

The idea and cultural history of statehood in Hungary

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the history of the interaction between statehood and culture. The literature focuses mainly on the cultural and organizational influence of large empires, but the changes in smaller regions are neglected. The analysis will look at Hungarian historiographical narratives of the 20th century and changes in modern conceptualisation in general, based on the history of celebrations in the second half of the 19th century. It also puts the different stages of the history of the state in context and within them the cult representing Christian culture and statehood. The paper aims to establish the concept of “state-creating culture” from a historical perspective and to demonstrate its potential application in explaining past processes, the first attempt to do so in the literature. The conceptualization and the attempt to apply the concept demonstrate that the derived concept is capable of illuminating and summarizing historical and cultural processes, since the analysis of the history of state and culture, taken as an example, explains the continuity of events and the survival of the community.

KEYWORDS : statehood, culture, community, common sovereignty, celestial power

Introduction

Statehood – the tradition or cultural knowledge of self-determination of individual countries – is an aspect of history that has, so far, escaped the attention of historians. Statehood as a broader perspective provide an interpretative framework for many myths, legends, customs, practices and phenomena that are part of the question of self-determination, in which their meaning makes sense. The interpretative framework, which includes identity, is defined by historiography and the politics of memory. The question of identity construction is largely Europe-centred, but the processes have been made problematic by the legacy of war and the colonial past.¹ Thus, for example, the Francophone movement of the 20th century can only create a loose cultural alliance.² In contemporary French historiography, the need for a community-building explanation of the past has re-emerged.³ Still, with all of this, Hungary is one of the countries in Europe where the consciousness of a shared past is alive. This larger perspective can be seen in Hungarian history, in case of King Saint Stephen I and his reception history. Since the scientific synthesis of the works of the monarch and the image of him as a matter of general knowledge began to be disseminated through the mass media primarily in the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century, the detailed discussion will focus on this period, with a sketchy digression into the history of state and cult (Figure 1).

1 Liebermann 2021, 23.

2 Le Marchand 2006.

3 Hartog 2006.



Figure 1. Peter Johann Nepomuk Geiger: *The coronation of St. Stephen*, source of the picture: *Vasárnapi Ujság*, 6. (1859) no. 2, [13].
Provenance: National Széchényi Library, identification number: MHC 2.960

Country and State: Emphases in Meaning

Sticking to the Hungarian example, in history the word ‘country’ was more commonly used to express ‘statehood’, i. e. the earlier conceptual equivalent of ‘state-founding’ or ‘state-creating’ was more commonly used to mean ‘country-building’. For a more precise explanation, it is worth shedding light on the evolution of the meaning of ‘country’ and ‘state’.

Latin texts from the 12th century associated with St. Stephen use the term ‘kingdom’ in translations reflecting the contemporary Hungarian vocabulary.⁴ This is justified, as the word

⁴ Tarnai–Madas 1991.

‘country’ (*úrság / uruszág / uraság*)⁵ is older than the Hungarian word for ‘state’,⁶ which has been used since the time of the neology. According to the etymological dictionary (published between 1862 and 1874), which also preserves the layers of meaning of the earlier Hungarian language, the broadest meaning of (1) included “a region of land, a larger area, confined within certain boundaries”, which formed a unit because of its specific location or the particularity of its inhabitants; (2) more narrowly, it covered “the homeland of city dwellers living under the sovereignty of a prince or an authority”, in which case it was a compound word with the name of the peoples living there or some other characteristic feature “e.g. island country (= England), Transylvanian country = Transylvania, apostolic country = Hungary [...]”; and finally, (3) it could be used metaphorically to represent either the universal whole of the Christian faithful by ‘the kingdom of God’, or the deserved afterlife of the departed by ‘kingdom of heaven’, ‘kingdom of hell’, or the whole of other beings on earth by ‘the kingdom of animals’, ‘the kingdom of plants’, and so on.⁷ Based on (2), the (one) verb of rule is ‘kingdom’, whereby the sovereign of a country – emperor, king, prince – exercised his power by administration, i. e. the “kingdom-ing” highness “kingdomed”.⁸ In the dictionary just quoted above, the term ‘state’ already refers to a later system of governance in which the prince or “moral highness” and a body of educated people – “bourgeois” – subject to law, ruled together, had their own government and presupposed a specific legal and political constitution.⁹

In the dualist era, the clarification of the meaning of ‘country’ and ‘state’ can be traced back to less than half a century, since in a modern society based on the bourgeoisie, the ever-expanding bureaucratic administration of the state was made up primarily of those “educated” in law. The image of the state as a complex organisation, run in accordance with the law, was thus brought to the fore in the everyday life of the country, because the construction of a society considered to be modern was only possible with their cooperation. There was therefore a shift in emphasis between the two concepts, which emphasised the importance of the state. One of the best-known 19th-century general lexicons gave a more precise definition of the word ‘kingdom’, i. e. “a kingdom” – Latin *regnum* [kingdom] – “territory under one prince and law”,¹⁰ which is the equivalent of a state, and which, in an already idealised explanation of the latter term, is “the most perfect and powerful development of social existence, in which the people living in a given area are organised for individual life, that is to say, for will and action”.¹¹

At the beginning of the 20th century, despite its undoubted drawbacks, it was more important to indicate the acceptance of the dual-state system in the pages of encyclopaedic

5 Benkő 1968–1984, vol. 2, 1970, 1095.

6 Benkő 1968–1984, vol. 1, 1968, 137.

7 Czuczor–Fogarasi 1862–1874, vol. 4, part 2, 1862, 1094–1095.

8 Czuczor–Fogarasi 1862–1874, vol. 4, part 2, 1862, 1097–1098.

9 Czuczor–Fogarasi 1862–1874, vol. 1, part 1, 1862, 265.

10 Gerő 1911–1935, vol. 13, 1896, 546.

11 Gerő 1911–1935, vol. 1, 1893, 385.

publications containing filtered condensations of common knowledge. Thus, in another popular general encyclopaedia of the time, the legal side of the concept of state appeared in the word ‘country’, with the appropriate reference, that is, country – Latin *regnum* [kingdom] – is the equivalent of state, which is “a constitution, in monarchy a commonwealth under a monarch. In Hungarian law, however, it is also used to designate a part of the territory of a state enjoying a greater degree of separation and a certain political autonomy (motherland), such as the Croatian-Slavonian and Dalmatian lands (co-territories) under Act XXX of 1868”.¹² According to the publication, the state was to be governed by the principle of territoriality, i. e. “a community of people living in a defined area under a common sovereignty. Its essential elements are: (a) territory, (b) supremacy over the population”,¹³ the latter being understood to mean state power, *suprema potestas* [supreme power] and sovereignty, and without a defined territory there can be no state.

