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*The Importance of the Hungarian  
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# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HUNGARIAN BALLADS ON THE CONFINES OF OCCIDENT AND ORIENT

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The fact that the Hungarian nation has lost contact with its steppe environment and settled down in the valley of the Danube, but most of all, that it has survived in a country with manysided connections, has brought about significant changes in the history of settlement of Eastern Europe. It was as though a caesura were introduced into the history of both the abandoned and the newly adopted cultural area; like a cross-section, it visualized the historic layers establishing a time-limit, suitable for comparison, between these layers, i. e. in the course of history.

All this can be observed in the ballads as well. The most important international relations of the Hungarian ballad can be divided into three groups: 1. elements of heroic poetry inherited from the steppe, 2. ballads and ballad elements taken over from the West, but not from the immediate neighbourhood, and finally 3. elements transmitted to East-European peoples.<sup>1</sup> Each group includes historical or theoretical lessons to be drawn.

Four motifs and three formula-like elements of Siberian epic poetry have survived in Hungarian ballads. Throwing a new light on the genesis of one of the most discussed international subjects, the under-the-tree scene appearing in the Hungarian—German—Dutch—Danish variants of

<sup>1</sup> In detail see L. VARGYAS: *Kutatások a népballada középkori történetében I. Francia eredetű réteg balladáinkban* (Studies on the medieval history of the traditional ballad I. Hungarian ballads of French origin). *Ethnographia*, 1960, 163—276; 2. *A honfoglalás-kori hősi epika továbbélése balladáinkban*. *Ethnographia*, 1960, 479—523 = *Das Weiterleben der landnahmezeitlichen Heldenepik in den ungarischen Balladen*. *Acta Ethnographica*, 1961, 241—294; 3. *A Kőműves Kelemen eredete*. *Néprajzi Értesítő*, 1959, 5—73 = *Die Herkunft der ungarischen Ballade von der eingemauerten Frau*. *Acta Ethnographica*, 1960, 1—88; 4. *Műfaji és történeti tanulságok* (Conclusions concerned with theory and history of the genre). *Ethnographia*, 1962, 206—259. See the first problem in Chapter 2, the second in Chapters 1—2, the third in Chapters 1—4.

the Molnár Anna type (CHILD 4 "Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight", Mädchenmörder, Renaud tueur des femmes) is the most important. From the theoretical point of view, however, the others are equally important, offering clear-cut examples of heroic-epic elements being able to survive in the ballad in a modified form. This is of equal theoretic importance for epic poetry and for the ballad. First of all, it offers a considerable assistance in drawing a line of demarcation between the epos and the ballad; it proves that epos is succeeded by the ballad in the course of development and points out the differences existing between the two literary forms. In this respect, Hungarian ballads are most instructive, replacing the mythical-legendary attitude of the previous form with a definite psychological-social one. Thereby the basic spiritual conduct to be observed in the ballad and in epic poetry becomes separated from and opposed to one another.

As far as Siberian epic poetry is concerned, it is more important, that the detachment of the Hungarians has conserved certain archaic elements which either actually survived in some relict areas, e. g. among Altaic Turks, or continued to develop or were completely ousted from the tradition of other Turkish-Mongolian peoples. The existence of these elements in Hungarian poetry lends itself to the establishment of genetic correlations and, as "terminus ante quem", to an absolute determination of time. The establishment of genetic correlations is of considerable importance not only in regard to Hungarians; it completes the results achieved by Soviet folklorists in elaborating the typological analogies, in so far as genetic correlations must be taken into account even within the sphere of subjects appearing as typological, if the latter are appearing among contiguous peoples or in civilizations taking the place of one another. Such correlations can consequently be used for the determination of ethnogenetic processes. Striking as it is, for instance, the most archaic epical motives survived among the Hungarians are appearing mostly in a similar archaic form among Abakan or other Altaic Turks and the Ob Ugrians, whose historical contacts can be observed in other ethnographical phenomena as well.

