken and unjust than to assert (as, in point of fact, those who professed the similarly false antinomy of nation versus progress were prone to assert at the time) that this movement in the same direction, having started off in two utterly different directions, was proof of, so to say, a morphologically related ideological structure. The sometimes-parallel shifts into “Oriental” ancestral mists that were made by Hungarian Turanism,* or kindred racist myths, like the one cherished by the populist movement, are largely explained by a shared negativity: the counterpointed nature of the compensatory mechanism turned against the historical myth fostered by official Hungary.

What has been outlined so far regarding the period which elapsed between 1867 and 1945 is one side of the coin; on the other side there is the state of the other half of the population of historical Hungary, where, after 1918–1920, national consciousness did not have to struggle with compensating for frustrations, but set about legitimizing the status quo historically in the full flush of a sense of achievement. The almost thousand-year political unity of the region disintegrated, but not its historical unity, and it is unlikely it ever will. Consequently, its ideological interactions are closely bound up with the topic, if only because the irritations that came from this side contributed to the derangement of the Hungarian national consciousness.

The process of fabricating historical fictions which got under way after 1920 on both sides of the northern and southern ranges of the Carpathians was not lacking in antecedents; at the same time, even in the upbeat state of the interwar period, in more than one respect it was still more comprehensible than what was later to be unleashed in this region. It was comprehensible as it had been a matter of a rancor of undisguisedly “bourgeois” nationalisms (over what was shared history, among other things, which was truly hard to disentangle), a phenomenon which was completely natural, while nationalism itself appeared as the declared program of a contest fought by laying one’s cards on the table. The reacquisition of so-called “ancient Slav” lands under the rubric of the Greater Moravian heritage, or the regaining of the “third principality of Romania” under the historical legal title of Daco-Romanian autochthonism, began increasingly to entrench itself into the national consciousness of neighboring territories. Its spread was inhibited, however, by the fact that the dominant element of the “Czecho-Slovak nation” founded in the year 1918 found its own

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* A pan-nationalist ideology, present in Hungary as well as Turkey and Bulgaria during the first half of the twentieth century, which stressed the common origins of these peoples in the steppes of Central Asia.
legitimacy not so much in historical theorizing than in a democratic ideal directed at the present. A brake was also present in the kingdom of Romania, where the postulate of a Daco-Romanian continuity, which had been genuinely medieval in contour and structure throughout its entire substance, was just one of the competing hypotheses of Romanian ethnogenesis and did not become a generally accepted view.

Beyond this, the contest of nationalisms proceeded with the cards being laid on the table and had no need of overriding historical rationales. The irritated reaction of these historical fictions in terms of the derangement of the Hungarian national consciousness in its “historical” focus was eventually a side effect.

2. So much for the past. The immediate past can be dated to the liberation of the entire region. The year 1945 awakened a fresh spring of hopes of, among other things, a resolution of the historical-ideological confusions. What is more, the hopes entitled one to even more than that: a modern-style liberation of conscious minds from the sway of a historicism reproduced by modern-day nationalism. Among other things, a hope glimmered that the construct of a historical \textit{origo} itself, in relation to both people and state, might be freed from a myth-laden “ideological” field in order finally to take up its own worthy place in national consciousnesses as a major basic historical element of identity.

In this context a basic condition was given, and completed by the developments around two further dates, namely, the developments in 1947 and 1948–1949. The first was the year of the Paris peace treaties, the second the “year of regime change” for the entire region. The first emphatically confirmed the status quo of the state frameworks that had been established in 1920, whereas the second signified that these states were, in the future, to be brought to a common denominator in the spirit of the common goal of socialism. The latter, in the projection of what is our present concern, ought to have meant that they would find a common denominator of history in the spirit of Marxism.

The coordinates were ostensibly different in every respect from those preceding 1945. From a Hungarian point of view, to start with, society was forced to acknowledge (and now there was no room for any illusions) the political reality that the existing Hungarian state was not the same as the historical Hungary that had been “founded” at the time of the first millennium; consequently, it could never again be an object of ideological myths or postulates—“national ideology” of any kind—as it had been in the past. The historical Hungarian state, in point of fact, now had become definitively “history” in the consciousness as well. Secondly,
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however, the existing Hungarian nation in a political sense was also not the same as the product of this historical Hungarian state, yet what stands in contrast to the latter is not “history” but the reality of the present, even though more than one quarter of the Hungarian-speaking population lives in political frameworks other than the Hungarian one. Even if it was no easy matter to approve of this, it had to be acknowledged that this nation likewise cannot be a subject for “national ideology” in a political sense; what was left open was the question of whether it might be a subject for ideology in any sense or the subject for a plain consciousness of identity. Thirdly, the dominant approach and methodology of history is also, in principle, not identical with, but of a nature different from that of nationalist historiography. Fourthly, the system of people’s democracy that emerged in the whole region was itself not, in principle, identical with the agglomeration of states bearing mutual grudges in the past.

Hungary’s “national history” had to be located in this fourfold-defined coordinate, including, among others, its alpha, the genesis of its people and the state.

Against all the listed “non-identities,” on the other hand, stands the fact that national consciousness is itself a sense of identity by virtue of its own inner logic, and specifically a form of a sense of identity of which a sense of historical continuity is an important component. Without this there can be no national consciousness, or else it is present but disturbed. Historical continuity of course does not mean an identity of “non-identity” in the Heraclitean sense of not being able to step twice into the same river, even though it is nevertheless the same river. The regulating system that is called on to validate this dialectic is history writing—to the extent that this is a science. National consciousness, however, in looking to the past does seek identity even in “non-identities,” not necessarily on ideological grounds, but in order to intimate the fact of identity in itself.

The matter of genesis, our present concern—and then not so much in its projection of the genesis of the people as rather that of the founding of the state—among a wide range of other subjects, has a far-flung connection between the distant past and the present, but not in the metaphorical sense of an “ideological bridge” mentioned above. The founding of the Hungarian state in itself is important from a wide variety of historical angles; its main significance for the national consciousness, however—and this also applies even at a level of elementary association—is necessarily the fact that in the given historical moment of danger, at the turn of the first millennium, it preserved and integrated into European history an ethnic group, the Magyars, out of which, over many centuries, the modern Hungarian nation emerged. (Equally, historical consciousness is in-
complete if it fails to keep in mind, even at the level of elementary association, that from the very beginning the state was built up from several ethnic groups, and over the course of time it was itself responsible for creating nationalities of a predominantly new ethnic tenor, which in the modern era then went the way of national separation.)

A cardinal question, even at the level of elementary association, is: what is the existing Hungarian nation that postulates its own identity, and seeks its historical continuity and identity (even in “non-identity”) on precisely that account? The people who are living in Hungary and who constitute the nation in a political sense? No, it postulates its own identity together with those whose historical archetype (and also “non-identity”) it shared in the historical process of becoming a modern nation, with whom it shares objective links of language and culture in the present, as well as a subjective “We-consciousness” based on these elements. The elementary association is particularly self-evident in the case of the state founding, since the Hungarian state founded at the turn of the first millennium is—for the national consciousness—the chief historical product of the one-time reality of historical Hungary which by now became history, and, at one and the same time, virtually its sole perceptible, hard daily reality.

