

Socialism and King Stephen's Right Hand*

C. M. HANN

This article proceeds from the assumption that politics everywhere and at all times can be illuminated by an anthropological exploration of the 'symbolic' dimension.¹ It is argued that political anthropologists can offer exceptional insight into processes of legitimation in contemporary socialist societies. Even before the era of *glasnost* the states of Eastern Europe, including the USSR, had long put behind them the 'heroic' phase of Leninism-Stalinism. There were few attempts to mobilise populations through socialist rhetoric, nor, with isolated exceptions, were citizens still terrorised by 'security forces'. However, the ruling powers have experienced increasing difficulties in grounding their legitimacy in rapid economic modernisation as, again with isolated exceptions, historic patterns of underdevelopment vis-a-vis the West have reasserted themselves strongly since the mid-seventies. Hence the symbolic dimension becomes of central importance to the state in its efforts to ensure political stability. We might expect this dimension to gain in importance as the economic situation deteriorates. Yet, even before economic decline became so serious, scholars examining the Soviet ritual system had pointed to significant changes in the symbolic sphere, including a shift towards powerful 'traditional' symbols such as those of national identity.²

It should not, of course, be assumed that these adaptations by the authorities will always bring success in their quest for legitimation. Some anthropologists argue that Marxist socialism, unlike other

* This paper has benefited from the advice of Mihály Sárkány, Tamás Hofer, John Eibner and Gábor Klaniczay, and the constructive suggestions of seminar audiences in Cambridge and St Andrews, to whom earlier versions were read in 1989.

¹ Abner Cohen, *Two Dimensional Man: An Essay on the Anthropology of Power and Symbolism in Complex Societies* (London, 1974); Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali* (Princeton, 1980). For a recent survey of literature in this field see David Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power* (New Haven, 1987).

² Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society — The Soviet Case* (Cambridge, 1981); Christopher A. P. Binns, 'The Changing Face of Power: Revolution and Accommodation in the Development of the Soviet Ceremonial System', *Man* No. 14 (1979), pp. 585-607 and *Man* No. 15 (1980), pp. 170-88.

ideologies, may contain within itself subversive strands which frustrate conservative goals.³ Furthermore, symbols and rituals have dynamics of their own which cannot be manipulated at will by new elites. Some symbols may become contested by different social groups, and, in the context of modern states, powerful opposition movements are just as beholden to the symbolic dimensions as the regimes which they oppose.⁴

The study which follows was stimulated by field experiences and conversations in Hungary during the summer of 1988.⁵ It aims to show how different groups interpreted and exploited King Stephen, who has long been a very potent symbol among Hungarians. Part of the efficacy of this symbol lies in its multivocality, i.e. its ability to 'say' different things to different people. Such symbols are the ones most likely to gain in prominence at times when powerholders have no ready answers to pressing political and economic problems. Stephen was therefore caught up in a crisis management programme on the part of the state, but also in a projected revival on the part of the Catholic Church, and a great deal more besides.

Anniversaries

King Stephen is known internationally as well as in Hungary as the ruler who converted his previously nomadic people to Christianity and established their state, superseding the old 'tribal' structures, in more or less its present territory in Central Europe. He was canonised by the Roman Catholic Church within half a century of his death in 1038, and his feast day is celebrated on 20 August, the day of his burial. Secular markers have been laid down for this same day by the socialist state. It has become 'New Bread Day', and since 1949 has been a public holiday as 'Constitution Day'. This provides a good example of the symbolic rivalry mentioned above. Thus in the village which I studied in Hungary there was a ceremony at the council offices on 20 August 1988 at which all three celebrations were apparently given equal prominence.⁶ Before 1988 only the secular symbols were

³David A. Kideckel, 'Secular Ritual and Social Change: A Romanian Case', *Anthropological Quarterly* Vol. 56 No. 2 (1983), pp. 63-75..

⁴Kertzer, *op. cit.*

⁵I visited Hungary on several occasions during July-September 1988 and discussed the anniversaries in conversations (rather than structured interviews) with a range of friends and acquaintances, some of whom I have known over a very long time. They included both rural and urban dwellers; within each sector I talked to non-believers as well as to active Catholics, and to representatives of all age groups.