In the light of the above, in the older historical periods, from the 9th to the 10th century, Hungary was self-designated as the *uraság* [dominion] of the Hungarians, i. e. a territory, or country, inhabited by them, which also meant a kingdom with a state and ecclesiastical administration adapted to the legal requirements of the time. It was the modern age that created the conditions in which the concept of state became synonymous with that of country, because of the need for a more elaborate legal and political system for the coexistence and governance of the masses – the population – which were to be unified into a citizenry (Figure 2).

12 Révay 1911–1935, vol. 14, 1916, 830.

13 Révay 1911–1935, vol. 1, 1911, 374.

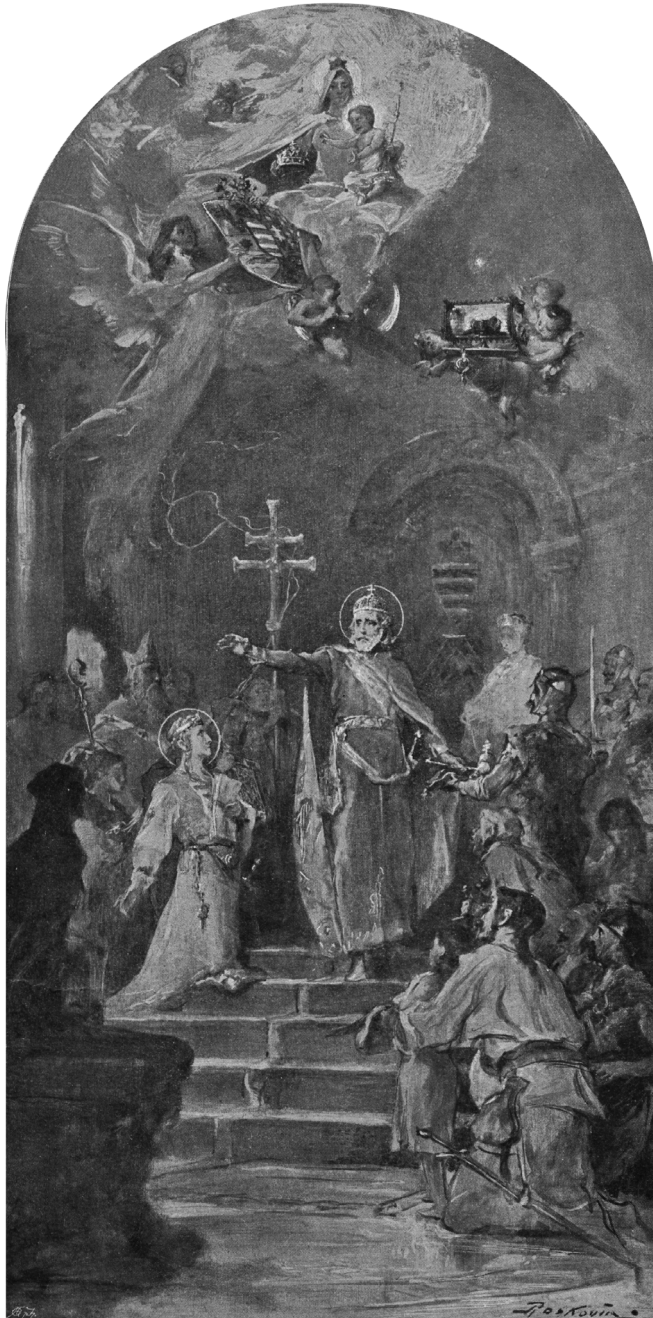


Figure 2. Sketch of the altarpiece of Ignác Roskovics' Saint Zsigmond Chapel, source of the image: *Vasárnapi Ujság*, 47. (1900) no. 1, [1]. Provenance: National Széchényi Library, identification number: MHC 2.960

Statehood and Cult

The following outline of the history of state and culture also presents the characteristics of cultural memory and memory studies as laid down in the theoretical literature: the attachment to place and community, the community-building character, the identity- and purpose-forming role, the rituals of making the past present, the sacred time and place, and the exemplary hero and deed.¹⁴ The historical act in this case is that during his reign King Stephen I established Christian Hungary in the Carpathian Basin.

The history of the institution of the state also goes back to the distant past, to the ancient East or to Greek and Roman times, which were mostly either city-states or despotic structures of rule.¹⁵ The latter form of government characterised the pre-Christian era in Hungary. During and after the reign of King Stephen I, the two main sources of jurisprudence were the common law and the written law. The common law was based on the consistent oral judgments of the community, while the written law recorded deviations from general legal principles, and in the 19th century became the main rule. In the Middle Ages, a specific group of written sources of law included legends, but the administration also used royal decrees, charters and privileges, as well as the ordinances of local communities (towns, guilds). This latter type of rule was adopted by the governments and ministries of later ages. Legal theorists distinguish between two main types of state: the monarchy, which is ruled by a king for the rest of his life, and the republic, which relies on elected leaders. The classification of the form of government is determined by the way in which power is exercised, i. e. it categorises, for example, a feudal monarchy or a parliamentary republic.

14 See Halbwachs 2011; Nora 1999–2010; É. Kovács 2012.

15 This subchapter is based on the followings: Balogh 2022; Mezey 2003.



Figure 3. Pál Vágó: Laying of the church foundation stone in the age of St. Stephen, source of the image: *Vasárnapi Ujság*, 42. (1895) no. 36, 583. Provenance: National Széchényi Library, identification number: MHC 2.960

King Stephen I founded and organised the Christian Hungarian state, the Kingdom of Hungary in the Carpathian Basin, in 1000 (Figure 3).¹⁶ At that time, the meaning of crown and state were synonymous.¹⁷ His successors confirmed the life's work of St. Stephen and the principles laid down in it. It was Ladislaus I who established the institutional practice of honour of the founding king with his canonisation on 20 August 1083. In 1222, Andrew II issued the Golden Bull, which enshrined the rights of the nobility and, at the same time, ordered the celebration of St. Stephen. Until 1301, the reign of the *Árpád* dynasty was characterised by a patrimonial monarchy, i. e. the king owned enough land to hold power in his own hands, raised an army and brought into power those rewarded with donations. But in the latter respect, the Hungarian procedure differed from Western European feudalism, because the king, from a clan or patriarchal point of view, regarded the priests and knights around him as members of his extended family. By the time of the extinction of the dynasty's male line, the diminished royal estate was no longer sufficient for maintaining the former rule of the kingdom.