But does such a nation exist either in theory or in the hard daily reality? According to European national theory it does. The term most commonly used in this domain is “cultural nation” in conceptual contrast to “state-nation.” Even socialist practice would place no obstacle to the theoretical or practical existence of such a nation if at any time a consensus had seriously emerged and later come to fruition on the sole possible solution to the national question in this part of the world: a confederation of states. In reality, however, the socialist practice has brought nothing new as compared with the region’s nineteenth-century structure. It was built on the principle of state-nations, such as the Hungarian postulate after 1867 discussed previously—with one difference, that is, but that difference does carry considerable weight. The national minorities of historical Hungary (which were more or less—but never sufficiently—recognized as entities in their own cultural character) prior to 1918 did not reckon themselves at all, or hardly at all, as being “national” within the national frameworks which were only born after 1918 and of which they subsequently became parts. The Hungarian-speaking ethnic group who lived in the Carpathian Basin, on the other hand, was part of a clearly and precisely definable modern nation that established itself historically and had existed historically.
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There is no such nation, however. Even the Hungarian notion is based on the fact that, on the one hand, there exists such a thing as the Hungarian nation within Hungary’s state framework and, on the other hand, there are “Hungarians” (Magyars). The World Federation of Hungarians (Magyarok Világszövetségé), for example, does not appear to make a clear distinction in principle between the parts of the nation taken in the above-defined sense and the scattered fragments or individuals who live on as historical communities on all sides beyond the country’s borders. Not even according to an official Hungarian point of view does there exist such a nation which may be found both in reality and in the national consciousness itself.

I am not flagging the problem for any purpose of national theory, though I might do so with that, too, in mind, but as something which has a specific connection to my chosen subject. It is my task to assess questions of historical genesis—the foundation of the Hungarian state inter alia—in today’s national consciousness. Still, the situation is that as an element of the national consciousness, the foundation of the Hungarian state, through elementary associations, also evokes an image of historical Hungary. If in principle and in the mundane facts of practice there exists “legally” a Hungarian nation in the sense that has been outlined, the identification with it “historically” does not pose any problem; if it does not exist, however, then the cluster of motifs, the foundation of the Hungarian state, through the associations it arouses, moves into the domain of the prohibited, the deranged, or the suppressed.

This is almost certainly not unrelated to the odd contrast, one that is perceived as fact—and one that is to be discussed later on—that this cluster of historical motifs shifted after 1945, even as a historical element of the national sense of identity, from the dominant, indeed ideologically weighted position which it had been occupying in the Hungarian national consciousness of earlier eras into, so to say, a state of weightlessness. The modern transformation of this structure of the national consciousness started with, among other things, this weightlessness. As to whether that was good or bad I shall not assess for the time being, but two more phenomena that can likewise be perceived as facts can be ranged alongside it. One is that in some of Hungary’s neighboring countries both the ethnogenesis, and the nebulous, historicized theories of the “state” connected with it, not only gained weight in the process of developments after 1945, they also took on the sort of “ideologically” legitimizing, indeed mythical character to which reference was made in the introductory comments. The other phenomenon is that one may explicitly observe in this transformation of
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the Hungarian national consciousness a more recent shift, even if this is not in
the direction of the main movement: a development of “compensatory” myths
of ethnogenesis. These three phenomena can hardly be unrelated to each other.

At this point it becomes comprehensible why I considered it necessary to in-
sert into my argument a historical retrospect to the Middle Ages. This is not a
matter of an obligatory reversion to Adam and Eve, but of the “wide arches” that
are observable in the structures of the consciousness. As for the following, for
reasons of limited space, I shall eschew the superfluous detailing of phenomena
in just the same way as in my prefatory thoughts.

3. In regard to the evolution of the coordinates which developed after 1945,
I shall start out from the state of consciousness in the year 1945: strictly speak-
ing, that is still a long way from my subject; indeed, it will necessitate a big di-
gression. However, I may be excused for dealing, if not with the subject in the
strict sense, then nevertheless with its aura.

Objectively, Hungarian society was completely liberated in 1945, but only
part of it (the better part) experienced it as a “success.” Of course, this should not
be understood as a statistical quantity. At the same time, the whole of society
again had to confront a set of “national frustrations.” Many people, of course,
clambered out of the ruins in a mood of “we came out badly once again,” but the
aforementioned “better part” sought for the “whys”: why did we get mixed up yet
again (as a nation) in a cul-de-sac; what closer and wider causes led us towards a
“distorted” history? In a certain sense, looking at the past was even more pain-
ful than it had been after the revolutions of 1918 and 1919, as at least back then
we had “heroically done our bit,” whereas the consequences of 1947 were experi-
enced as frustrations by both parties: that was perhaps the sole common denomi-
inator. Beyond that, society’s better part (and only that part) still had a guilty
conscience, and justifiably so, for even impotent indifference is “sinful” on the
grounds that “he who keeps silent among sinners is their accomplice.”

When a national community is in such a psychological and mental condi-
tion, the primary methods of relief are to be found not in the past, but in pres-
ent activity. In this respect, as it happens, the position was exactly the inverse of
that after 1918–19: it was favorable and opened up new vistas. But relief cannot
be successful without assimilating the past. Collective guilt as a normative sys-
tem was brilliantly analyzed by Elemér Hankiss in his recent book, Diagnózisok

* A quote from Mihály Babits’s Book of Jonah.
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(Diagnoses, 1982), pointing out the necessity for healthy mechanisms of relief, on the one hand, and the injurious consequences of omitting them. The same goes for frustration: if healthy mechanisms of resolution are not set in progress, then that leaves two erroneous tracks: repression and compensation.

We are now back to history, and more specifically the quality of the approach to history in national consciousness.

After 1945, a process of national self-examination got underway with the object of awakening the consciousness to the causes of frustration and guilt, but equally for healthy relief in the spirit of “non-identifying” identity. Its most eminent pioneer was István Bibó. All at once the outlines of a historical self-examination—and, moreover, an attitude to viewing history—were sketched out, which, in treating its structure, was critical and analytical, capable of seeing both “good” and “bad” together, which will for simplicity’s sake be referred to hereinafter as an attitude centered on national self-reflection. There was no shortage of great predecessors: if I mention just the names of the statesmen-writers István Széchenyi, József Eötvös, and Oszkár Jászi, the poet Mihály Babits, or even the late works of Gyula Szekfű, I will have made it clear that an identity of political or ideological persuasion is not at all absolutely essential; still less is it a historian’s mere “scholarly task,” though it does no harm if a historian also considers laying the foundations of that attitude to be his own vocational task. It is my belief that the better part of Hungarian society who represent its consciousness took note of the revival of that attitude and was ready to participate in the collective inquiry. The other side, obviously, sought to forget and repress everything as soon as possible. It is also true that in order that this critical and analytical inquiry should become, as it were, a national or communal reflex, it was paradoxically not beneficial if, in the midst of the suddenly blossoming opportunities for activity, the relief mechanisms overly indulged themselves in party political activity. Despite all this, between 1945 and 1948, much more so than ever before, there was a possibility for a “self-reflective” stance on national history to evolve.

