

THE "CSÁNGÓ" MAGYARS OF MOLDAVIA

BY

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In the immediate neighbourhood of the Magyars of Transylvania there are living some hundred thousand persons of Magyar origin known familiarly as "Csángó" Magyars. It is in the western section of the province of Moldavia (itself forming part of Old Rumania), in the valley watered by the Seret and the Tratos, that we find — on the eastern side of the Carpathians — the 150 villages in which this large number of Magyars are living. There are a considerable number of purely Magyar villages, though a large proportion of the "Csángó" inhabitants are found living in symbiosis with the Rumanians, a third and smaller part living in scattered small groups in Rumanian villages. As a consequence of unheard-of political oppression and of ethnographical difficulties very many have forgotten their mother tongue, only some hundred thousand having proved able to preserve down to the present time their ancestral Magyar. But even those who have become rumanianised in tongue have kept intact their Magyar consciousness. The official Rumanian point of view is that the only criterion of nationality of decisive importance is racial origin; consequently, even those "Csángó" Magyars of Moldavia who have become rumanianised in tongue are according to the official Rumanian interpretation of Magyar nationality.

Of this people, which Hungarian and foreign scholars believe to be descended from the first Magyar settlers in Etelköz — the district situated between the Dnieper and the Szereth which is watered by the Bug, the Dniester and the Pruth —, it is exceptionally difficult to give any exhaustive account, seeing that the Rumanian authorities refuse to allow any one to study the question on the spot. In recent years Hungarian ethnographers have tried in vain to reach the territory inhabited by the "Csángó" Magyars of

Moldavia in the ordinary way; and if any one succeeds nevertheless in getting near them in a roundabout way, the Rumanian authorities are not long in expelling him.

The "Csángó" question has been treated in detail — independently of Hungarian scholars — by Professor George Wichman, of Finland, Professor Gustavus Weigand, of Leipzig, and M. Radu Rosetti, the Rumanian historian.

*In point of religion the "Csángó" Magyars of Moldavia have nothing whatsoever in common with the Orthodox Rumanians surrounding them; for — with the exception of one single parish — they are all Roman Catholics. This circumstance is regarded as so definite a mark of distinction differentiating them from the Rumanians that in Moldavia the Rumanians themselves speak of the Catholic faith as the "Magyar faith" (*religia ungureasca*), the Orthodox faith being on the other hand spoken of as the "Rumanian faith" (*"religia romaneasca"*).*

The "Csángó" Magyars of Moldavia have a peculiarity of pronunciation which has been adopted also by the Rumanians surrounding them. This peculiarity was observed first by the abovementioned *Professor Weigand of Leipzig*, who between 1894 and 1902 visited all the territories inhabited by Rumanians, when he was struck by the circumstance that in the Rumanian spoken in the neighbourhood of *Bacău* (the Capital of one of the Counties of Moldavia lying on the river *Seret*) the sounds "s" (sh) and "cs" (tch) were consistently replaced everywhere by the sounds "sz" (s) and "c" (tz). The explanation of this phenomenon he found to be that the Magyar spoken by the Magyars of *Bacău* had the same peculiar lispings tendency. And, seeing that this linguistic peculiarity is not found anywhere else among the Rumanians, being confined exclusively to the district inhabited by the "Csángó" Magyars and to the immediate neighbourhood, the lispings tendency in evidence in the Rumanian spoken there too must be due to the influence of the example of the "Csángó" Magyars.

Apart from possessing a peculiarity of pronunciation, the "Csángó" Magyars have also a vocabulary containing words that go back to the oldest Hungarian period. *It is an interesting coincidence that the vocabulary of the "Csángó"*

Magyars of Moldavia corresponds to that used on the westernmost fringe of the Magyar language area — that of the district flanking the Mura.

Ethnographically the "Csángó" Magyars of Moldavia differ in every respect from the Rumanians among whom they live. Their type corresponds to that of the Magyar race, though in respect of costume and outward customs they have already become largely assimilated to the Rumanians living near them.