The kings of various dynasties who came to the throne in 1301 could only run the country by establishing a representative estate monarchy until the Mohács disaster in 1526.¹⁸ The privileges of the estate of clergy were extended: they were granted personal protection, their donated real estates were exempt from taxation, and they were allowed to collect ecclesiastical taxes (tithes). The estate of nobility enjoyed four basic privileges: personal liberty, subject to the jurisdiction of the king, exemption from taxation and the right of resistance. The noble counties appeared. The free royal towns with autonomy had the customary right to judge, legislate, to appoint an envoy to the diet, to exercise staple right and hold fairs, and to own land, i. e. to have mills, public houses, meat markets and customs. From the 14th century onwards, the commemoration of the Holy King became primarily a religious feast, and its veneration continues to this day. At the beginning of the period, King Charles Robert of Hungary recognised the need for a treaty with a neighbouring country to ensure internal peace – economic and social life – and organised the summit of the Bohemian-Hungarian-Polish Kings at Visegrád in 1335. Over time, the centralising ambitions of the Hungarian rulers made it necessary to collect and organise legislation, including customary law. This task was carried out by István Werbőczy, who published the *Tripartitum* in 1517. This collection of laws determined the development of Hungarian law for a long time and is considered by historians to be of great merit in that it cemented the “political nation” (Figure 4).¹⁹

16 For the outlined history of the cult see Fabó 2022.

17 Bartoniek 1987, 68.

18 There was an attempt on convening an estate-general even in 1277 during the reign of László IV.

19 Hóman–Szekfű 1936, 591.

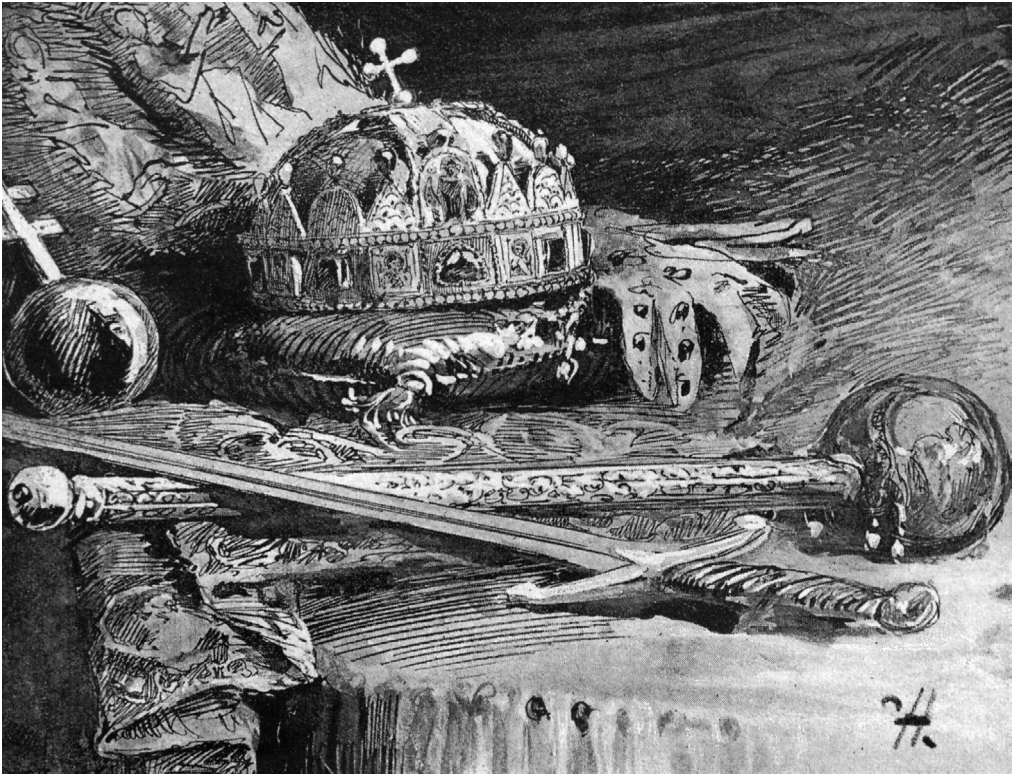


Figure 4. Gyula Hány: *The Holy Crown and its symbols*,
source of the image: *Vasárnapi Ujság*, 39. (1892) no. 24, 421.

Provenance: National Széchényi Library, identification number: MHC 2.960

The book incorporated the Holy Crown doctrine, which had developed up to that time, and was a state theory that served as a constitution. The thesis of the organisation of power associated with the imperial crown was known and used in other countries, but the Hungarian exposition had always linked it to a single physical object. King Stephen I repeatedly drew attention to the need to preserve the honour and dignity of the crown in his Admonitions [*Intelmek*]²⁰. The earliest mention of the crown as the Holy Crown is found in the charter of Béla IV of 1256, from which time it clearly became the representative of the sovereign power and the unity of the country or state, independent of any person, i. e. an eternal and independent source of law above earthly and human interests. Under the idea of the Holy Crown, legislation and government are made in the name of the Crown, it represents the sovereignty of all, it is the right of sovereignty, it is the source of the transfer of

20 The Admonitions was a short collection of advices of St. Stephen given to his son Prince St. Emeric.

power, it unites the wielders of power, it owns the territory of the country, it has its own property, it is the source of all rights of possession, it links Heaven and Earth. The doctrines of the liberty of the kingdom, of a single and equal liberty, of a freely elected king, of the forfeiture of the violation of the law, and of the right and duty of resistance, are part of the idea. The Crown owns the geographical territories included in certain international treaties, or those that revert to the Crown, and the estates of disloyal subjects and extinct families revert to the Crown. The annexed (Balkan) territories or their representatives swore an oath of allegiance to the Crown and then, when they needed protection from the expanding Ottoman Empire, repeatedly reaffirmed this. The jurisdiction of the Crown was valid for the King, the nobles and the free royal cities, who thus formed the membership of the Holy Crown.

The partial occupation of the Carpathian Basin by the conquering Ottoman Empire in the 16th century brought a great blow that divided the life of the country, as a result of which the area was split into three parts. In the west, the royal Hungary²¹ came under the influence of the Habsburgs, in the center the Ottoman power became the dominant force, and in the east the Principality of Transylvania remained. The Ottomans were driven out by the Habsburgs in the 17th century, the court of Vienna remained in control of the Hungarian state for a long time, but in the meantime Transylvania could also return to the Kingdom of Hungary. Thus, from 1526 until the mid-18th century, a representative estate monarchy continued to exist in Habsburg Hungary and Transylvania. This was interrupted by the enlightened absolutism in the period between 1760 and 1790. The independent status of “Hungary and its attached parts” – its statehood, borders, legislation and use of the Hungarian language – was re-declared by law (Acts X–XIII and XVI of 1790/91), and then, in the reform era up to 1848, the establishment of a constitutional monarchy was advocated under the same conditions as before, and Meanwhile, in times burdened by Christian sectarian strife and religious disputes, they reached back to the arguments of St. Stephen. In turn, Maria Theresa used the cult and legal principles of St. Stephen to consolidate her position of power: she founded the Order of St. Stephen, the highest state honour, revived the right of the supreme patronage to rule over church affairs, brought the Holy Right Hand [*Szent Jobb*] home to Buda from Raguzza in 1771 and ordered the public worship of St. Stephen. Later, by a law of 20 May 1792, Leopold II introduced the Hungarian language into the deliberations of central government.

