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THE HURDY-GURDY IN HUNGARY

The hurdy-gurdy, this odd stringed — almost bowed — musical instrument is known to most European peoples. In the course of its history it appeared under several names, in a number of various forms, at the most different times and in the hands of the most antagonistic layers of society in certain regions of Europe.[1]

It reached Central-Eastern Europe in the 15—17th centuries spreading probably in one wave from the western part of the continent. It may have appeared in the Carpathian Basin in the 1500s — in our opinion through Austrian mediation — but it is only from the second half of the 17th century that this musical instrument can be identified without doubt in Hungary.[2] Yet, this European instrument coming relatively late to our country can be considered Hungarian in the sense in which it can be distinguished from the instruments worked in a similar way of other peoples living, first of all, in our neighbourhood. These differences can be pointed out in its terminology and constriction, the kind of music played on it as well as the mode of its use.

Among others the fact that our people's instrument is equipped with the device for the accompaniment of music with rhythm also makes the

1. Comp: *M. Bröcker:* Die Drehleier. Bonn, 1974.; *S.* and *S. Palmer:* The Hurdy-Gurdy. London, 1980.; K. M. Klier: Volkstümliche Misikinstrumente in den Alpen. Kassel und Basel, 1956. 43—46.; *L. Kretzenbacher:* Die streireische Bettelgeige zur Kulturgesischte eines Volkmusik-Instrumentes. Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereines für Steimark, LXXV. 1984. 91—105.; *L. Kunz:* Die Volksmusikinstrumente der Tschechoslowakei. Handbuch der europäischen Volksmusikinstrumente. S. I., Bd. 2., Leipzig, 1974. 72—74.; *St. Oledzki:* Polskie instrumenty ludowe. Kraków, 1978. 27—28.; *K. Vertkov — G. Blagodatov — E. Jazovickaja:* Atlasz Muzikalnih Instrumentov Narodov SSSR. Moskva, 1963. 30—31.; 37., 43.; *T. Alexandru:* Instrumentele muzicale ale poporului Romín. *Bucureşti,* 1956. 125.; *B. Sárosi:* Die Volksmusikinstrumente Ungarns. Handbuch der europäischen Volksmusikinstrumente. S. I., Bd. 1., Leipzig, 1957. 50—55.

2. *J. A. Comenius:* Orbis sensualium pictus. A látható világ. Budapest, 1959. 200.; *A. Béres:* Tekerőlant ábrázolása XVII. századi címerben. Ethnographia, LXXXV. 1974. 252—254.