The leaders of the Communist Party of Hungary (MKP) who returned from Moscow did not just join in the unfolding of national self-criticism, but were among the sharpest critics. But they also brought back an attitude according to which, when pushed to extremes, there are “goodies” and “baddies,” with the former deserving to be rewarded, but the latter to be exposed and punished, while the middle ground was to be won over. They also brought back such a view of history. In history there were “goodies” and “baddies,” “progressives” and “reactionaries”; the former had to be followed, the latter ”unmasked,” but there was
not much middle ground. This new model of the ideology of national history had evolved during the 1930s: the accentuation of the progressive and independentist traditions as examples against the exploitative Horthy regime and all-devouring German fascism undoubtedly had a noble mobilizing intent. That in itself, in a very broad sense, was also justified as the Communists did indeed wish to see progress; indeed, they were its vanguard. In the historical ideology in question, however, to the extent that certain leaders of the MKP began to serve not so much progress as the near-fatal discrediting of the socialist cause itself, it carried a characteristic legitimizatory implication: “I follow the ‘goodies,’ consequently, since I follow them, I too am good.” This is to say nothing of the imminent snags of “historical ideology” and its internal conceptual and methodological contradictions that Erik Molnár started to rake up after 1960.

From the point of view of the national perspective of history, attitude, and self-esteem (indeed a sense of identity), the changeover after 1948–49 was not fortunate because, among other reasons, it cut short the mechanisms for relieving frustrations and the conscience of guilt that had got underway, obstructed the possibilities for a self-reflective historical approach, and lastly, encouraged the revival of the old reflexes which it intended to obliterate.

The new mechanism branches into two seemingly diametrically opposed directions. One of these was, instead of relieving the conscience of guilt, that of engendering it, which assumed the dimensions of veritable “campaigns,” which embraced the whole of society and followed a time-honored mechanism for exercising power: “arousing a guilty conscience in you in such a way that you can only hope to obtain absolution from me, and in that way you come to be dependent on me”—a dependence to which it was again Elemér Hankiss who drew attention. A reckoning on a, so to say, national historical scale was also left out, and in its place the stigma of a “guilty (fascist) people,” which was never written down in that form but hinted at and paraphrased all the more strongly, was propagated. “The outlet for a muddled and murky consciousness, or partial awareness, of crimes that have been committed, tolerated, or only recognized in retrospect, was thereby blocked in Hungarian society” (Hankiss). Such a condition can give rise to anxiety, fear, a diffuse malaise, but it may just as soon switch over to a complete absence of a conscience of guilt. This duly happened. It was precisely this area into which the matter of a national identity also slipped. The decision taken in the Paris peace treaty of 1947 ought to have been digested, and the appropriate conclusions drawn from that. The Communist Party did many things to oppose the decision, but after it had been handed down, the decision got caught up in a
logic of the following kind: “You received this as a punishment because you are a culpable, fascist people, Hitler’s last ally; resign yourself to it and forget it; as a culpable people, submit to the punishment.” Of course, after 1948–49, irrespective of this, the entire complex of questions was placed under an ideological lock and key in the entire region. The society’s national consciousness was stifled.

In the other direction, a nationally colored progressive-independentist historical ideology persisted, though by now as a “thesis” provided with a Marxist stamp, which was essentially of much the same inherited consistency, as it had been formulated for a noble propaganda goal after 1933. Historians were expected to “verify” this, and they did what they had to do. They accentuated anything that was progressive and laid bare anything that was retrograde. A discussion of the inherent scholarly weaknesses of this way of looking at things does not belong here, and anyway, by and large, they can now be considered as having been cleared up, but four aspects are worth mentioning in the context of the present train of thought.

For one thing, the line of history highlighted was in general marked by names (Dózsa, Rákóczi, Kossuth), which, given that they had strung historically disparate qualities onto the same chain, was from the outset pretty abstract. Secondly, this abstraction became even more abstract to the degree that the listed series of names rigidified into a kind of litany at the end point of which the name of the communist leader, Mátyás Rákosi, was supposed to be understood. In that sense also an “ideological bridge” was created, which with its own independentist and progressive coloring was destined to overcome the fact that the politics which crystallized by around 1950 was, on the one hand, anything but national and, on the other hand, progress had plunged itself, as well as the cause of socialism, into a disaster. Thirdly, in addition to mechanically churning out countermyths (“people’s patriotism”) to obsolete myths, the attitude had an explicitly “compensatory” character: even if you don’t feel comfortable in your national garb, at least you have a “splendid” history and grand heroes. Fourthly, this way of looking at selective “highlights” of history did not teach people to think. As both historical and present-centered thinking form part of a system of intercommunicating vessels, a person who is unable to analyze the past (and only seeks to retrospectively reward the goodies and unmask the baddies) is also incapable of analyzing the present, and vice versa.

As a result of this, history was left in the sphere of “ideology.” By the latter, the word is not to be understood in the widespread usage (“Marxism”), and the construct had very little to do with Marxism. Just as the possibility of society it-
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self clarifying and processing the frustrations and sense of guilt that were felt to be “national” was omitted, all of that was bottled up or shaken off (“I am not so guilty as to have it cast in my face every day; I am not guilty”). In return it was given an “ideological” and “compensatory” attitude to history, merely reinforcing compensatory tendencies which, having been inherited from the past, were in any case already present. The possibilities of developing a self-reflective model as outlined above were stymied.

After 1956, the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (MSZMP) jettisoned the former “official” historical ideology. Since then, there has been no canon; history has been dropped from the “ideological” sphere. There is nothing wiser a political power can do than that; this separation is itself one of the important aspects of modernization. On the one hand, history was entrusted to Marxist historians; on the other, through open debate, to a process of self-purification of the social consciousness. Of such a nature was the so-called “Erik Molnár debate” of the 1960s, extending into the 1970s, which it is nowadays unbecoming and unfair sagely to disparage just because, on the one hand, all kinds of extreme opinions, in some cases not of a particularly high standard, were formulated in it and, on the other hand, we have since (in part) moved on from its dimensions. It was a phase of a major process of self-purification, although maybe not a resoundingly successful one, for the debate entered Hungarian public discourse at a peculiar point in time. For one thing, it was around then that after the repression (and the 1956 explosion) a national sentiment was searching for new routes, which, since the self-examination that got underway between 1945 and 1948 had been balked, did not always adjust to the (euphemistically speaking) dialectic of the identity of “non-identity.” For another thing, it was also a time when conditions were starting to ripen for a kind of national indifference as a result of economic improvement (“refrigerator socialism”) and certain belated trends of the time. It was likewise Hankiss who analyzed a 1978 public opinion survey in which, in answer to the question of what in his/her own country the respondent was proud of, 75 percent of Hungarians questioned opted for the standard of living and economic outcomes, just 17 percent for “social and political institutions,” and 2 percent in all for “human qualities” (sadly, “pride” in the country’s history did not figure among the points in the questionnaire, though that would hardly have produced any significant change in the proportions). In this way, Hungarian social consciousness was not truly able successfully to process, or even understand, the debate in question, though that was less of a problem than if no debate at all had taken place.
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The essential point has been the possibility for the unfolding of a process of self-purification. More than likely, of course, for a long time there will remain some very old mental reflexes that had in fact been reinforced by the 1950s; among other things, a magical belief in the power of propaganda, coupled with a “compensatory” mechanism. Like a drop in the ocean, this attitude was recently reflected in József Magyar’s instructive documentary film about schools.* A truly startling scene unfolds in a class of teenagers when, in response to a question as to who would stay in Hungary if they could move freely, not more than three or four children raised their hands. In response to the reporter’s further questions, the teachers excuse themselves with the following: “Alas, only one lesson a week is set aside for ‘education of patriotism.’” Such a teacher is quite likely convinced that if he/she had two lessons, or maybe five, by the time they would have three hours a week devoted to the purpose maybe six children would be won over to the homeland, inspired by its “splendid” and unambiguously “positive” history.