⁶C. M. Hann, *Tázlár: A Village in Hungary* (Cambridge, 1980). Although I revisited this village in the summer of 1988 I was unable to attend the ceremonies held on 20 August; information comes from correspondence with the organiser, the local council chairman.

recognised on state premises, and Stephen was confined to the church. But in the inter-war period the highest state leaders (including Admiral Horthy, a Protestant) took part in a commemorative procession of which Stephen was the main focus; it was emulated all over Hungary with festivities including displays of folk costume and fireworks.⁷

Stephen has a vital association with the most important symbols of Hungarian statehood, notably his own Holy Crown. This was taken to Fort Knox at the end of the Second World War, on the occupation of Hungary by Soviet troops. When it was returned by President Carter in 1978 the event attracted enormous publicity in Hungary, and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was drawn into elaborate ceremonies to hand over the crown. Consequently the return of the crown came to be widely perceived as the most important mark of foreign recognition for János Kádár's reform-minded regime.⁸ Since then the crown has been kept in a specially constructed chamber of the National Museum, forming the closest Hungary has to a national shrine. Succeeding years have witnessed more and more discussion in academic and public life, and in all the media, of the complications and problems pertaining to Hungarian identity and Hungarian history. This has to be understood in the context not only of economic crisis, but also of a much more relaxed political climate which has encouraged, and almost invited, a radical reappraisal of the earlier socialist decades. For example the media have again been able to discuss figures who were 'non-persons' for a generation, socialist accretions to Hungarian heraldic emblems and flags have been discarded in favour of 'purer' traditional versions, and by early 1989 even the Revolution of 1956 had been completely reassessed. The other vital contextual element was the simmering conflict with Romania over ethnic and historical issues which are crucial to many Hungarians.⁹ It was against this

⁷ Since completion of this paper the pace of political change in Hungary has accelerated dramatically. In 1989 the church organised public processions freely on 20 August, without the close intervention of the state. The events in Budapest were given extensive media publicity. For the tone of public comment see the articles in *Reform* No. 32, 18 August 1989, pp. 6-7. In the course of 1989 it seemed increasingly likely that, whenever the promised free multi-party elections were finally held, the Christian strand in the platform of the 'Hungarian Democratic Forum' would help secure that party the largest share of the popular vote. I would argue that such a result would owe more to the harnessing of appropriate symbols such as Stephen than to the party's actual programme which in late 1989 was still vague in the extreme — perhaps deliberately so.

⁸ Cf. Trevor Beeson, *Discretion and Valour: Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe* (2nd edition; London, 1982), p. 256.

⁹ The battle over Transylvania is fascinating for scholars interested in contemporary examples of how ideas can be manipulated to serve political ends. It comes as no surprise to anthropologists that the past is constantly rewritten to serve the needs of the present. Although this paper does not ascertain 'truth' in such matters, it does not mean that there are no important truths to be found in some of the current areas of contention. For an introduction to the problems of Hungarians in Transylvania see George Schöplflin, *Hungarians in Romania* (Minority Rights Group Report: London, 1978).

background that the Hungarian state sought in 1988 to commemorate the 950th anniversary of the death of King Stephen, the founder of a state which certainly included the Transylvanian territories that are the focus of present concern. A typical slogan for public consumption (this one was offered in various languages to accompany a set of coloured slides issued for the occasion) read: '950 years ago died king Saint Stephen [*sic*], founder of the Hungarian State'.¹⁰

The state saw the anniversary as an occasion to 'rehabilitate' a national hero who had largely disappeared from view under Stalinism, and it was happy to promote some harmless pageantry and special exhibitions to encourage tourism. To a considerable degree the actions of the secular authorities may also be understood as a response to demands from the Hungarian people: the state was following public opinion rather than dictating to it. But the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary also perceived an opportunity in 1988 that was too good to miss. Stephen was for them Saint Stephen (the standard Hungarian phrase is *Szent István király* which obviously poses problems for translators, as the above quoted slogan indicates, but reads literally 'Saint Stephen king').¹¹ His state was a bulwark of western, i. e. Latin, Christianity. However, unlike the church in that other great stronghold of the West in Eastern Europe, Poland, the Catholic Church in Hungary has in recent decades experienced an accelerating decline in its position in the life of the nation. This can be documented in many obvious ways, such as levels of church attendance; but it needs also to be understood less tangibly, in terms of the image presented by the church and its leaders in society, including the intelligentsia. The explanations are complex, but would include historical factors (such as the presence, unlike in Poland, of significant Protestant minorities — who also happen to be strongly associated with the Transylvanian regions) as well as characteristics of the socialist period, among which the 'consumerist' orientation which dominated economic policies in Hungary from the 1960s onwards is of major importance. But by 1988 the church had cause to feel that a revival was due. It had a new leader, László Paskai, who was