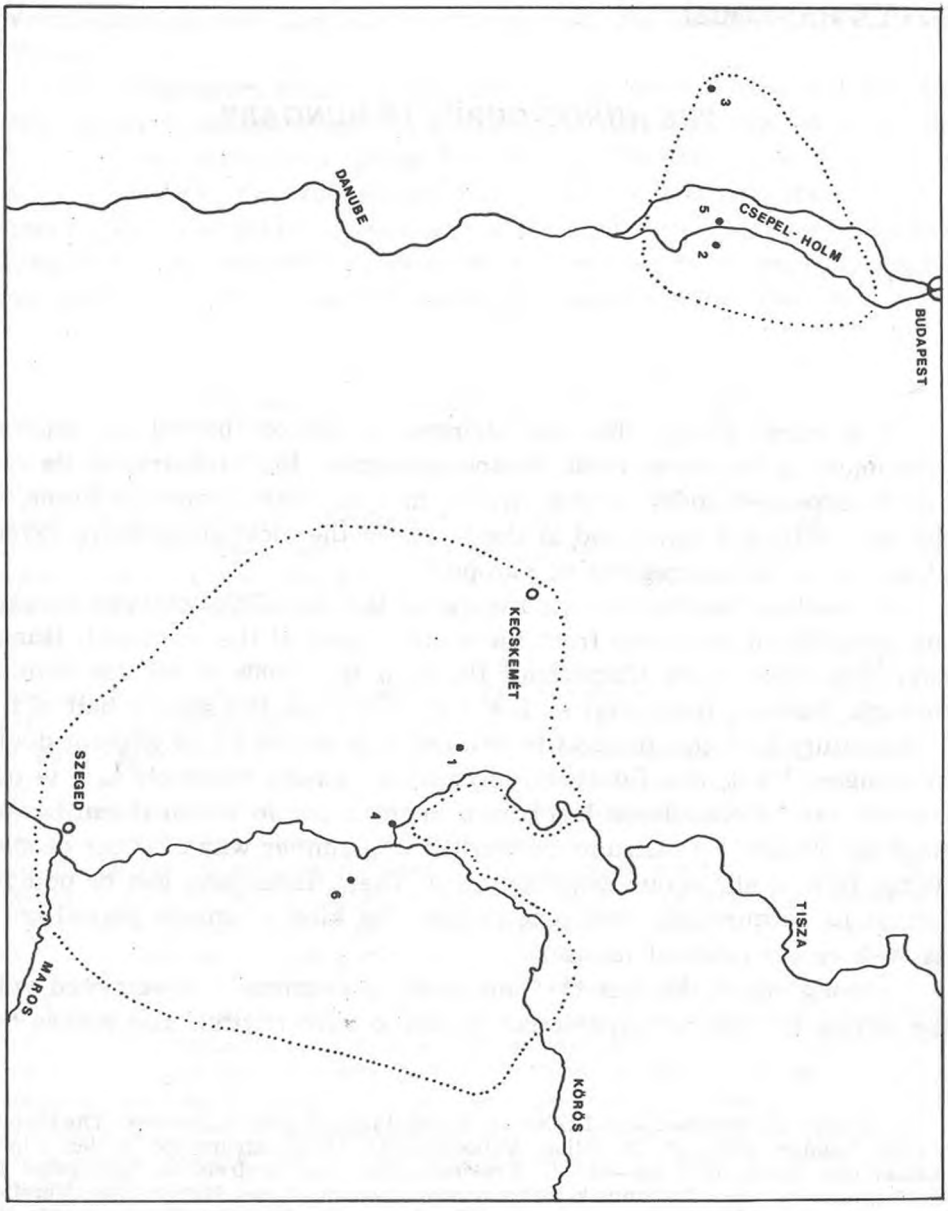

Fig. 1. **The assumed area of occurrence of the hurdy-gurdy in Hungary on the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The settlements mentioned in the text or the notes under the photos are the following in the order of their first appearance: 1. Tiszaújfalu (County Bács-Kiskun), 2. Pereg (County Pest), 3. Pálmajor (County Fejér), 4. Csongrád (County Csongrád), 5. Ráckeve (County Pest), 6. Szentes (County Csongrád).**

Hungarian hurdy-gurdy characteristic compared with the great majority of the ones in Central-Eastern Europe. While this device is general only among the Austrians concerning our neighbours, it is extremely rare among the Czechs and it is missing from the instruments of the Poles, the Ukrainians, or the Roumanians. Mention could also be made of the differences in shape and the varieties in tuning.[3]

The Hungarian ethnographic literature of the present century locates the area of the occurrence of the hurdy-gurdy in two separated areas.[4] One of these can be identified with the ten-odd settlements of Csepel Island and its immediate vicinity along the river Danube, while the other, about 30 to 40 villages or towns, can be found along the middle and lower reaches of the river Tisza (Fig. 1.)

However, the two areas of its occurrence separate not only geographically but also in terminology. The general name for the instrument is *nyenyere* in the settlements of Csepel Island and its vicinity, whose nearest foreign parallel is the Czech *ninera*. Both of them may be best compared to the former meaning of the English word *hurdy-gurdy*. The other, rarer name for the instrument is *lófej* in the vicinity of Csepel Island, and it is a Czech parallel again we can refer to: *kobylí hlava*.[5] (Hung. *lófej* = Czech *kobylí hlava* = Engl. *horse's head)* This is a completely unknown term in the area of the occurrence of the instrument along the river Tisza; it is most frequently called *tekerő* — this name, however, is unknown in the vicinity of Csepel Island — rarelier its name is *nyenyere*.[6]