4. After that digression, I now return to the coordinates of state, nation, history, and historical region which evolved after 1945, and especially after 1948, more closely in relation to the problems of historical genesis.

As regards the connection of state and national identity—or, to be more accurate, “non–identity” in the case of Central and Eastern Europe—I can only refer back to the fact that over the entire region Stalinism suppressed the problem institutionally, and in the specifically Hungarian context Rákosism did so ideologically. The problem has not been suppressed since the 1970s, but neither has there been any definite formulation of its character. Yet until the existence of a Hungarian nation in the sense outlined above is clarified sufficiently—either at the theoretical level or the level of its “connections” with practice—one must also count with the disturbance of national sentiment in connection with this; and for another thing, for reasons that have already been alluded to, one cannot expect that the motif of, for instance, the founding of the state will swing over in a healthy manner from an earlier, “ideologically” confused domain into a clear realm of consciousness of historical identity. With regard to the axis of historical perception, I must refer back to the foregoing digression.

The mutual interdependence of the identity problem and the ideological mech-

* A mi iskola [Our school], a seventy-five-minute film from 1983, concerns the tasks, the problems, and the successes of the Hungarian educational system, and was seen by many thousands of teachers at the time.
anisms of the Rákosi era was likely the reason why the foundation of the Hun-
garian state was not placed on the VIP list of “progressive traditions” at the level
of the “official” ideology. To be more accurate, it ended up in an already half-
open drawer, from which it could be pulled out every now and then, though in
a given case the drawer may itself also be closed. One had to keep one eye on the
neighbor, and the other on the “guilty people” to see whether in this or that case
they were taking it badly.

This explains how in the case of such a demonstrative—and indeed, in its
very compactness, the most eloquent—symbol of the sense of historical conti-
nuity, the national coat of arms suggesting total discontinuity came to be cre-
ated in contrast to those of Czechoslovakia or Poland, for example. Admittedly,
the historical coat of arms was not created by King Stephen, and in fact the
memory of the House of Árpád is only represented in the alternating bars of red
and white and the patriarchal cross.* It is admittedly also true that the additions
to the shield are also expressive of historical Hungary (albeit not according to
the senseless “readings” of irredentist ideology). The fact is that after 1945 the
national coat of arms simply had to be modified, but that not even a faint sym-
bolic element was left to express the country’s historical identity was all too out-
rageously typical. The new national coat of arms was intended as a reward, in
order that Hungary’s population would feel itself as having been “reborn,” like a
nova creatura after the baptismal water in Christian symbolism,** but in reality
it was a punishment for the “guilty” people.

Three further remarks on the topic. One is that even the currently used na-
tional coat of arms fails to express a continuity of identity either in its heraldic
overall picture or in its present character of lacking any sort of “historical” ele-
ment. As regards pertinent lessons of 1956, for example, for one thing the mem-
ory of the Hungarian national flags of 1956, with a central hole left by ripping
out the postwar coat of arms, should be taken note of as a need for theatrical
manifestation toward this symbol; but on the other hand, to the best of my
knowledge, not even a faint hint of any kind of irredentist atmosphere was
shown during those twelve days, despite that being the best moment of its man-

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* The heraldic description of the historical coat of arms is a crown of St. Stephen (since the eighteenth century
the cross on the crown is bent) over a shield, the left-hand half of which (or “dexter” from the bearer’s point
of view) bears eight alternating red (gules) and silver (argent) bars, with the right-hand half having a patriar-
chal cross (cross lorraine argent on gules), rising from a crown in gold (or) on a green triple mound (compart-
ment vert).

** See 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away;
behold, all things are become new.”
manifestation. For this issue, in that sense, 1956 might even be perceived as a test case. In the recent past, Hungarian society did not take the crown and corona
tion insignia up in their “ideological” capacity, but as “tangible” symbols of the
fact of historical identity and continuity. All these testify to mental structures
being in a process of transformation. The third remark is that the fashion for de-
signing coats of arms, which has evolved in Hungary over the past two decades,
does not for the time being cast a good light on the character of that mental con-
sciousness in itself. The fashion for coats of arms, which is evident especially in
the creation of coats of arms for cities is, in part, a healthy phenomenon as it sig-
nals a strengthening of local and communal ties, though for the most part they
are preposterous new confections (which reject not only symbols that are con-
sidered to be “feudal” or “clerical” but even entire historical heraldic figures) test-
ifying to a confused apprehension about admitting to historical continuity,
notwithstanding the fact that a coat of arms is not “ideology,” merely a symbol
documenting identity. In Czechoslovakia and Poland, it is not just the country
itself, but also towns and cities in general which have retained their historical
coats of arms.

The fact that King Stephen was not entered on the VIP list of “progressives
and fighters for independence” may have been inexplicable in the absence of the
connections that were in part intimated earlier, for if there is a portrait gallery of
progressives, and—with some reinterpretation—“independentists,” the first pic-
ture of it would unequivocally have had to be one of King Stephen. In an ab-
tract way he was indeed there among the “progressives” (albeit half in the
drawer), but accompanied by a continual urge to explicate: back then a class soci-
ety was progressive, now it is a classless society. The ideologizing of the “indepen-
dence” motif was already present in the pre-1945 structure, inasmuch as it was
anti-German, since Stephen did not ask for the crown from the Holy Roman
Emperor, but from the pope, and so the country also stayed outside the “concep-
tual” framework of the Holy Roman Empire. This is an unhistorical line of argu-
ment strictly speaking, as the actual crown was in fact received by the young
Vajk* “by courtesy and encouragement of the emperor” (imperatoris gratia et
hortatu), and dependence would not in any case have meant a loss of sovereignty
in the modern sense; this degree of historicizing is, however, still tolerable to the
ordinary historical consciousness. Even in this line of thought, though, it is typ-
ical that it was not so much out of any association of ideas with national “sover-

* Stephen’s heathen name.
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eighty” that King Stephen was given the status of reserve stock in the picture gallery, but because by mechanically adopting the general model of Eastern European applicability it could be listed as a topos, which could be assigned as a main chapter heading in school textbooks to the present day: “The fight of the peoples of Eastern Europe against Germanic conquerors.” What is historically half true and half untrue, and certainly in no way fitted into those school textbooks, is that the Ottonian dynasty and its successors—antedating Hitler, as it were—constantly worked away at subjugating Eastern Europe, while the peoples of Eastern Europe were constantly preoccupied with warding off Germanic incursions. Over and beyond this, the necessity for historical progress could also have been included among the motifs, but for understandable reasons that was not such a gratifying matter. The assignment of free peasants into “decuries” and “centuries” of serfs around 1000 AD, and the political line taken with the peasants around 1950, might have roused unwanted direct associations.