With the elements taken over from epic poetry, the ballad joins in the results achieved by Soviet folklorists in regard to the development of epos. The line of development running along the various stages of development of epic poetry leads to the ballad through those very epic elements, maintained by the Hungarians and amalgamated into the ballad in a modified form. Next to the stages of development, historically discernible in the epos, we thus obtain a further stage of development in the ballad, attached to the former, together with new lessons to be drawn on the course of development of the different peoples. In Hungarian poetry, the

ballad follows immediately upon the mythic heroic poem, with no historic song having developed in folk tradition and ballad having remained exclusive up to now; among the Russians, on the other hand, epic poetry gets as far as the bylinas and it is from there it evolves into the historic song; in the meanwhile, ballad-type songs are also born, but this is not the main line of development. Roughly the same conditions can be observed among Southern Slavs and Roumanians. In the West, the rests of former epic poetry is also washed away by the ballad; there is, however, a type of historic song developed from literary or semiliterary, broadside-epic poetry, "sinking" in great masses into the sphere of the ballad. Sporadically though, such type of historic song can be found among the Hungarian people too (e. g. István Kádár), either in clear-cut literary wording or with the express reservation of a well-known poetical work. These differences make it possible for us to work out the development of epic poetry with more delicate nuances taken into consideration and to bring it in a closer contact with the history of civilization of the various peoples.

In regard to Western ballad, however, the Hungarian ballad offers still more important lessons to be drawn. What we think of, that is a somewhat similar "detachment": the appearance and multisecular life in Hungary of French-Walloon settlers, introducing a caesura into the steady geographical expansion. Although the caesura is rather of a spatial than of a temporal nature, manifesting itself in the contacts skipping some peoples, it still lends itself for temporal determinations to be made. The "terminus ante quem" is not the detachment from the old community, but the break-off of the contacts with the motherland and, later, the gradual absorption of the linguistic isles.

Direct French-Hungarian relations permit many important conclusions to be drawn, first of all in regard to the old forms and the wider scope of French ballad poetry. Hungarian ballads throw a clear light on the ancientness of French ballads which, in their actual form, seem to be new compositions, e. g. the "Soldat par chagrin", requesting to have his heart torn out, washed in alcohol, wrapped in a cloth and taken to his sweetheart, so that she may be grieved about his deed;<sup>2</sup> or the "Ordeal of Faithfulness" ("Liebesprobe")<sup>3</sup>, the French wording of which seems to be a recent broadside-text; however, a comparison makes it evident that it has actually

<sup>2</sup> E. g. J. BUJEAUD: *Chants et chansons populaires des provinces de l'Ouest, Poitou Saintonge, Aunis et Angoumois*. Niort, 1895, vol. II p. 213. Further variants see VARGYAS, op. c., Chapter 1, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> E. g. L. ERK—F. M. BÖHME: *Deutscher Liederhort*. Leipzig, 1893 I, No. 67; A. MILLIEN: *Chants et chansons*. Paris, 1906, vol. II p. 178.

maintained the elements of the former draft; or the "Enlèvement du couvent",<sup>4</sup> which is a transformed rest of an old text, and, amalgamated with another French ballad, the "Joli tambour",<sup>5</sup> this old version has brought about the Hungarian variant, as proved by Hungarian "Csudahalott" (CHILD 25 "Willy's Like-wake"). In all of these parallels, the Hungarian texts are conserving the common subject-matter and details of wording in an archaic and classic ballad form, proving beyond any doubt the one-time similar state of the French texts. Wrecked by the Turkish occupation, Hungarian poetic development has continued to conserve these ballads in their ancient form, while the French equivalents were transformed by further development, by the civilization of peasantry and by the increasing influence of written literature.

In France, a large number of ballads were expunged from memory by this course of development. However, some of them have their analogue surviving in Hungary and a careful comparison of international relations permit to deduct the French antecedent of the Hungarian ballad. In such a case, the East-European, Hungarian text is a proof of the existence of a French ballad and of a one-time wider tradition of French ballad anyway.