¹⁰ Indicative of the climate of opinion in state circles is the following statement by a distinguished and well-connected journalist, editor of the *New Hungarian Quarterly*: 'This year the entire country has been commemorating the 950th anniversary of Stephen's death. Although this is no centenary, the political leadership, the Catholic Church and, indeed, the general public, all felt that we should not wait another 12 years to celebrate him on the millennial of his coronation. At a time of refinding their national identity, Hungarians should reach back to their oldest roots. . . ' Iván Boldizsár in *New Hungarian Quarterly* Vol. 29 No. 4 (1988), p. 5.

¹¹ Precise names were of some importance in 1988. In at least one major settlement, the southern city of Pécs, there was a debate about whether to restore the word 'Saint' in the designation of 'Stephen's Square', the religious title having been officially dropped by the state in the Stalinist period. After strong representations by local citizens it was eventually restored in 1988.

appropriately raised to the status of cardinal as the anniversary celebrations reached their height in 1988.¹² There was a widespread feeling among non-Catholics as well as Catholics that, with the long consumer boom now clearly over for Hungarians, the church had an opportunity and a duty to preach a renewal of spiritual values. The anniversary of Stephen's death was therefore a convenient one, all the more so as it could be linked with a year of Marian devotion, in a manner to be examined below.

In the background to the church's treatment of the Stephen anniversary was another anniversary relating to an event that many Hungarians can actually remember. This was the 50th anniversary of an International Eucharistic Congress organised by the Catholic Church in Budapest in 1938. That congress was planned, of course, to tie in with the 900th anniversary of Stephen's death. It seems to have provided a focus for a range of national/secular and religious/spiritual energies similar to those unleashed in 1988. But, whereas the conservative government of the time could depend upon the Catholic Church as a natural ally of the state, the church-state relationship was clearly problematic for a socialist government. Indeed relations between church and state were highly antagonistic in the 1950s.¹³ Nevertheless in 1988 both state publishing houses and the various church organs gave substantial publicity to the events commemorating 1938.¹⁴

The Image of Stephen through the Ages

To understand different attitudes to Stephen in 1988 the view is taken here that persistent and powerful symbols must be given a full cultural and historical explanation. It is by no means sufficient to restrict the

¹²Paskai had become primate of the Hungarian Catholic Church in 1987 after the death of Cardinal László Lékai in 1986. The latter, though popular and respected, was felt by many to have been too accommodating to the secular authorities. His successor was not well known, and had little in the way of charisma, but most ordinary Catholics were ready to give him a chance. For a well-informed discussion see John V. Eibner, 'A New Primate: A New Policy', *RCL* Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 164-68. See also 'The Church and the Law in Hungary', *RCL* Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 70-81.

¹³The best general account of church-state relations throughout the socialist period in Hungary is to be found in Beeson, *op. cit.*, pp. 257-87.

¹⁴See Jenő Gergely, *Eucharisztikus Világkongresszus Budapesten/1938* (Budapest, 1988). There was also an abridged one volume reissue in 1988 of a massive three volume commemorative study of Stephen and his age, first published in Budapest in 1938: *Emlékkönyv Szent István király halálának kilencszázadik évfordulóján*, edited by Jusztinián Seredi. There was apparently some reluctance among leading historians in 1988 when invited, at rather short notice, to take part in an academic meeting devoted to Stephen. They were afraid — and rightly so — that the published proceedings would be compared unfavourably with the scholarship of their predecessors! See Ferenc Glatz, 'Szent István 1038-1938-1988' in *Szent István és Kora*, edited by Ferenc Glatz and József Kardos (Budapest, 1988), pp. 239-52.

enquiry to what different groups in society are doing with Stephen in the contemporary context, since the accumulated layers of Stephen myths begin long before 1938. The sources available to help us chart the image of Stephen among Hungarians are woefully inadequate, especially for the earlier centuries.¹⁵ It is reasonable to argue that he became in an early period the crucial figure in the legitimation of statehood and territory, complementing the older *mythomoteur* of the Hungarians that was rooted in nomadism.¹⁶ This image was first dramatically formulated in Stephen's canonisation in 1083 (when King Ladislas, not a direct descendant of Stephen, sought through proclaiming the first Hungarian saints to consolidate his own position on the throne) and by the convenient identification and location of a suitable relic, Stephen's right arm, in the following year.