The question that arises next is when the "Csángó" Magyar people — a people differing completely from the Rumanians in respect of language, religion, type and national consciousness — settled in its present home? As already stated, *the "Csángó" Magyars live around three central points (Román, Bacău and Torgul-Ocna) in the immediate vicinity of Transylvania, being separated from the Széklers of that province only by the Carpathians. However, seeing that the two peoples are connected by two passes of the Carpathians — the Passes of Ojtuz and Gyimes —, the Carpathians may be regarded rather as a connecting than as a dividing factor; for the Carpathians served as a rear defence in the days of the Turkish and Tartar inroads: and it was through these passes that the Széklers of Transylvania continuously drifted across to the ancient Magyar settlements in Moldavia.*

Even according to the Rumanian historian, M. Radu Rosetti, the "Csángó" Magyars were already living in the valley watered by the Seret and Tratos at the time of the establishment of the Rumanian Principality, their settlement being certainly not at a later date. According to the results shown by recent researches the "Csángó" Magyars also kept in touch with the Magyars of the Szamos Valley by way of the valley watered by the Beszterce and the Szamos. There can be no doubt, therefore, that during the course of history the "Csángó" Magyars of Moldavia and the Magyars of Hungary and Transylvania respectively formed a compact unit.

Another moment witnessing to the "Csángó" Magyars having been in Moldavia before the Rumanians is the fact that *they occupy the fertile valley of the Seret and the*

Tratos. Now the fertile valleys are usually occupied by the people first settling in the territory in question. *Again, so many of the topographical names found in Moldavia between the Seret and the peaks of the Carpathians are of Magyar origin, the only logical explanation must be that this region was inhabited by Magyars before the coming of the Rumanians.* The Rumanian historian, M. Rosetti, has indeed investigated these topographical names for their Magyar origin. We would offer a few by way of illustration: — Tarhaoş = Tarhavas; Aldamaş = Áldomás; Apahaos = Apahavas; Cheberic = Kerekbükk; Solintar = Solyomtár; Miches = Mikes; Şandru-Mic = Kissándor; Şandru-Mare = Nagysándor; Cheşchieşul = Kecskés; Haloş = Halas. In this connection it should be noted that there are in Moldavia numbers of villages and towns with Magyar names which have recently been arbitrarily "rumanianised". By way of illustration we quote a few instances of these names too: — Dormánfalva = Dărmăneşti; Csügés = Ciughes; Tatros = Trotuş; Szalánc = Slănic; Diószeg = Tuta; Onfalú = Oneşti; Gorzafalva = Ojtuz; Fűrészfalú = Fărăstrău; Szitásfalva = Nicoreşti; Ujfalú = Satul-Nou; Szölöhegy = Părgăreşti; Szárazpatak = Valea-Seaca; Tarkő = Tarcău; Kövesalja = Petricica; Forrófalva = Buzdugan; Szászkút = Sascut; Szabófalva = Săboani; etc.

The "Csángó" Magyars of Moldavia were never reduced to the condition of serfs; they were "participants" (razes) — yeoman farmers. As a consequence the Magyars of Moldavia must have occupied the territory where they live in union with the Rumanians at least as early as the latter, for otherwise they would necessarily have been reduced to the condition of slaves.

As to the number and influence of the Magyars even in the eastern towns of Moldavia such as Jasi (known to Hungarians as Jászváros), the Capital of Moldavia, or Husi (known to the Hungarians as Husz), we have evidence in the fact that even *early in the seventeenth century the chief magistrate of Husi was alternately a Magyar and a Rumanian*, a fact borne witness to by the Bosnian Bandinus.

The "Csángó" Magyars who were living in Moldavia already *in the eighth century culturally influenced the*

kindred races which came after them — the Rumanians and the Petchenegs —, who settled mostly to the east and south of them. Some of these new settlers were absorbed by the Magyars; and very many were killed during the Mongol inroad. That part which had been absorbed by the Magyars was converted to European culture by Magyar missionaries, a result ensured by the establishment in 1227 of the Cumanian Bishopric (episcopia cumanorum) of Milkov, a valley below that of the Tratos. In 1241, however, the Magyars of Moldavia and the Moldavian Cumanians who had been culturally influenced by the former, were almost completely annihilated by the Mongol invasion.