The clearest case is that of the ballad "Szégyenbe esett lány" (The Girl Who Has Lost Her Honour), "Lady Maisry" CHILD 65, ("König aus Mailand" *Deutsche Volkslieder mit ihren Melodien* 67, "Don Carlos d'Alem-Mar"), where the Hungarian text unites the different mosaics of the texts surrounding the French area. In a similar way, it was from the analogy of Spanish, Portuguese, English and Breton details — mosaics of different areas — as well as from divergencies of the neighbours, e. g. Southern Slavs, that it was possible to infer on the existence of a disappeared ballad in the case of "Kádár Kata"; or in the long chain of variants of "Katonalány" (Girl-soldier, "A Doncela que vai à Guerra", "Moma vojnik", "Deklica vojak"), running over a wide area, it was only the recent appearance of the Hungarian text which permitted the solitary French fragment to be recognized as the starting-point of the whole chain.

These results throw a new light on other phenomena as well, so for instance the French loans of the Greeks and beside the well-known French origin of Iberian and Italian forms on that of English and Danish versions too. Where Catalan and Greek texts are showing a striking resemblance with Hungarian ballad fragments, assuming a most dissimilar form in the

<sup>4</sup> E. g. A. MILLIEN, op. c., vol. I p. 236—241.

<sup>5</sup> E. g. E. ROLLAND: *Recueil de chansons populaires*. Paris, 1883—1890, vol. I No. 128g; J. CANTELOUBE: *Anthologie des chants populaires français*. Paris, 1951 vol. III p. 322.

German version of the same type, not only the French origin of the Hungarian text will turn out, but that of the Greek and German as well; and if details of the French ballad "Les tristes noces"<sup>6</sup> are appearing again and again in the modified story of Hungarian "The Girl Made Dance to Death", then we can conclude not only on its French origin and its ancientness — dating from the XIVth century — but with a fair degree of probability on the English "Lord Thomas and Fair Annet" (CHILD 73) as being its successor and not its source.

The recent results coming from the Hungarian ballads are of a still greater importance in regard to the German area, which has turned out in several cases to have obtained one and the same ballad from two directions: in the West from the French border and in the East either directly from the Hungarians or by the intermediary of the Czechs. This phenomenon is inconceivable unless the ballad in question, and the ballad in general, was extant among the French earlier than among Hungarians and Germans. In Hungary, however, the existence of the French settlers and their constant and direct contact with the motherland permitted the pieces of the new genre to appear simultaneously, and sooner than among the Germans, who were likely to receive them thus at once from the East and the West.

All this leads to the conclusion that the starting-point of the ballad was in the northern region of France and in Wallony, from where it spreaded everywhere towards neighbouring and remote peoples alike. However, the lessons of the Hungarian ballad permit not only conclusions to be drawn on the territorial centre of the ballads, but also to set closer limits to the time of its development. As a matter of fact, the Franco-Hungarian relations were not always of equal intensity. In the sources they appear to be the strongest in the 13th and 14th centuries, decreased considerably in the 15th and ceased definitely at the beginning of the 16th century. Thus, the 14th century can be the latest date when French ballads could be taken over en masse from the motherland. Missing French adoptions are also a proof thereof: we do not find such masterpieces, known from manuscripts of the XVth century and thus unquestionably existing at that time, like "Roi Renaud", "Germine", "Pernette", "La fille du roi Loys", which have continued to be most popular pieces of French folk poetry up to now. Taking into consideration the presence of a homogenous layer of twenty ballads (with the French origin of several others being possible), it is impossible to oversee the absence of the above-mentioned popular texts. Collating the history of Franco-Hungarian relations it

<sup>6</sup> G. DONCIEUX: *Le romancero populaire de la France*. Paris, 1904 No. 29.



seems unquestionable that the 15th century specimens were born later than those adopted, at a time when the Hungarian people was no more in a position to take over, or even to get acquainted with the new literary harvest. It follows therefore from Hungarian ballad adoptions that in the 14th century the ballad was flourishing in France and in Hungary alike.