The hurdy-gurdies known in Hungary are completely uniform in structure. It concerns their shape, the technical implementation of the keybox and the device for the accompaniment of music with rhythm as well as their construction in general. (Fig. 2.) It is in the number of the keys for tuning and that of the strings (three, four, sometimes five) and in the arrangement of the keyboard (viz. if the scale is diatonic, or more or less chromatic) that some differences can be found between the individual instruments. But all these differences are natural, and put into the

3. *L. Kunz:* Die Volksmusikinstrumente... op. cit. 72—74.; *Zd. Szulc:* Slownik lutników polskich. Poznan, 1953. 20—22.; *Dm. Zelenin:* Russische (ostslawische) Volkskunde. Berlin — Leipzig, 1927. 349—350.; *T. Alexandru:* Instrumentele muzicale... op. cit. 125.

4. Comp.: *Z. Trócsányi:* A nyenyere Magyarországon. Budapest, 1933., *Gy. Hankóczi:* Die ungarische Drehleier. In: Volkskunst, 6. 1983. 108—109.

5. Comp.: *P. Vása* — Fr. Trávnicek: Slovník jazyka českého. Praha, 1937. I. 761., II. 1092., *V. Machek:* Etymologicky slovník českého a slovenského. Praha, 1957. 326.;*A. Buchner:* Musikinstrumente der Völker. Prag, 1968. 285.; *L. Kunz:* op. cit. 72,; *L. Dobossy:* Cseh—magyar szótár. Budapest, 1960. I. 307., 582.

6. *Gy. Hankóczi:* A tekerőlant az Alföld középső részén. Ethnographia, XCIV. 1983. 386.

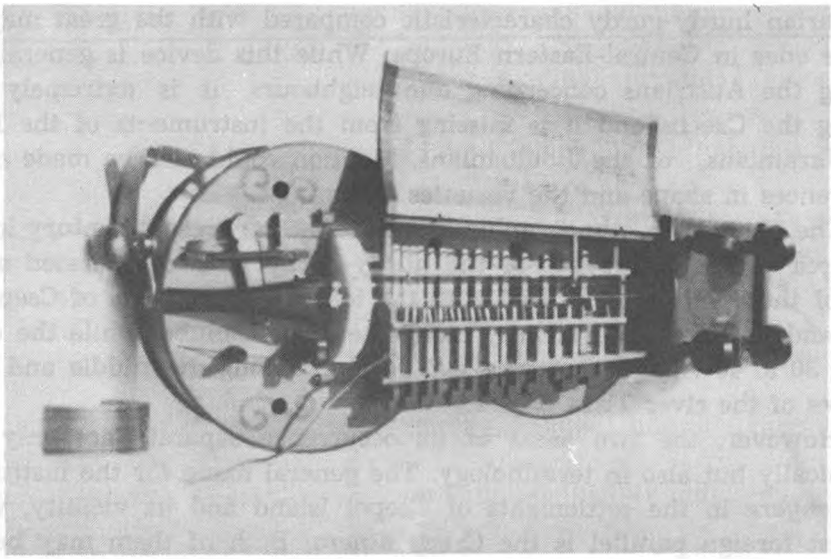

Fig. 2. A Hungarian hurdy-gurdy of traditional-structure made in the 1970s. Tiszaújfalu Photo Gy. Hankóczi, 1983.

chronological order of the making of the instruments they mark a definite tendency, they are the manifestations of the development (or the regression) of the hurdy-gurdy.[7]

In both areas of its occurrence the instrument was most often used at wedding parties and feasts at pig-killing, on name-days, at corn-husking and house-parties. Yet, in the village *Pereg* situated by the Danube the players living there played mostly only at parties organised for children at carneval time in the first decades of the 20th century.[8] This meeting was called *nyenyerés ház* (hurdy-gurdy house) after the local term for the hurdy-gurdy.