The founding of the Hungarian state nevertheless does have two obviously delicate aspects. One of these is the accommodation of the population to the Western structure. That could have been reinterpreted in the sense of (and this logic would not have been foreign to the era) the progressive force having been the West back then, but now it being the East. An attempt to do so was indeed made, but it did not really take off, and it could not have taken off because it would have been all too obvious that through the foundation of the Hungarian state the Hungarian people truly did become a part of the West, and in some shape or form it had stayed that way down the succeeding centuries. Here then is a problem that can only be addressed in terms of a “nationally self-reflective attitude to history,” and not from a basic position that has been simplified to “slogans” and “examples.” Did Hungarians truly become a “Western” people? If so, then to what extent? If not, why not? What is the structure of this history? If it became partly “East European” but also retained a bit of its “Western” character, does it not then follow that socialism (a Western idea which had gained currency in Eastern Europe) ought to be fused with that other Western innovation of democracy? Enquiries into such and similar questions and associations prompted by the founding of the Hungarian state could not be undertaken during the 1950s. The other ticklish aspect has already been touched on earlier: the state was founded, but what sort of a state? What is the tangible historical identity of that kind of state, which can also be perceived ethnically today?

These were regarded as delicate, even embarrassing questions back then, and consigned the founding of the state to that drawer reserved for national histori-
cal consciousness, which was normally kept half-open, but could be firmly closed at any time. Those reflexes survived the 1950s. When in 1970, the time came around to celebrate what, by common consent, was the millennial anniversary of King Stephen’s birth, naturally there were festivities; around August 20, every daily and weekly newspaper and magazine made available its obligatory commemorative piece, and in the city of Székesfehérvár, which was the capital at the time of Stephen, a very brief (half-day) academic session was also organized of such brevity as I do not recall ever having experienced elsewhere. After that: a deafening hush. (The Poles, clearly falling into the other extreme, celebrated their own millennium of statehood for a full decade.) The scientific secretary of Székesfehérvár Museum resigned his post due to conflicts with local state organs, because in their view he had made “too much of a fuss” of the jubilee.

The ideological mechanism went into operation not long after 1945 in order to (rightly) drive back traditional distorting notions, and partly in order to forestall undesired associations of ideas. The thesis was formulated that the foundation of the Hungarian state can be explained by fundamentally Slavic influences, and moreover by carrying over the institutional bases of “Slavic states” in Pannonia. There is no question that Erik Molnár was also motivated by some justifiable and fitting intentions of redress, as it was possible to account for the far more complex influence of the Slavic population of the Carpathian Basin than had been the custom (out of bias) before 1945. On the other hand, however, there is also no question that the necessary scholarly basis to enunciate that “notion” was lacking; it would have been fit to propose further investigation into the matter as a desideratum. The “notion” was ideological, and was made all the more so in being vulgarized. A “historical” construct lurked vaguely in the background (with some people at the time present just to scrape up as much from the construct of “historicity”) that there is a model today, and already back then the Slavs were our model, with the model lying crisscross behind the early centuries. Similarly, around 1970, György Győrffy was still metaphorically in the dock on charges of “anti-Marxism” because, according to the prosecutor, he had attempted to derive the foundation of the Hungarian state not from borrowings from the Slavs but from internal social contingencies. In point of fact, he regarded the role of the armed escort as being a decisive factor (an elementary seminary precept has it that the state is a machine for the enforcement of power); secondly, constructing the polarity of “richness” and “famine,” he had perhaps supposed the internal structure of society as being more extreme than it actually was (nota bene: Marxism deems the state to be a product of class relations).
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was an interesting example of an “ideological” precept being declared as being Marxist; nevertheless, due to scholarly opposition, especially on the part of linguists, the “Entlehungstheorie”—borrowing hypothesis—only acquired semi-official status, but in that capacity it still crops up in textbooks to this day.

Lastly, one further important aspect of the topic needs to be brought up. Whilst the now dominant school of thought—due to the “national” inhibitions—partly consigned the abovementioned ideas about the foundation of the Hungarian state to the drawer, whereas on the other hand there were almost no inhibitions about declaring the country’s feudal movements to be “national,” most paradoxically it also partly consigned to the drawer the fact that historical Hungary had been a multinational state from the very outset, and became so even more as time went on. It was not that this fact per se was denied in general, but that in this connection it tended to be pulled out of the drawer along with the idea that here, too, a historical prototype of the “guilty nation” could be detected: “repression of the national minorities,” which is complete nonsense and an untrue charge prior to the nineteenth century. At the same time, precious little is to be found in old textbooks and popular history pamphlets about what the Hungarian state really was, and details on just how much and in what way it was multinational. Alarmingly, that imprint is still left in many minds. A typical case is the tourist who returns to Hungary from Slovakia, let us say from the district around the Orava valley, and seethes out of “nationalistic” aggravation at the use of Slovak for place names and personal names; he is in many cases only betraying his own ignorance, because in the selected instances it really was the then-emergent Slovak ethnic group which bestowed the names on the villages, and the person in question may well have been (at least partially) Slovak. (A starkly different matter is the anomalous automatic equation of “Master MS as a Slovak painter.”)* The mirror image of this is a typical reproach that so often pains Transylvanians when a tourist from Hungary, buying thick woolen blankets in Kolozsvár/Cluj or Szeklerland says: “How well they speak Hungarian! Where have they learned it?”

In the ideological prohibitions, confusion, and suppressions outlined so far, at least in regard to “consciousness-regulating” factors, we have now passed well beyond the 1960s. Of course, the general public consciousness has not yet got over them because the repercussions of the “fifties” abate only slowly in people’s minds. The fact is that, as a matter of history, the cause of the founding of the

* Master MS—late Gothic painter active in Upper Hungary in the sixteenth century.
Hungarian state has been handed over to historians. György Györffy’s monograph on King Stephen has been a bestseller,† and of course the rock opera based on the story of King Stephen was a huge success,‡ though it is hard (and completely irrelevant) to judge how much of that is attributable to the music, how much to the content, and how much to the flag sporting the national colors that flutters across the background from time to time. Nonetheless, according to my own experiences, the state of relative “weightlessness” referred to in the introductory argument still pertains to this day, with the following comments on examining consciousness to serve as a supplement. However, an imagined state of equilibrium is not helped by a sense of irritation received by national consciousness outside the borders of Hungary, without those concerned taking part in any genuine domestic “consciousness-regulation” in this area.

I endeavor to deal in as summary fashion as possible with the fourth determinant of the coordinates of the area of inquiry, as this is not the place to present, even in a nutshell, something that has barely received attention in Hungarian scholarly forums for four decades. “Guilty consciences” in this part of the world following 1945, it is common knowledge, did not pose much of a problem elsewhere. The general public consciousness deemed the memory of Tiso’s Slovakia*** eliminable with the Slovak uprising. The procedure was simple enough: the Czechoslovak state framework labeled Slovakia’s Magyar ethnic minority almost explicitly a “guilty people,” and meanwhile a historical fiction (ancient Slovakian land and people that had been forcibly Hungarianized over the course of time) already played a big role in its ideology of “re-Slovakization”; indeed, the historical right to the reannexation of the “ancient Slovak lands” was asserted even at the level of the Communist Party. Romania’s breakaway in August 1944, on the other hand, apparently rendered the memory of that country’s own fascism forgettable, while distorted concepts of “guilty peoples” who should be expelled arose in the region, as well as elsewhere in Europe.