In 1253 a fresh beginning was made with the work of strengthening the religion and culture of the Magyars and magyarised Cumanians of Moldavia, the work being undertaken by the Dominicans of Hungary. In 1278, King Béla IV., the re-builder of the Hungary devastated by the Mongol inroad, sent Franciscans to assist the Dominicans in their work. This work proved so successful that before long (in 1362), in the Principality of Moldavia which had been established in the meanwhile, it proved possible to found (at Seret) a new Hungarian Catholic bishopric, which in 1423 was transferred to Moldvabánya, where it remained in existence until 1523. On May 9th., 1381, another bishopric was founded at Curtes de Arges — this bishopric being subordinated to the Archbishopric of Kalocsa in Hungary!! Gradually Moldavia began to be the eastern nursery of Magyar culture. It was here that the Bible was first translated into Hungarian (by Brothers Thomas and Valentine), this being the translation copied at Tatros in 1466 by George Némethy. This copy is known to Hungarian literature as the Munich Codex.

The greatest of the Rumanian Princes of Moldavia, Stephen the Great (Stefan cel Mare), had many Magyars serving in his army in his campaigns against the Turks. In the most important battle fought by him — that against the Turks at Magashid in 1475 — 5000 Magyars took part.

In 1518, at Tatros, near to the first Moldavian bishopric (that of Milkov), the episcopal see of the Magyars of Moldavia was established, as if to consecrate Tatros as the centre of the Magyar culture of Moldavia. In addition to the

above-mentioned Bible-translation we have another famous memorial of the medieval Magyar culture of the Tatros Valley, the bell at Gorzafalva near Tatros which has been preserved since 1568.

At the close of the sixteenth century Moldavia entered a quieter period; consequently, the seat of the Magyar bishopric was transferred in 1597 from its refuge at Tatros in the protecting mountains to Bacău (Bákó), where the bulk of the Magyars were living.

The Moldavian princes were not pleased with the religious and cultural advance made by the Magyars; for they feared they would increase excessively in numbers and would obtain a far-reaching influence as a consequence of their cultural superiority: therefore they prevailed upon Rome to provide that first the leading bishop and later on — from 1520 — the clergy too should be foreigners — i. e. non-Magyars.

The first bishop of foreign nationality, *Bernard Querini*, witnesses to the existence of the Magyars of Moldavia, for according to the report sent to Rome by him in 1599 out of the 11,704 souls in his diocese 9000 were Magyars. One of his successors, a Bosnian of the name of *Mark Bandinus*, in 1646 and 1647 visited the Moldavian diocese. He found 33 parishes there, to each of which he paid a personal visit, making them the object of a veritable study. As a result of this study he recorded the existence of 1122 almost exclusively Magyar Catholic families. In 1743 the Prince of Moldavia, *Nicholas Mavrocordat*, invited three Hungarian historiographers to *Jászvásár (Jasi)* in Moldavia to write the history of that principality. This fact shows how strong was the intellectual influence of the Magyars even in the court of the Rumanian princes of Moldavia. Evidence proving the existence of Magyars in Moldavia is offered also by the Papal Decree issued in Rome in 1774. The missionaries of foreign nationality having proved unable to cope with the work of teaching their parishioners who were Magyars by tongue, continually submitted complaints on the matter to Rome, whereupon, in 1774, the Pope issued a Decree providing that every new missionary should learn Magyar

within six months and that those failing to do so should be removed from among the Magyar Catholics of Moldavia.

The hostile and oppressive attitude of the princes of Moldavia, though seconded by the control being in the hands of priests of other tongues, failed to check the constant increase in the number of Catholics in Moldavia of Magyar nationality, that number being augmented also by the influx of Székler-Magyar immigrants from Transylvania, the result being that *in 1779* — according to the *report prepared by the Austrian Schulze*, who travelled through the length and breadth of Moldavia, — there were some *6000 Magyar families (i. e. roughly about 25,000—30,000 Magyars in all)* living in that principality. *In 1839 John Petráš-Ince, a Catholic priest from Moldavia*, reported that the number of Magyar Catholics in Moldavia had already advanced to *57,300*. According to the Census drafted by the Catholic Diocese of Moldavia in 1902 the number of Members of that Church — *almost all without exception of Magyar origin* — was *64,601*.