Hungarian adoptions present a basis for research work not only in respect to a retrospection westwards. Many East-European problems cannot be solved unless it is assumed that ballad subjects and elaborations have come to the Hungarians directly from the French, in skipping other peoples. Of course, with more or less interest, the peoples of Eastern Europe responded also to the new genre that was appearing here. In some cases, direct adoption from Hungarian Walloons — without the intermediary of Hungarians — could be proved among the Poles; this was made possible by the fact that Walloons were living in larger numbers along the Polish border, in fact, there was also close contact between Poles and the Walloons of the Tokaj region who had thus the possibility of a direct exchange of ballads. Two significant ballads are concerned here: "Molnár Anna" (CHILD 4 "Mädchenmörder", "Tueur de femmes"), and "Donna Lombarda". Both were discussed in the German complete edition,<sup>7</sup> the first by John Meier and the second by Erich Seemann; although they point out the French motives of the stories, they cannot account for their adoption by the Poles. Thus the presence of French settlers and the resolved problem of French adoptions in Hungary present a clearer picture of geographical propagation in Eastern Europe. We are reminded of taking into account the conditions of vicinity as they were extant at the time of development of the ballad, i. e. of applying the geographical method in its historical interpretation.

Contradictions, such as appearing in the Serbo-Croatian versions of "Girl-soldier", having disturbed so far the theory of origin and of spreading, are equally eliminated. Italians omit the current western formula of the old hero complaining of having no son to send to war in his stead, only a daughter. It occurs therefore, that the girl, before leaving, says farewell to her brother too. This was transmitted to the Southern Slavs where the girl expressly replaced her brother in the army. At the same time, other versions do conserve the saying of the father without sons, together with

<sup>7</sup> *Deutsche Volkslieder mit ihren Melodien*. Hrsg. vom Deutschen Volksliedarchiv, Vols 1—3. Ed. by J. MEIER, vol. 4, ed. by E. SEEMANN, Berlin 1935—1959, No. 41 and comments to No. 78 in vol. IV p. 187.

the original story. Previous Southern Slav research (SHOZONOVICH) has conceived the trace of the subject from Serb to Italian and Portuguese, referring to the outstanding role played by fraternal ties in Southern Slav popular life. Since we know, however, that a French influence was actually existing in Hungary and since the original Hungarian version of the ballad was discovered in Moldavia, it is clear that the Southern Slavs have adopted the original form from the Hungarians and the modified one from the Italians, while the Bulgarians have taken over the original form exclusively from Hungary. The only fragmentary French text is completed with the Hungarian version, that is actually complete, as well as by comparative researches, according to which the Hungarian version is derived from the French.

This two-way outlook to the East and the West alike offers a classic example in the most famous European ballad, the type of "Molnár Anna" (CHILD 4).<sup>8</sup> Students were faced with an almost irresolvable problem by the Hungarian text because of its striking resemblance to the German version in the scene under the tree and in the motive of the "search in the head" ("Lause-Szene"), while at the same time, it was not the nearer East-German but the remotest western version that was known in Hungary. Then, there was the Polish version with unmistakable details of French wording. But since the western conditions were not to be judged correctly either, most authors derived the ballad from the Dutch. Only from this point of Eastern Europe was it possible to discover that it was the French form which came to Hungary and was adopted, through the medium of Walloon settlers, by the Poles; Hungarians have added a motive of Siberian origin, the scene under the tree, and this modified form returned to Germany and as far as the Netherlands and Denmark. The elements of the French form progressing eastwards could be distinguished from those of the form that wandered from Hungary to the West. Thus the Dutch wording cannot be the startingpoint either, but merely a derivative of the French. In Eastern Europe the Roumanians of Transylvania also formed variants of the version they found in Hungary after modification of the French subject.

Hungary's position between the East and the West not only elucidates thus a number of issues of facts, but underlines certain methodological requirements as well. In addition to the historic application of the geographic method we must accentuate a most emphatic factor, crossing not only linguistic affinity but often even geographical vicinity, i. e. that of

<sup>8</sup> See VARGYAS, op. c., Chapter 2.

cultural contacts. The analogy of ballads was often attempted in vain to be explained with Germanic, Slav or Finno-Ugrian affinity; this new genre, developing in a late stage of social evolution, followed the same way as the fruits of civilization: every people took it there where it first met it, irrespective of the people in question being a relative or not. It was not an ethnogenetic problem that was pointed out, but the conditions of contact and of social evolution.

In concert with one another, questions of methodology and of facts most emphatically call our attention to examine the subject from this point of view also and to introduce the lessons of Hungarian material into the circulation of science, or else European research work on the ballads will obtain none but unilateral results.