The new postwar era differed from the interwar period not just in the weight shifted unequivocally to constructs which, though present, had not been dominant before 1945, but also because these were central to the “state ideology,”

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‡ Rock opera *István a király* (Stephen the King) by Levente Szörényi and János Bródy, recorded in 1983.
*** Jozef Tiso (1887–1947) was a Roman Catholic priest and activist in the Slovak People’s Party who became Prime Minister (1938–1939) of the autonomous Slovak government after Munich, then President (1939–1945) of the Slovak Republic when it was established as a Nazi protectorate. After the war he was tried and executed for collaboration.
more latently so in the case of Slovakia, in a frankly manifest manner in Romania, and increasingly so in the 1960s and 1970s. The only difference was that as far as academics were concerned, this was not a matter of state and party discipline in Slovakia, but it became so in Romania.

As far as vulgarizing historiography is concerned, one might recall one of the first paragraphs of the present essay where, by contrast, the characteristics of the medieval structure on the basis of internal features of the Middle Ages are summed up. Belief in a fictitious “prehistoric people” that was created by means of a pedantic literary construct? Instead of a Moravian substrate, a substantial population of which lived only in the river valleys of the northwestern parts of the Carpathian Basin (one element of the Slovak ethnic group that emerged in the late Middle Ages from a population in which Czech, Moravian, Polish, and Ruthenian settlers were mixed from the thirteenth century onwards), there is a proto-nation, which already lived as a “Slovak” people in what, by and large, is the present-day territory of Slovakia in the ninth century. In place of Romanians of disputed and complex origin, who in the twelfth century were gradually moving from Wallachia to the Făgăraș and Hătszeg (Hâțeg) districts in Transylvania (who thus made up the first element of a mass of ethnic Romanians to settle there from the thirteenth century onwards over the centuries) there was, on the basis of the anonymous Magister P.’s “historical romance,” a Daco-Romanian autochthonous population living in “vassal states” from southern Transylvania to Bihar (Bihor, Romania). All of the foregoing is fiction; the “historical” rights for the purposes of map drawing now reach a crescendo. The true border of the Empire (Principality) of Greater Moravia marked by the River Garam (in Slovak: Hron) is moved not just to the projected border of today’s Slovakia but at times even as far as the Hungarian town of Szolnok. The Daco-Romanians are increasingly inclined to settle on state borders along the lines of the River Tisza and its White Körös and Black Körös tributaries. If it is possible for the introduction to a serious-minded and basically sound document published in 1971 to contain the statement that this fictitious “ancestral land” was “usurped” by the Magyars, in the background to it there lies a belief in the fiction, the likes of which are now more or less boundless at the levels of popularization. The Romanian “founding of the state” currently stands at an order of magnitude several millennia ago, and a myth of autochthony in recent years has been fused with an intensified tendency of cultural myths (highly developed Slavs versus nomadic “marauding” Magyars; Romanians who were intensely Christian an uncertain length of time ago versus heathen Magyars) and myths
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of self-characterology (sturdy, humane Romanians versus “wild,” conquering Magyars). In place of a summary, I shall merely refer to Point 3 of this study, and to the fact that not long ago the topic was finally summed up—as it happens, precisely in connection with how this all has repercussions of an, as it were, irritative nature on a certain awakening appetite of the Hungarian national consciousness for “historical” mythopoesis—by István Fodor with a topic which is of a high standard and also popular. But where would such an article appear? In Múzeumi Közlemények (Museum publications) 1982, no 1, no less,* whereby the information remains hermetically sealed from the “general public.” Yet, it is impossible to evade touching on the entire subject sooner or later, not just in scholarly reflections (which are not relevant here) but also at a popular level, precisely because of the irritative effect that it has on public discourse. Anyone may experience what I have in the recent past, in connection with several invitations to lecture as a consequence of an article of mine which appeared in História.** Almost half of the questions on the topic of “the peoples of medieval Hungary” have been prompted by the Daco-Romanian hypothesis.

The state of the entire subject matter in popular thought would be measurable in principle through the sociological survey that Antal Bőhm and György Csepeli are currently engaged in. It is a pity that just two questions in the study, the raw data of which I have been able to inspect, relate to the foundation of the state.

What does, at least, emerge from the part of this study which involved 600 individuals of intellectual occupations, is that a minuscule 7 percent of this stratum were able to accept the Slavic hypothesis (with 15 percent undecided), while it is noteworthy that the vast majority (79 percent) opted for “necessary accommodation to the patterns of more highly developed Western Europe,” with 55 percent of these opting for “an original approach to amalgamating Magyar traditions and European requirements.”

The sole question from this comprehensive survey of altogether 1,600 individuals (stratified into those having an intellectual job, skilled workers, and semi-skilled workers) which is pertinent to the present study was formulated as follows: “In your view, would St. Stephen be satisfied with the Magyar people if he were to be resurrected today?” 6 percent of those questioned in total (though 12 percent of

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* See also István Fodor, In Search of a New Homeland: The Prehistory of the Hungarian People and the Conquest, trans. Helen Tarnoy (Budapest, 1982).

** The major popularizing historical periodical in the period, launched in 1979.
the intellectuals) answered “the question is bad” or “nonsensical,” which I personally consider to be a relevant response given that it is hard to give a serious answer to the question at the level of historical thinking. The answers are of some value, but it stems from the nature of the question that it is of no use to what we are curious about now; that is, their perception of history, but, above all, people’s general (political, financial, moral, etc.) sentiment. Nevertheless, I have processed the sample of raw data made available to me according to types of response.

What is probably of primary significance in connection with the subject of the present paper is that 24 percent of both worker categories were unable to answer because “I don’t know what he had in mind,” “I don’t understand history,” “I don’t bother myself with things like that,” “I don’t know how he reigned,” etc., whereas there were no such answers among those in intellectual jobs. In these cases, one has to wonder if the persons questioned took the question they were asked “seriously” and were unable to answer it as such, but it is not reassuring that in the consciousness of one worker in every four there was registered indifference, gaps in knowledge, or the aforesaid trivialization in some indefinable ratio.

The remaining responses can be placed into five contrasting categories for each group (any major stratified differences are given in parentheses).

Proportionally the largest group is composed of those who answered positively to the stereotyped reference to progress (“the country has developed considerably,” “progress has been huge,” “big changes have taken place,” etc.), but equally those who answered negatively without offering any explanation—or to be precise: 15 percent each (8 percent–12 percent–28 percent versus 8 percent–20 percent–12 percent respectively). The previous unknown fraction can most likely be taken as relating to the specific topic of the present study, whereas the rest cannot be evaluated. One may also add here the 7 percent (24 percent–0 percent–4 percent) who gave a positive response relating to the continuity of the people or state, the counterpole of which is the 4 percent (12 percent–2 percent–0 percent) who gave answers of the type, “the country has become small . . . due to its area on the map or population.” The latter extremely low scores are a sign that irredentist sentiment has practically ceased to exist in Hungary, as even those giving a negative answer are not necessarily thinking of territorial revision. At all events, the “activity” of intellectuals on both sides of the response is striking.

The other three types of responses have nothing to say on attitudes to history. The counterpole to the 4 percent who gave a positive (yes) answer which was significantly politically motivated (“we built socialism” or “this is the regime he wanted”) is 8 percent of the no category (“the Magyar people are not autono-
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mous,” “he was pro-Western,” “the people of those times were more advanced than we are”); the counterpole to the 3 percent who cite “good laws,” “order,” or “organization” is the 9 percent who gave a morally motivated negative answer (“the population was more diligent, tougher, etc., back then,” “there is too much indiscipline, immorality now” etc.); and finally the financially motivated 5 percent who responded positively (“we have a good life,” “due to the country’s economic development,” “things are going well for us” etc.) can be counterposed to the 5 percent who gave a religiously motivated negative answer (“he was an extremely religious king,” “people are not religiously minded nowadays”).