On the feast of St. Stephen, from 1810, the Holy Right Hand procession was held in Buda Castle, which from 1819 was to be attended by the nobility regardless of denomination. In the parliament, the classes previously excluded from privileges were granted rights by extension and became members of the Holy Crown. The modern bourgeois transformation could begin, and autonomous state government could be achieved. Ferdinand V, who had

21 See Illik 2016.

sanctioned the laws, was deposed and succeeded by Francis Joseph. But neither the abdication nor the succession was in accordance with Hungarian law, so the Declaration of Independence of 14 April 1848 declared the dethronement of the House of Habsburg and the War of Independence began, which could only be crushed with Russian help in the summer of 1849. Revenge and subjection took place under the autocratic rule of the Austrian Emperor, during which there were attempts at a constitutional solution, but it was not accepted by the Hungarian Parliament. From 1849 the Holy Right Hand procession was banned, but from 1860 it was allowed.

Under the terms of the 1867 Compromise, Austria and Hungary were two separate states, bound together only by the person of the monarch. Both countries had separate branches of power, with the Imperial Assembly in Vienna for Austrian matters and the Parliament in (Buda) Pest for Hungarian matters, and they had their own independent jurisdictions. But they also had their common affairs for war, foreign affairs and for finance of the common affairs. However, the Hungarian legal culture was much more coherent than that of Austria, with a constitutional tradition going back hundreds of years, while the provinces of Austria were governed mainly by decrees which had little or no jurisdiction over Hungary. Austria only received a constitution with the Compromise.²² The cult of St. Stephen remained unbroken until the middle of the 20th century.

It was only at the end of WW I that the country regained its independence, but most of the original territories were taken away. After the inglorious People's Republic of 1918 and the dictatorial Soviet Republic of 1919, a constitutional monarchy without a king was established between 1920 and 1944 under the regency of Miklós Horthy, and the succession to the dualist system of government was declared. The kingdom remained in force as a form of government until 1946, although at the end of 1944 an Arrow Cross²³ dictatorship was briefly established, which broke completely with the historical constitution. The communist era of the second half of the 20th century brought a new rule of a foreign sphere of interest. Between 1944 and 1949, the communists crushed the multi-party system. In 1946, the republic was proclaimed, with the people as the source and holder of its sovereignty. In 1949, the Hungarian People's Republic was proclaimed by adopting the Stalinist constitution, which was in fact the dictatorial totalitarian power of the Communist Party. Between 1947 and 1989 the procession of the Holy Right Hand was banned. But St. Stephen's Day [*Szent István-nap*] was kept throughout as a celebration of the new bread and statehood, but the ecclesiastical character was ignored.

Finally, the change or regime in 1989–1991 opened the way to a renewed independence. In 1989, the republic was re-proclaimed, and the Constitution in 2012 enshrined respect for the heritage of St. Stephen and the spirit of the historic constitution. Since then, the commemoration of 20 August has once again been celebrated in full.

²² Brauneder 1992, 20., 154–186.

²³ The Hungarian national socialist movement.

Even during its limited independence, Hungary has always maintained its own laws, its organised form of government – statehood and its cult.

Saint Stephen Festival and its Interpretation

St. Stephen's Day is the oldest Christian celebration in Hungary, held since the canonisation of Stephen I, the founder of the state. The canonisation of the monarch was initiated in 1083 by Ladislaus I, who consolidated the country's order, and later the honour of St. Stephen, together with the Lawgiver's Days, was confirmed by Andrew II in the Golden Bull of 1222, before becoming a specifically ecclesiastical feast in the 14th century. In 1771, after the expulsion of the Ottomans, Maria Theresa declared it a countrywide holiday. From 1810 onwards, the ceremony was extended to include the "Szent Jobb" (a relic, the remnant of the right hand of Stephen I) procession, which ceased to exist during the despotic periods of Francis Joseph and of the socialism, but was retained after 1988. Much of the history of the feast after the Compromise of 1867 is obscure.²⁴

The Christian Hungarian royal family, who founded the country, gave many saints to the Catholic Church.²⁵ Among them, of course, St. Stephen is the most prominent, whose legacy and cult came to the fore again, especially from the end of the 18th century. The figure of the holy king is both an ecclesiastical and a statesmanlike example, and by him the idea of statehood is presented, which was often recalled in the sermons on the day of remembrance dedicated to him. The interpretative framework of the values mentioned was always determined by the issues of the specific time period, and therefore not only the aspirations to be pursued, but also the social criticisms of each year. Since the scope of St. Stephen's work primarily covers Hungary, and a similar cult of a saint that also represents statehood is difficult to find elsewhere, there are only partial cultural-historical parallels at international levels.

He was the first king to have earned the crown through his missionary and ruling activities.²⁶ Although King Erik IX of Sweden is also credited as a lawgiver, King Olaf II of Norway for his religious code or Henry II of the German-Roman Empire for his dedicated life of faith, none of them had such a dominant influence on their countries over the centuries as the Hungarian monarch had,²⁷ who was also recognised as a saint by Eastern Christianity. Thus,

24 The research on this field started in the Research Centre for History of the Institute of Hungarian Research. Analyses until 1881 were published.

25 Klaniczay 2002.

26 Ibid., 114–154.

27 Hungary, Government, 2000.

the best examples and analyses of them are mainly provided by works on mediaeval culture and ecclesiastic history,²⁸ although a 19th century history of their own saints' cult has already appeared in English literature.²⁹ Nowadays, in domestic context, the interest in the memory of St. Stephen has been revived, which led to the author's researches concerning the procedure, reception and sermons of the celebration. The last time that the sermons on St. Stephen's Day were discussed was in the 1930s,³⁰ and this was finished by the evaluation of the mid-19th century sermons. The perception of the first half of the 20th century was that religiousness had declined since the second half of the 19th century, and consequently the sermons that most represent the cult of St. Stephen were not discussed.³¹ This view is so widespread that the memory of the sermons of 20 August has even been lost from the scholarly consciousness, as has the consideration that, compared to a 21st century-man, society in the dualist era can still be considered clearly religious.³² The celebrations of St. Stephen's Day were a popular event that attracted crowds, even if their religious character was increasingly supplemented by secular entertainment.

Some of the more comprehensive studies of the history of St. Stephen's Day concern commemorations of the dualist period.³³ Austria also had a public holiday: the emperor's birthday, which was commemorated in a fitting manner every year. In fact, throughout the Monarchy, the King's birthday was a public holiday, but the court etiquette of the central celebration in Vienna allowed limited publicity. In addition, Hungary, a partner state, also had its own national public holiday, St. Stephen's Day, which was reinforced by the Habsburgs (Figure 5).