On Csepel Island (County Pest) and in its vicinity the instrument was often used alone (Fig. 3.) but also together with a *cither* or a *pipe* and occassionally with a primitive clarinet called *flóta*. The name for the latter duet of instruments is always *nyenyer-flóta* (hurdy-gurdy — flute) here. In the region of the river Tisza it appeared only rarely as a solo instrument, but the ensemble consisting of a *hurdy-gurdy and a clarinet* was general, while the one consisting of *a bagpipe and a hurdy-gurdy* was sporadic and the one including *a bagpipe, a hurdy-gurdy and*

7. More detailed see: Gy. Hankóczi: Typen und Spieltechnik der Drehleier im Karpatenbecken (manuscript) 1983.
8. *Z. Trócsányi:* A nyenyere ... op. cit. 9.

Fig. 3. A hurdy-gurdy player in the region of Csepel Island at the beginning of the 20th century. Pálmajor. Photo J. Lichtechert, 1903. Museum of Ethnography, Budapest.

a clarinet was rarer. (Fig. 4.) The tuning of the hurdy-gurdy in Hungary is known only from the region of the river Tisza. Regarding the order of the melody string, the trompette and the big bourdon, the tuning usually varied between e^1, *a*, *A* and *Fsharp*^{1}, *h H*.[9] But in the abovementioned ensembles it was a general tendency to use the hurdy-gurdy as an accompanying instrument, and neither the hurdy-gurdy player, nor the musician playing the first instrument required the melody-play of the instrument in question, but was content with its accompaniment emphasizing the rhythm, and in certain cases the clarinetist demanded only this. That was why sometimes it also happened that the string used for melody-making was not even tuned, but lifted off the wheel.[10] Owing to the modernization of the taste of the villages the hurdy-gurdy often made music together with a *violin, a viola and a double bass,* or even with a *cymbalo.* This phenomenon reveals the loss of importance of the hurdy-gurdy as well as its readiness for conformity.

9. *M. Bröcker:* Die Drehleier, Without year and place III. 755.; *Gy. Hankóczi:* A tekerőlant... op. cit. 394.

10. Comp.: *Gy. Hankóczi:* A tekerőlant... op. cit. 399—400.; *Gy. Hankóczi:* Typen und Spieltechnik... op. cit. 17—19.

Fig. 4. An ensemble consisting of a hurdy-gurdy player and a clarinetist. Farmstead *in Csongrád. Photo Gy. Hankóczi, 1978.*

There is not a single note recorded or taken down from the repertory of the hurdy-gurdy in the region of Csepel Island. It is just because of the aforementioned general tendency that the music of the instrument used in the region of the river Tisza can only be examined regarding the question what the *hurdy-gurdy — clarinet* duet played. First of all, a great number of folk songs in new style, so-called Hungarian songs and occasionally tunes in old style as well. Some melodies of composed music origin got a special function. For example the well-known Rákóczi march, which inspired famous European composers as well, in its popular variant was a song played when the guests were being shown out at the end of the parties. Some pieces of music of foreign origin also performed a special function. One of these tunes had become a song of welcome at feasts on pig-killing day.[11]

The hurdy-gurdy players on Csepel Island and in its vicinity were mainly poor peasants, cotters but there were some artisans and shopkeep-

11. Comp.: *B. Bartók:* A hangszeres zene folkloreja Magyarországon. Zeneközlöny, 10. 1911. 309., *L. Lajtha — O. Dincsér:* A tekerő. Néprajzi Értesítő, XXXI. 1939. 109., 110—111. *B. Sárosi:* op. cit. 56—57., *B. Sárosi:* Magyar népi hangszerek. Budapest, 1973. 58—59.; *B. Sárosi:* Zenei anyanyelvünk. Budapest, 1973. 275—276.; *Gy. Hankóczi:* Die ungarische... op. cit. 110.; *Gy. Hankóczi:* A tekerőlant... op. cit. 395., 397—398., 401., 403. See the following discs: Hungarian Folk Musik, 1. Ed. by *B. Rajeczky,* LPX. 10095—98 III/B 6 a, b.; Hungarian Instrumental Folk Music, Ed. by *B. Sárosi:* LPX 18045—47 Side Three 3., Side Four 1.