The structure is highly divided, which was only to be expected. There is little more to be gleaned from the survey in regard to attitudes to history.

5. What about the fate of the other genesis problem, that of the origin of the Magyar people, after Hungary’s liberation? It has followed from the turn of events that the Turanist culture of the interwar period has sunk well below the public sphere, while from another angle, the public arena is now held by those who, for the most part, espouse the account available from “The Prehistory of the Magyars” (1943), edited by Lajos Ligeti.* As to what there was in between, it is hard to know.

Certainly, it was beneficial for the subject area itself that it was not dragged into the ideological domain. In some sense, this is acknowledged by the relevant question in the above survey of the awareness of individuals in intellectual occupations: “Does the origin of a people have any significance?” Some 60 percent of those asked gave a positive answer, but added that it was only of scientific significance, while according to a further 22 percent it had “hardly any” significance, and altogether only 14 percent opted to state that ethnogenesis had “profound significance.” This is largely in accord with the result of another stratified survey according to which slightly more than two thirds (67.9 percent) of respondents profess the Magyars to be a people of Finno-Ugrian origin.

What of the other third? Almost exactly a tenth of those surveyed either did not know what the origin of the Magyars was or expressed no opinion, which is rather a lot, while the gap in between is practically filled by a camp, amounting to 19.7 percent of those questioned, who took the line that the Magyars are descendants of the Huns, with only minimal proportions believing they are of

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Turkic (1.5 percent) or Sumerian (0.8 percent) origin. It is to be noted, then, that as we near the end of the second millennium, one Hungarian citizen in five still (or already) holds by a Hunnish origin.

There is something surprising about that result. It is widely known that in the early years of the twentieth century, and also later between the two world wars, it was the pro-Turkic party who in public forums provided combative opposition to the idea of a Finno-Ugrian origin, and even at this level the Huns were held on record as in the realm of legends. The dwindling of this faction seems to indicate that the “traditionalist” opposition of the modern age has no substantial succession to carry it over the changes marked by 1945; its continuity has been broken. Equally, the new opposition grouping of “Sumero-Magyarologists” was also unable to muster a camp of support worthy of mention, even in the mid-sixties when it was at its height. The vast majority of these groups were people who, for whatever reason, did not wish to take part in the modern era’s enterprise of clarifying the ethnogenesis of the Magyars and cling on to a far-fetched fiction which is seven hundred years old.

The tiny group of Sumerian fans would need no further mention here were it not for a single aspect. All that one needs to know about the topic is contained in Géza Komoróczy’s marvelous little book, *Sumer és magyar?* (Sumerian and Magyar?, 1976). It is a question of a small sect of fanatics of no social significance who, from time to time, lay siege to the press and book publishers, but otherwise live in their own world, swapping manuscripts with each other, but the psychic soil for the myth, which sprouted in the American exile community of the 1950s,* is fairly evident. For those who have completely lost their footing, the traditional solaces are ineffective; what they need as compensation is at least the thought that the Magyars were among the “ancient peoples” of human culture. The “heightening” of a myth by taking it ad absurdum is an old symptom, incidentally, for the intensifying debates of “nationalisms” in the late Middle Ages. The Germans wanted to compensate for the patent lacunae of their self-realization in their own “national” character in contrast to other, more successful peoples by it becoming a central article of faith that Adam himself already spoke German, because that was the language of *allmann* (the etymological source of the Latin name for the Alemannic dialects of the West Germanic peoples). What is noteworthy in the context of “Sumero-Magyarology,” is the fact that

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* See Francisco Jos Badiny, *The Sumerian Wonder (How We Found the Sumerian Language on the Medieval Linguistic Remains)* (Buenos Aires, 1974).
there is just one other part of the world outside the American continents where
the doctrine has won any significant following, and that is Transylvania. Natur-
ally, it is not measurable, but clear as daylight that, especially since the unear-
thing of tablets at Alsótatárlak (Tărtăria, Romania) became public knowledge,*
the movement is much more vocal and has gained more ready access to the pub-
lic than in Hungary. Public opinion is a factor to which, merely out of courtesy,
even scholars pay attention. The most obvious explanation was articulated by
Komoróczy: “We may be almost sure that the popularity in Transylvania of the
idea of a linguistic affinity between Sumerian and Hungarian is most directly
related to the dogged adherence of the official line to Daco-Romanian contin-
uity.” It is also almost sure that the readily traceable influence of the previously
described irritation can be captured on this point.

Sheltering as they do in Hungary under the level of print culture, the much
more sizeable camp of believers in a Hunnish origin is hard to approach. We are
in the fortunate position, however, to have had at hand two literate adherents as
well recently, so that the phenomenon can be studied from the source materials
as it were. As it happens, I had the good luck of being one of those to trigger the
process nearly a decade ago with a study on Simon of Kéza, which “rides rough-
shod over the cause of a Hunnish-Magyar connection,” as it says word for word
in a bulky pamphlet by ex-journalist Lásló Sebestyén (Kézai Simon védelmében
[In defense of Simon of Kéza], 1975), multiplied copies of which made the
home rounds at the time and which was one of the informative sources of the resusci-
tated Hunnic theory. The other was the writer Ferenc Kunszabó, who has most
recently taken up the cudgels with his at times none too gentle meditations
about supposed traces of the Huns which have come to light in Switzerland.**

I encountered the influence of some of Kunszabó’s earlier meditations on his-
tory in the reactions to a lecture I gave in a university club, whereas a smaller
movement had gathered around Sebestyén and pushed the defense of the Huns
onto the agenda of various clubs until, sad to say, intervention from higher offi-
cial quarters broke up the agitation. Sad to say, because if it had not happened
the way it did, we would be much wiser about the natural history of the phe-
omenon. This way, however, the way of thinking reflected in the sources indi-

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* The Tărtăria tablets are three tablets of unbaked clay, originally unearthed by Nicolae Vlassa in 1961. These
bear incised symbols, resembling those on Sumerian clay tablets. They were once believed to date from c. 4000 BC, though more recent radiocarbon dating has pushed the date back to as long ago as 5500 BC.

** Ferenc Kunszabó, “Hunok Svájcban?” [Huns in Switzerland?], Kortárs 11 (1981): 1793–96; Ferenc Kunszabó,
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cated and the anonymous mass of the public—put at around 20 percent by the survey—can only be connected hypothetically.