28 Gecser et al. 2011.

29 Atkins 2016.

30 Szekfű 1938, 1–80.

31 *Ibid.*, 71.

32 Kollega Tarsoly 1997, 289.

33 Romsics 2013.



Figure 5. *St. Stephen's Day procession in the Buda Castle,*
source of the image: Vasárnapi Ujság, 29. (1882) no. 34, 536.

Provenance: National Széchényi Library, identification number: MHC 2.960

In Hungary, 20 August was a very popular event, it became a national holiday. For the central event in Budapest, discounted fee trains transported guests to the capital. The press of the time published data on the size of the crowds that crossed the Chain Bridge [*Lánchíd*] to attend the services at the Castle and the Holy Right Hand procession, as well as statistics on the number of visitors to these institutions.

The feast of St. Stephen was separated by only one day from the royal birthday on 18 August, but the official ceremonial order of the two anniversaries was completely different and separate, without obscuring each other's significance. Although it has been easy to toast King Stephen and celebrate Franz Joseph at informal celebrations on the occasion of the historic commemoration day, the two celebrations were not separated by any significant difference in their significance. For posterity, in the light of the memory of the systematic, inhumane atrocities of the dictatorship of the 20th century, the person of King Francis Joseph I is of particular interest, as the monarch ruthlessly retaliated the 1848–1849 revolution and struggle for freedom. There was also general agreement that the country's existence could only be imagined in terms of independence from Austria, and the only difference of opinion on the public law of the treaty between the two states was whether independence should be

achieved as soon as possible or more slowly, step by step. The political parties of the dualist period were therefore organised along the same lines as those of the public law.

The elections of 1875 brought to power a liberal-oriented political group that postponed full independence for the sake of a manageable present but trusted in the expansion of possibilities. This political grouping, with one minor wobble, held on to its governmental positions unalterably by parliamentary means until 1918.³⁴ The opposition politicians of the period, who were fully pro-independence, formulated their programme and critical positions within a constitutional framework. In other words, the citizens and politicians of the country were thinking in terms of an independent statehood for the country, which still maintained a social and political structure during the Monarchy that had only been shattered with external assistance by the turmoil at the end of World War I, by the Aster Revolution and the Soviet Republic. Although socialist and communist theories had crept into the Hungarian ideologies of the 19th century, neither then nor after the World War II did they have a mass base on which to build power democratically. Fearmongering and dictatorship were prominent in the persuasive toolbox of left-wing political ideologies. This is what the Hungarian people rebelled against in 1956, and during the revolution, the local communities in the countryside almost immediately organised themselves on the basis of the rules of self-government. In the communist era, the materialism oriented party leadership realised that common historical cults were indispensable, and so St. Stephen's Day was celebrated as a celebration of statehood – the People's Republic as the form of government at the time – and of the new bread, and finally in 1978 the Holy Crown was allowed to return home. One of the important events of the regime change that began in 1989 was the Holy Right Hand procession, which had been banned since 1947.

However, after 1945 in Hungary, the socialist, communist-grounded scientific approach was imbued with a lexical-verbal brutality of concepts, which at the very least classified any deviation from the desired developmental line, or any event or phenomenon that contradicted it, as “self-deception”, “false consciousness”, “false origin”, “false theory of the past”.³⁵

State and Cult – Evaluation of Historians on Culture in the 20th century

With the weakening of communist power and spirit, the earlier bourgeois historiography of the past was reassessed. Among other things, this is how the conclusions of Gyula Szekfű (1883–1955), a representative of this movement between the two world wars, who was a

³⁴ Varga 1999, 43–45.

³⁵ Bibó 1986, 569–620.

leading researcher of the memory of St. Stephen, came to the fore again. One of his studies, entitled “Saint Stephen in the Centuries of Hungarian History” [*Szent István a magyar történet századaiban*], was published in the St. Stephen’s memorial book of 1938. In this jubilee volume, he traced the centuries-long changes in the memory of the holy king and his place in Hungarian historiography. According to his analysis, the cult of Saint Stephen lost much of its religious connotations as it progressed towards the 19th century, and later in the reform era, but especially after the Compromise, “the liberal, nationalistic, materialistic, natural-scientific spirit of the age almost completely eradicated faith from the intellectuals.”³⁶ The Church did not resist firmly, and actually religiousness became an obstacle to the expression of patriotic national feeling. As a reaction to the tragedy of Trianon, there was an increased interest in the history of the country, the nation and the nationalities, and how historical facts explained the losses. Gyula Szekfű devoted much time to the definition of state-nation and nation-state, and in particular to the exploration of the coexistence of nationalities, and as a result of his historical analyses he identified the conception of St. Stephen’s theory on state as the key to Hungary’s survival.

The modern Hungarian state leadership, primarily because of its multi-ethnicity, defined the population of the country as a political nation. When the influential historian Gyula Szekfű published his collection of essays on the state and nation in 1942, in the preface he summarised the historical lessons of the thousand-year long survival of Hungary.

“[...] yet the stability and uninterrupted security of our national life depends on them. Here are some of the most important ones:

1. The Hungarian nation has always had a state, and this state, Hungary, has always belonged to the Hungarians;
2. in the state of Hungarians there were always non-Hungarian peoples as well; Hungary has never been a monolingual country; a monolingual country would mean renouncing a thousand-year past;
3. the ways and means of coexistence with non-Hungarian peoples have always been sought and mostly found by the Hungarians; the initiative at this field was in their hands, as the state was always theirs and they bear the responsibility for it;
4. In the course of time, many non-Hungarian elements have been absorbed into the Hungarian nation, but this assimilation has never reached a point in the past centuries beyond which it could have hindered the functioning and development of the ancient characteristics of the Hungarian nation;

When, therefore, disturbances in the national and state existence appear, there again the assertion of these ancient characteristics, including the old Hungarian political sense, must be made possible, even exclusive.”³⁷

³⁶ Szekfű 1938, 71.

³⁷ Szekfű 1942, 6.

Szekfű's generalised statements are difficult to refute, and he explained them in the St. Stephen's concept of the state. The validity of this claim is best demonstrated by the fact that, for example, Maria Theresa relied on the legal principles, relics and cult of the Hungarian king and the Holy Crown, which symbolised her ideal, to strengthen her power in the international and domestic political situation of her time, and in doing so, she restored the status of the cult of the founder of the state. The Hungarian subjects accepted as legitimate only the actions of the monarch inaugurated with the crown. The traditional Hungarian jurisdiction considered the crown as an independent (legal) entity, and the delay or omission of the coronation constituted an irreplaceable legal vacuum. This is why the coronation of Francis Joseph I on 8 June 1867 was so significant in the dualist era.