Fig. 5. An old hurdy-gurdy player in the companion of a folk-music collector. Probably Szentes, about the 1950s. József Koszta Museum, Szentes. Photo by an unknown photographer.

ers among them, too. In the area along the Tisza it was day-wage workers and shopkeepers who used it, but sometimes wealthier farmers also spent money for it. Certain musicians influenced the musical life of a larger or smaller part of their environment beyond the limits of their settlements as well. The players of the *hurdy-gurdy—clarinet* duet of Ráckeve (County Pest) situated on the bank of the Danube, for example, often made music in the neighbouring villages, too. Besides even an instrument maker is known here who built some hurdy-gurdies for the players of the neighbourhood. However, Szentes (County Csongrád) by the river Tisza is much more characteristic from this point of view. *Hurdy-gurdy—clarinet* duets were willingly invited to the neighbouring and sometimes even very remote settlements; as for the instruments coming from here, they have turned up at various places up to the present.

It was the radical economic change which gradually transformed the picture of society after the Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867 that made the hurdy-gurdy disappear from folk-lore. However, the process of the decline of the instrument, though it began at the same time, did not take place in the same way and at the same time in both areas of its

occurrence. The consequences of the industrial development and the following social regrouping became perceptible in the immediate vicinity of Budapest sooner, and owing to these the hurdy-gurdy practically disappeared from the musical life of the area between 1910 and 1918. The once respected instrument of weddings was hardly needed any more after the turn of the century. The players went to play on those occassions where custom let them appear uninvited, i. e. at feasts on pig-killing days and on name-days. Superseded even hence, for a time they played accompaniment to children's dances, but at certain points only. Then some of them became beggars in Budapest. Along the river Tisza this decline took place one or two decades later. After flourishing in the second part of the 1930s, the hurdy-gurdy recovered from the regression caused by World War II, and what is more it regained its strength, and it was only in the second part of the 1950s that, after a long decay but without any other transition, it disappeared completely.

In spite of the vanishing of the hurdy-gurdy from folklore the possibility of its reviving at the right moment did not cease to exist because some of its former players have survived the decline of the hurdy-gurdy. First they were visited many times by folk-music and ethnographic collectors (Fig. 5.) then, owing to the vogue of folk music spreading among young people at the beginning of the 1970s, they got into the field of interest of wider circles of the youth. From among them mention must be made of Mihály Bársony from Tiszaújfalu, who was a zealous helper of folk bands and curious visitors both as a musician and an instrument maker.

The young players of the folk-lore of the hurdy-gurdy discussed the questions of the history and the possibilities of the use of the instrument at nation-wide meetings in 1980 and then in 1982. Even the manuscript of the Hungarian textbook teaching how to play the hurdy-gurdy has been written by now.[12]

A tekerőlant Magyarországon

A tekerőlant a legtöbb európai nép körében ismert hangszer. Kontinensünk nyugati feléből valószínűleg egy hullámban terjedve jutott el Közép-Kelet-Európába a 15—17. században. A Kárpát-medencében az 1500-as évek táján jelenhetett meg, feltehetően osztrák közvetítéssel. Ez a nálunk viszonylag későn meghonosodott hangszer azonban sok szempontból mégis eltér a környező népek hasonló működésű instrumentumaitól. Ezek az eltérések elsősorban a terminológiában, a szerkezeti elemekben, a hangszer használati módjában és a hozzá kapcsolódó zenei anyagban

12. *A. Fajcsák—Gy. Hankóczi—M. Herczegh:* Tekerőlantiskola I. (nanuscript) 1983.

mutatkoznak meg. Jellegzetessé teszi a magyar tekerőt a közép-kelet-európaiak többségéhez képest egyebek között az is, hogy ismeri a ritmuskísérőszerkezetet, amíg ez szomszédaink közül csupán az osztrákoknál általános. Szép számmal vannak még formai és hangolásbeli különbségek, változatok is. Tanulmányomban részletesebben foglalkozom a tekerőlant magyarországi elterjedésével, terminológiai kérdéseivel és használatával. A hangszer folklorizmusának lehetünk szemtanúi az utóbbi évtizedekben, amikor a néphagyományból való eltűnésével egyidejűleg a tekerőlant népszerűsége a fiatalság körében egyre terjed.

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