However instructive it would be to analyze the methods employed by the inchoate “Hunnology,” there is no space to do so here and now. The methods are instructive because they weirdly match the ingenuity of the medieval chroniclers. For a start, then, at the level of linguistics: or to be absolutely precise, the naïve “etymologizing” of the Middle Ages. According to the chronicler Simon of Kéza, who lived around the year 1280, the name *Hispania* had been taken from the Hungarian (hence axiomatically Hunnish) *ispán*; seven centuries later, Kunszabó, at Hüningen (Huningue) just outside Basel, arrives at exactly the same notion in connection with the word *Wiese* (meadow): Hey presto! That’s nothing but the “Hunnish” (hence axiomatically Hungarian) word *víz* (water)! The methodology, by the way, is much the same in “Sumero-Magyarology.” The other methodological condition: just as medieval chroniclers would rummage around indiscriminately in picking together texts by the authors of antiquity, so too does today’s awakener of the Hun idea from the fiddle-faddle of his reading matter, only to regurgitate the undigested mess, “gathering the forkfuls together . . . in a hayrick,” as Sebestyén himself describes the products of his own diving. And lo and behold! . . . everything comes together. That, of course, is the way, for instance, *Hispania* and *ispán* are also matched, to follow the example of the late György Bartal* in the case of the Parthian word *megistan* that he came across in Pliny (and who actually used it in the sense of great man, grandee, magnate, etc.)—well, what else could it mean than *megyeispán* (county chief)? Filled with “exultation” at hitting every such bull’s-eye, like Sebestyén in his pamphlet, Kunszabó in the Val d’Anniviers—that is to say: “valley of Hunvér” (i.e., Hunnish blood)—his own enlightenment dawning on him during a stroll. And he is just as inclined to inform us that the cerebrations of Sumerologists are likewise full of such Eureka! moments.

With regard to the topic of the present study, it is not the method, but two circumstances in particular that are worthy of note. The first is the psychiatric background and motivation.

According to both authors, the Hun origin of the Magyars is, as has been seen, a “cause.” A national cause. Sebestyén propagated his own pamphlet (“this valorous document in the Hun-Magyar cause,” as he terms it) among those

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* György Bartal, Sr. (1785–1865) lived much of his life near Pozsony (present-day Bratislava) and, alongside various court and ministerial appointments, was a noted historian of medieval law.
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deeded worthy of receiving it on the grounds that he was fulfilling “a service in
an important communal matter” when calling upon every decent Hungarian to
take an unspecified action. Kunszabó, too, has grim misgivings in establishing
that “we are witnesses to a devilish misstep in the field of official research into
the Hungarian language, but also the entire related area of research into origin
and development.” Why is the situation devilish, and why is the cause a cause?
Because the trickery of the “Habsburg administration” coerced Hungarians
back then for the false doctrine of the Finno-Ugrian origin of the Magyar peo-
ple in order to “thereby use this, too, to sap the nation’s self-knowledge and self-
confidence.” This self-knowledge and self-confidence have been suffering from
that coercion ever since; the spiritual liberation of Hungary is in large measure
a function of the acknowledgment of common identity with the Huns. In close
concord with this, from a perspective of nearly ten years earlier, comes the logic
of Sebestyén, who set about “suing back” the Hun descent of the Hungarians in
order that we may at last regain “the healthy spirit of our national consciousness.”
It should be noted that the complete piffle which sees Finno-Ugrian studies as
German opium is once again consonant with the peculiar reasoning of Sumer-
ologists, along with that other stigma that it is part of the prevailing “official”
scholastic dictatorship. “A Finno-Ugrian origin is insisted on by the camp of
current occupants of university chairs, indeed one might well say the political
‘backwoodsmen,’” writes Sebestyén, and meanwhile those who believe in the
Huns and Turks “suffer the fate of beaten field armies.” This makes for a dou-
bbling of the orchestration, with the violoncello’s sweet tone of anguished con-
cern for the national consciousness constantly lacerated by strident horn tones
of bubbling temper.

In the historical perception lies the other noteworthy circumstance. It was
not by chance that in the passage cited above Kunszabó, in one and the same
breath, labeled “research into origin and development” as being a chronic mis-
step. In a “rumination,” which appeared years ago in the columns of a daily
newspaper, he grumbled that historians were not accepting an account of in-
come dating from the reign of King Béla III as proof that Hungary was at the
same level of development as England and France. Why did they do this? To sap
the nation’s self-confidence? And then by means of the peculiar logic of tempest-
uousness, he went on to ask why there was a continual need to make compari-
sions of Hungary’s history, and to measure it by European yardsticks, when it
stands sui generis in accordance with its own autotelisms. The thinking of the
Hunnologist who had come forward a decade before is also in perfect accord
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with this—by now independent of the Huns. Sebestyén himself lets it be known that he had first and foremost winced and then taken pen in hand at the kind of search for “synchronicity” in European historical development that I myself engage in, which implants “faint-heartedness” in the nation. “It is not hard to recognize,” he writes, “that the reason why Hungarians started to become more European at the end of the thirteenth century, as Jenő Szűcs sees it, is because the Tatar campaign broke the spine of our hitherto sovereign statehood that had previously still proved more vigorously effectual against the West, and we had to have more recourse to our neighbors on this account.” Leaving the absurdities on a number of counts aside, and to rephrase the words, it was external violence which broke its spine, otherwise Hunnish-Magyar autotelism would have continued to prove effectual . . .

For newfangled Hunnology it is not only the Finno-Ugrian origin which is irritating, but also universal history; the Hunnish consciousness is nurtured on the soil of autotelism—that is the basis of this “perception of history.” Nevertheless, what could be more laughable than to treat this phenomenon, which is raising its head as, so to speak, an ideological “threat”? It is more expedient to investigate the causes of the compensatory mechanism lying behind it.

Last of all, I would like to point to yet another phenomenon in this subject area. Gyula László’s hypothesis of a “double conquest” per se cannot of course be mentioned in the same breath as the above. It is the thesis of a fellow academic, fully deserving of all respect, who on this point believes he can link research into the Avars with Magyar prehistory, and at his every articulation he stresses the hypothetical nature of the surmise.* The noisy and triumphant reception with which the theory is greeted on every hand does, however, point to an interesting symptom in certain sectors of public opinion.

In these sectors the hypothesis naturally manifests as a certainty; more importantly, somehow it is always brought up in conjunction with the Daco-Romanian speculation, as a counterpoint to it. In other words, an irritation arriving from the southeast somehow brings to mind a prehistoric motif of a “historical right,” even though subsequently this had seemed to have been truly removed. In this way it is understandable that László’s hypothesis is an achievement that has also been greeted enthusiastically in “Sumero-Magyarological” climes, even though it has absolutely nothing to do with it, with the exception of the antedating, taking into account the fact that the “double occupation”

* See for example Gyula László, The Magyars: Their Life and Civilisation (Budapest: Corvina, 1999).
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gives it a modest start of two centuries (and not millennia). Nor is everybody content to leave it at that; some seek to take the detective work further. It was likewise in issue 11 of the monthly Forrás in 1981 that Endre K. Grandpierre came forward with a new theory (by now called the “one-off conquest,” for like others, he ranks Finno-Ugrists as the German opium of the post-1849, Bach era) according to which the ancestral Magyars carried out the “original settlement” in an “indefinite primeval age”—and this was repeated not once, but no fewer than seven more times. This diverting treatise is instructive from a certain angle. The implication of the Huns concerns the fifth century AD, the “double conquest” the seventh century, and as if that were not enough, a need is felt to fall back on a “primeval age,” while it is not hard to spot the influence of the millennia of the Daco-Romanians in the parrying mechanism.

Finally, one more remark is due. It might be raised as an objection that my presentation is neither proportional nor balanced. Yet, I was not aiming at proportionality or balance, as my intention was to devise a diagnosis. One states in a medical diagnosis not that otherwise the body is healthy, but that certain organs are not healthy.

Translated by Tim Wilkinson