The work of the Hungarian king who founded the state proved to be extremely long-lasting as the principles he laid down in his *Intelmek* [Admonitions] and the system of counties he also established remained in operation, with certain modifications, until 1949, and the Catholic ecclesiastical system, with minor differences, remained in place until 1993.³⁸ This was an outstanding achievement which contributed much to the establishment and strengthening of the Hungarian kingdom – unlike the surrounding countries, it was not dependent on anyone, but it was a sovereign power.³⁹ This unity was shattered by the Ottoman occupation, Habsburg rule and the influence of the Soviet Union.

Gyula Szekfű considered the Compromise of 1867 a reasonable solution, but he saw the period that followed as an age of ruin. The “St. Stephen's state spirit”, formulated by the logic of a historian, however aptly summarised as a term to express the common idea that held the country together, did not gain enough currency in the public consciousness to become part of the general public's political culture, and remained a mellow old historical category. Compared with earlier periods, it seemed a constrained idea in the conceptual framework of a desacralised modern society, since sacrality no longer found its function and was not a thesis in the 12-point programme of the revolution of 15 March 1848 or in the organisation of rural self-government in the wake of the 1956 revolution. The former, however, attempted to implement the announced demands in the context of a constitutional (state) transformation, while the latter constituted the basic units of Hungarian statehood.

Conceptual clarity was made difficult by the fact that the dominance of modern society and the beginning of the awakening of national (thought or) consciousness coincided, and later they sometimes were mixed and sometimes separated. Until then, the inhabitants of the Hungarian Kingdom in the Carpathian Basin had been known as Hungarians, and they had also referred to themselves as such abroad. For many other peoples were allowed to settle in the country, who were able to retain their culture and language, following the admonition of St. Stephen to welcome “guests and strangers”. The Hungarians' consciousness thus created made it possible for other nationalities to identify with the Hungarians, and

38 Thoroczkay 2002, 492.

39 Font 2005, 257–266.

their coexistence was uninterrupted until nationalism took hold.⁴⁰ National ideals, which also encouraged rivalry, fuelled new hostilities. The reality was that countries were not just one nation, but other nations or nationalities living in the same territory,⁴¹ so the idea of a political nation state became commonplace.⁴² In fact, the designation corresponded to the earlier *Hungarus* consciousness in Hungary. However, in order to justify and challenge the claims of domination, concepts that are difficult to separate were created in the relationship between nation and state, such as nation-state, nation-state or culture-nation, which marginalises others, and from then on, the historiography of the modern age was permeated by the vision of cultures and peoples competing with each other (for freedom, for self-determination).

Conceptual and Interpretational Framework of “State-creating Culture”

The modern society having eroded traditional small communities, has become increasingly entangled and complex as the bourgeoisie has become like a mass, and that’s why sociology was created to explore its regularities. The definitions of social science are flexible enough to cover all aspects and, by being accessible to the general public, can be easily integrated into public thinking. Max Weber was not yet well known in Hungary at the beginning of the 20th century, but his definition of the “state” is inevitable, reflecting mainly the Western view of the time, but also having a significant influence on the general understanding of the state today. The German thinker “[...] described the state as (a) a plant (b) of a ruling organisation (c) which is valid on a specific territory (d) within the framework of an administrative and legal order, (e) carries out political activity (f) and its political being can only be determined with regard to the method used.”⁴³ This is accompanied by a broad description of the

40 Miskolczy 2014, 32.

41 Connor 1978, 377–400.

42 The idea, which had crystallized by the Enlightenment, was that the geographical extent of a nation and its language should be derived from the same government and state territory, and that it would be difficult to tolerate linguistic differences. Thus, the nations of Western Europe (see England, France) include all those living within their borders as members of the nation, while the peoples of smaller countries (see the Dutch, Austrians, Luxembourgers) are on the way of becoming a nation. The cultural nations include the historical countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the former (Habsburg, Ottoman, Russian) empires, as they encompassed different regions, ethnicities – cultures – with different historical backgrounds. Multiethnic states (see United States, Switzerland), on the other hand, preferred – for reasonable reasons – the designation ‘political nation’. However, countries of cultural nations have used and continue to use the term ‘political nation’ for themselves. See Joó 1988; Barna–Gereben–Stefkovic 2003.

43 Takács 2014, 39.

“state-creating nation”, in which, in the nationalised Eastern European empires of the 19th and 20th centuries, it is sharply separated from the other nationalities, is the legitimate “owner” of the institutional system, but is unable to develop its full potential, has to resort to solutions other than the usual ones to secure its positional advantage, and whose justification is complicated, and is capable of mobilisation, involving the official organisations.⁴⁴ The list of characteristics reflects the difficult but necessary strategy of state leadership to ensure the governability of the country. In view of this, the concept of “state-creating people” is favoured by a more precise legal definition, which has in fact become a commonplace in the historical literature. “The ‘state-creating people’, together with the territory of the state and the organisation of its powers, is the defining element of the modern concept of the state and, as such, is a legal category. It is to a certain extent related to the nation of the state, but is nevertheless more explicit, since it includes all citizens.”⁴⁵

Thus, the 19th century saw the beginning of a process of linguistic differentiation to the point of exclusivity, and therefore nationalism included threat to other communities. The existence and change of the state seemed to be taken for granted in the explanatory projection of the competitive spirit that was the driving force of modernity. Historiography has used the term “state-creating people”, but this has prevented the recognition of another related, broader perspective: “state-creating culture”. For if there is a “state-creating people”, it is logical to assume that, if there is a history of the (practice or) cultivation of statehood, then that people also must have a “state-creating culture”. A state-creating people has a long history of statehood because it has a vision and an idea of statehood, a knowledge of statehood, underpinned by, preserved in and practised on the basis of its historical traditions, so that it can maintain and defend its statehood. The term is not used at all in modern history, although it does appear in archaeological works or in works on ancient history. However, on the very rare occasions when the two-word term did occur, it was used as a quotation mark category for a more general cultural surplus.⁴⁶ This phraseme can also be found in the literature on minorities, but they always refer to the culture of the majority nation as a whole.⁴⁷ However, none of the texts cited strictly covers the very activity of creating, running, maintaining state, that is, cultivating statehood. The term “state-preserving” could

44 Brubaker 1996, 105–106.

45 Brunner 1996, 20.

46 “In some cases, these views proved to be powerless in the face of the teaching of the ‘state-creating’ and ‘culture-bearing’ role of the Hungarians.” Zsigmond 1974, 12. “From both sides, politically motivated myths from long before were frequently voiced: the Romanians maintained the idea of Daco-Romanian continuity, the Serbian, Croatian, Czech and Slovak writers and politicians wanted to restore the ancient Slavic unity, which had been destroyed by the barbarian Asian hordes, while the Hungarians emphasized their role as state-founders, culture-creators and culture-bearers.” Pálfi–Tanos 2006, 101.