After the Great War Transylvania was allotted to Rumania. In Transylvania, as a consequence of the Rumanian oppression, the situation of Magyar workers and Magyar officials became more and more unbearable. The Magyar workers and craftsmen emigrated in large masses to Older Rumania — and therefore to Moldavia too —, particularly in view of the fact that in pre-War Rumania the better-trained Magyar worker (in particular the skilled workers) had always been welcome. In addition, the State transferred the Magyar officials — in particular the railway officials — mostly to Older Rumania. This double process of re-settlement was effected on so large a scale that in present-day Bucharest, for instance, a city with *800,000 inhabitants, same 80—100,000 Magyars are living*. The number of Magyars settled in *Constanza* on the shore of the Black Sea is *10,000*. This re-migration spread to Moldavia too, the result being that the number of Magyars living there has again considerably increased, so that we may estimate it at present at roughly *100,000*.

What is the attitude of the Rumanian State towards these ancient Magyar settlers? *Absolute persecution*,

complete oppression and a refusal to grant even the minimum of national rights.

The hundred thousand Magyar autochthones living in Moldavia have not a single school with Magyar as the language of instruction. Indeed, the Magyar language is not even taught at all in the schools, where Rumanian is the sole and only medium of instruction. The officials employed in the public administration do not know Hungarian (Magyar), the language of that administration and of the courts of law being exclusively Rumanian. Hungarian may not be used even as a makeshift. The arbitrary "rumanianisation" of names is still in force everywhere; and the "rumanianisation" of the villages whose tongue has been Magyar from time immemorial, is already an accomplished fact. The Rumanian State employs the most ruthless severity to prevent the political and economic organisation of the Magyars of Moldavia. Transylvanian Magyars are strictly forbidden to carry on any kind of political or economic activity in the territory of Moldavia; indeed, the Rumanian Government refuses even to allow scientific ethnographic research work to be undertaken. Magyar pupils from Moldavia entering Hungarian schools in Transylvania are immediately expelled from the territory of the latter province, the Hungarian schools admitting them being threatened that they will be closed. No Magyar sermons may be preached in the churches, where recently even the ancient Magyar folk-songs have been placed under a ban. The spiritual pastors are all without exception persons not knowing a single word of Hungarian. During the Great War the Magyars of Moldavia were forced to fight against their racial kin in Transylvania, the members of their families being held as hostages and threatened with execution in the event of their men being taken prisoners by the Hungarians.

Rumanian statistics have never taken any notice of the Magyar autochthones of Moldavia, treating them as persons whose "rumanianisation" is an accomplished fact. The truth is, however, that even that part of the Magyars of Moldavia which has been rumanianised in tongue has remained Magyar in sentiment and still prides itself on the fact, not to speak of the bulk of the Magyars of Moldavia, who have

remained true to their Magyar character in tongue too. *And despite all the oppression and arbitrary measures the most recent Rumanian Census already records the presence of 23,000 persons whose mother-tongue is Magyar.* This number represents however only one-fourth of that of the Magyars of Moldavia. The present writer himself knows of cases in which the returning officer has registered as Magyars only those who immigrated from Transylvania to Moldavia after the Great War, not showing the slightest inclination to register as Magyars the thousands of other Magyars who are autochthones — and that despite their having declared themselves to be Magyars.

The new Constitution of the Rumanian State does not ensure the Magyars of Moldavia any kind of right whatsoever. Nevertheless, Rumanian official and semi-official propaganda would have foreign countries believe that the settlement of the minority question effected in Rumania is the most humane. While she continues to brutally oppress the autochthonous minority living within her own territory and does her best to evade the endeavours of Hungary and of the Magyars of Transylvania to intervene in the matter, Rumania nevertheless continues to attempt to bring about an adjustment of the rights of the Rumanian minorities living in foreign countries. The Rumanian State has ensured the rights of the Rumanian minorities in Czecho-Slovakia and Yugoslavia, for instance, by means of treaties concluded with those countries.