47 “[...] several of the different ethnic groups are competing for the right to the ‘majority’, the ‘state-creating’ culture [...]” Forray–Hegedűs 1995, 5.; “[...] the postmodern state is not an expression of a single state-creating culture, but of the relationship between cultures.” Végel 1996, 36.

also be used, but it covers a time span from the past to the present, while the term “state-creating” is imperfective, and it refers to the past, the present and the future. The “state-creating culture” also has its own cult through the life’s work of the founder of the state, St. Stephen, and the history of the two (state and cult) is inseparable.

The horizons of social science are wide enough to shed light on the essence of culture and cult. “Colony, culture and cult are words that have a common origin [*colo, colere, colui, cultum*]: all three refer to the habitation of settled groups of people, to the activities (including the cultivation of the land) that nurture, influence or transform natural processes for their subsistence, and to the practices that reinforce the beliefs that guarantee the cohesive identity of their community.”⁴⁸ A shared past is usually associated with a particular place, individuals share a common destiny, identify with enduring values, take pride in excellence, and aim to survive. Based on countless definitions of culture it means the relationship and organisation of people,⁴⁹ while the term ‘cult’ narrows down to the common worship of people, artefacts, beliefs connected to one specific territory.⁵⁰ The Hungarian equivalents of the Latin words both support the scientific definition and, given the tradition that accompanied the Holy King, are perfectly in keeping with the most typical way of preserving the memory of him. A shared past is usually associated with a particular place, individuals share a common destiny, identify with enduring values, take pride in excellence, and aim to survive.⁵¹

At the time of the dictionary source cited, the idea of the political nation began to replace the *Hungarus* idea. These were basically the same, but the latter was divided by the competing assertion of national and nationality interests. Throughout Europe, rivalry was not a game of mutual appreciation, but a bloody dramatic game of exclusion and elimination. Thus, Hungary tried in vain to continue the practice of the previous centuries of different peoples living side by side, but the primacy of language opened up a front unlike any other in Europe. Hungarians were proud of their homeland, their past and their culture.⁵² Even members of the political nation of the 19th century, took up their country with dignity (Figure 6).⁵³

48 Wessely 2003, 7.

49 In the middle of the 20th century Alfred Louis Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn collected 165 interpretations of culture. Since then, this number further increased. See Kroeber–Kluckhohn 1952.

50 See Nora 1999–2010.

51 Ibid.

52 See Rab 2015, 55; Bél 2014, 7.

53 See Fabó 2020.

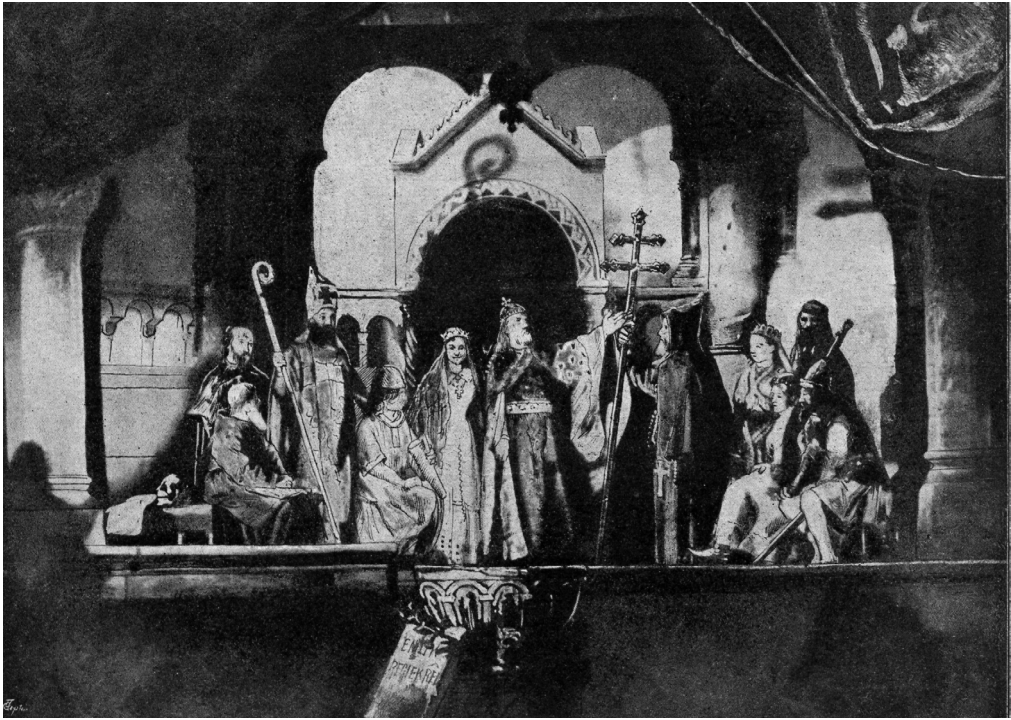


Figure 6. Lázár Nagy: *St. Stephen receives the symbols of Christianity*, (after photo, life picture in the *Vigadó*, *St. Stephen*: Count Imre Széchenyi the Elder, Queen Gizella: Baroness Emilia Papp Kramolin, Prince Imre: Count László Hunyadi, bishops: Ferencz Rakovszky, Alajos Stróbl, young girl: Valéria Elek, Prince Endre: Count József Hunyadi, courtier: Emilia, Prince Thurn-Taxis, scholar: Count Zedwitz-Utz), source of the image: *Vasárnapi Ujság*, 42. (1895), no. 17, 273. Provenance: National Széchényi Library, identification number: MHC 2.960

The change came first with the Trianon treaty, but especially with communism: for political reasons, it was not appropriate to be proud because of the sensitivity of neighbouring countries, just as the despicable and ridiculed category of “Hungarianism” [*magyarkodás*] was born. The leftist phraseology said it was unfounded, based on false convictions, “self-deception”, i. e. lies. And the historiography after the regime change could not really restore the sound national self-esteem, especially because it continued the narrative of national cultures playing off each other, which further weakened national (self-)consciousness. The national consciousness, separated from the country’s historical culture, became a self-serving conceit, an outmoded – at best romantic – set of props and costumes, eclectically cobbled together.

The culture of a nation (or of its fellow peoples) belongs to the country or state, as a part to the whole, and must be understood together. The notion of “state culture”, which replac-

es the former “country culture” or *Hungaria / Hungarus* culture, opens up a framework of interpretation in which the adjective “national” has meaning and purpose. For a person who identifies himself as Hungarian is, as is obvious to all, a member of a community that has an experience/culture that can sustain, protect and build the future of his family, extended family, generation, nation, multitude of friends and acquaintances, with a special – heavenly – source of spiritual sustenance for the community, beyond interdependence.

The Hungarian “state-creating culture” has so far been derived from a legalistic view of the earthly world, but because it incorporates the St. Stephen’s idea of the state and the Holy Crown, it also carries a transcendental dimension. The Holy Crown was treated as a legal entity from the point of view of the state, and thus represented the earthly, material laws, and through its autonomy it represented the interests of the state. However, King Stephen I, with his famous dedication of the crown to the Virgin Mary, placed the whole country under the authority of the Virgin Mary.⁵⁴ The supernatural being, representing pure morality and the celestial order, is then ultimately above the material and human world – she is not subject to the power of worldly forces.⁵⁵ In other words, the Holy King, by the gesture of asking for protection or donation, created the lowest denominator of the common interest; the peers and people extended its greatest reach by making agreements in times of crisis. Although the cult has sometimes faded and is not as bright as it once was, its memory as a specific cultural element has been and is still present, even in the less religious strata of the general public consciousness. The forces influencing modern society may proclaim the omnipotence of theorems justifying material interests and ignore the rules of the universe, but in the light of the tradition of Hungarian state-building culture, there is a being who is above them. And this is the smallest common point, from which springs the eternal hope necessary for perseverance – the spiritual force (Figure 7).

54 See Teiszler 2022.

55 Eliade 1959.



Figure 7. Ferenc Szoldatics: *St. Stephen before the Blessed Virgin*,
source of the image: *Vasárnapi Ujság*, 35. (1888) no. 4, 56.
Provenance: National Széchényi Library, identification number: MHC 2.960

The reconciling factor is a major figure in Christianity, similar to the deity of the previous religion, yet the creation, maintenance and transmission of a common consent about her is an achievement for which there is a great demand elsewhere.⁵⁶ For the past thousand years, the Carpathian Basin country has relied on the Christian religion as its community-building force, and it is still a dominant one.⁵⁷ Man derives his morality, which explains his existence and inspires him to action, from religious doctrines and logical propositions describing the world as it is comprehensible to his own mind. In modern secularised (and commercialised) society, since the Enlightenment, law has been the channel for mortal human interests, with principles claimed to be just, and for which rational arguments, backed by science, are provided. Thinkers of the 20th century saw the way forward to reconciling religion and reason differently. Jürgen Habermas placed his trust in the tolerance, or conscious self-limitation, of the enlightened citizens of the liberal state,⁵⁸ while Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, proposed a common dialogue between representatives of the two perspectives in order to find “what holds the world together”.⁵⁹

However, in this changing world, the challenges that surround different societies are such that even critics of a conception of the state based on the national ideal recognise its right to exist for its community-building power. “The nation-state, for good or ill, is the political institution with the most effective and broad legitimacy in the world. Modernity is reinventing itself in the nation state. It is otherwise in only a few cases. The complete denial of nationalism, or the denial of distinction between nationalisms, leads to a line of thought by which intelligence, especially postcolonial intelligence, excludes itself from effective political action.”⁶⁰

The historical practice of Christian statehood justified the organizational form which nowadays is regarded as the nation-state. In the past, the community of this nation-state identified themselves as *Hungarus* or *Hungarus*-conscious, and only later – as part of the political nation and with a self-respecting patriotism after the state-creating national name – as *Magyar* [Hungarian].

56 Maritain 1939.

57 See the thoughts of Roger Scruton. Pétery-Schmidt 2019.

58 Habermas–Ratzinger 2007, 32.

59 Ibid., 47–48.

60 During 1990, 139.

Conclusion

Using Hungary as an example, the study shows that there is a specific intertwining of culture and statehood, where

1. in the same geographical area,
2. a centuries-old Christian country or state is maintained by its inhabitants,
3. in accordance with the culture of the people who created the state.

To describe a culture with these characteristics, the concept of “state-creating culture” was introduced, the historical conceptualisation of which (and its application to explain past processes) is the main original achievement of this study.

Historical and present awareness of state-creating achievements, as well as future visions and expectations, give meaning to national (self-)consciousness, national self-esteem and the real basis for a justly deserved national pride. A sense of national communal life, in which everyone can participate who, according to historical practice, considers himself or herself a member of the nation or a member of the country.

From a social-historical point of view, the analysis focuses mainly on the discourse of history of state and culture from the dualist period. Francis Joseph I, who ruthlessly retaliated the 1848–1849 Revolution and War of Independence, was accepted by the public primarily because he was able to ensure the state-run operation of the country – statehood – which suggests that for contemporary society the existence of a state framework was at least as important as autonomy. Furthermore, politics was conducted in accordance with the constitutional aspects, as politicians in government and in opposition formulated their programmes only within the framework of this law. The state administration, based on the political nation of Hungarians, which was also an expression of the earlier national consciousness, promoted the use of national language, the concept of national culture – which had its origins in the Enlightenment and which, in the case of Hungary, understandably, gave priority to the Hungarian language, given the role of the Hungarian people as the state-creating nation. The Compromise and the half-century that followed it are sometimes referred to as the beginning of a decline, condemning the whole period. Yet it was in this period that the modern society was built, that is the historical precursor of today’s society, its public life. There are similarities between societies then and now, the most obvious of which is the question of the country’s independence. The cult of St. Stephen played a prominent role during the dualist period, as the sermons delivered at the central celebrations in Budapest, the church services of St. Stephen’s Day on 20 August, reflected the social issues and criticisms of which everyone was concerned, as well as proposals for solutions. These sermons have remained unexplored yet. But the ideas raised at the time may be instructive for posterity, especially when the very existence of the nation state is at stake.

In fact, the study is the background analysis of an ongoing research on the history of the feast of St. Stephen's Day, which has brought to the surface the concept of "state-creating culture" and its explanation, and at the same time makes the overall historical processes understandable for modern man.

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Az államiság eszméje és kultúrtörténete Magyarországon

A tanulmány az államiság és kultúra kölcsönhatásának történetét mutatja be. A szakirodalom főleg a nagy kiterjedésű birodalmak kulturális és államszervezeti befolyását vizsgálja, de a kisebb térségeken zajló változások háttérbe szorulnak. Az elemzés a 19. század második felének ünneptörténete nyomán a 20. század magyar történelmi narratíváit, illetve általában modern kori fogalomhasználat változását tekinti át. Emellett összefüggéseiben láttatja az egyes államtörténelmi szakaszokat, és bennük a keresztény kultúrát és az államiságot képviselő kultuszt. A tanulmány célja az „államalkotó kultúra” fogalmának történelmi igényű megalkotása, és alkalmazási lehetőségeinek bemutatása múltbeli folyamatok magyarázatára; mely az első ilyen kísérlet a szakirodalomban. A fogalomalkotás és fogalomalkalmazási kísérlet bizonyítja, hogy a levezetett fogalom alkalmas arra, hogy történelmi és kulturális folyamatokat világítson meg és foglaljon össze, mivel a példának hozott állam- és kultusztörténelmi elemzés megmagyarázza az események folyamatosságát és a közösség fennmaradását.

KEYWORDS: államiság, kultúra, közösség, közös szuverenitás, mennyei hatalom