According to a recent study of the text known as 'Saint Stephen's Exhortations', in which the monarch provides some political and ethical tips to his son Prince Imre, Stephen is shown to be an exemplary Christian monarch of the period:

. . . the *Exhortations'* political theory ideologically separated the rulers' power from society's older, pagan, barbarian sector on the one hand, and placed it under the control of society's new, Christian, feudal sector on the other. King Stephen established the relationship between the Hungarian state and contemporary Europe and underpinned the sovereignty of the ruler in terms of theology. In terms of ethics he regulated the relationship between royal power and society. On the theoretical level this early feudal, Christian monarch exists in a twofold functional relationship; between royal dignity and universal Christianity, and between

¹⁵The sources I have consulted for this account include various popularising works disseminated in 1988 by both secular and religious publishing houses, a more scholarly collection of commentaries and documents *István király emlékezete* (Budapest, 1973), and the monograph of the leading contemporary authority on the period, György Györfly, *István Király és Műve* (Budapest, 1977). The 1988 symposium volume edited by Glatz and Kardos, includes a useful bibliography and an introductory chapter by Iván T. Berend which focuses explicitly on how the image of Stephen has been successively reconstructed in Hungarian literary traditions over the centuries ('"Szent István a magyar történet századaiban." A 950 éves hagyaték mai leltára,' pp. 9-17); this volume reached me too late to influence the arguments of this paper. Hungarian historians have been claiming almost throughout the present century that they are now at last in a position to dispel the myths and give their readers the truth about Stephen (e.g. János Karácsonyi, *Szent István Király Élete*, Budapest, 1904); but there remain significant differences of interpretation between scholars of opposing world views, and even some discrepancies as to 'facts', some of which have been highlighted by the Catholic historian Thomas von Bogyay, 'Zum Stand der Sankt-Stephen-Forschung', *Süd-Ost Forschungen* No. 38, (1979), pp. 240-57. It must be doubted whether any 20th century scholarship on Stephen has had much effect on the 'folk image' of Stephen that had formed by the end of the 19th century; on the other hand, present-day Hungarians' image of Stephen may have been influenced by other cultural forms, as we shall see.

¹⁶John A. Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill, 1982), pp. 47-51.

king and politically active members of his society. Herein lies the basis for that dynamic development of the medieval state that neither barbarian nor despotic systems ever knew.¹⁷

Now, it is all very well for a medievalist and political theorist to interpret the one surviving text from Stephen's court in such a grand manner. Jenő Szűcs is concerned to link Hungarian political developments to the Christian West rather than with the more authoritarian regimes in the East, and this is a theme which is dear to many 'reformist' intellectuals in Hungary today. This is why Szűcs insists that Stephen had no ambition to be an absolutist ruler, and even recognised '... an early precursor of what constitutional history calls the right of resistance'.¹⁸ But an anthropological history might pay more attention to the difficulties of breaking so suddenly with the 'tribal' past, difficulties that are well illustrated in the violent conflicts which erupted after Stephen's death, and which remained close to the surface long after the political stabilisation achieved later under Ladislas. It is interesting here to consider the relatively low profile of Stephen in Hungarian popular culture in succeeding centuries. He is, for example, in folk tales and folk beliefs overshadowed by Ladislas himself, who also became a saint, and by another ruler who, though not achieving sainthood, approximated better the image of the 'Good King': Mathias Corvinus. Stephen's low profile is perhaps not surprising when one reflects on the probable tensions in society during those early centuries. Hungarians did not all give up their pagan beliefs immediately, and not all who were required to do so did so willingly. Absolutist or not, the power of the new state was experienced by many as something novel and unwelcome. Hence it is not surprising that its founder was not accorded the most popular niche in folklore.¹⁹ Rather, Stephen's image remained that of a distant potentate. It was cultivated in later centuries by various chronicles, and by highly stereotyped representations, showing Stephen clad in royal robes and crown, holding the usual ceremonial objects (lance,

¹⁷Jenő Szűcs, 'Saint Stephen's Exhortations: King Stephen's State', *New Hungarian Quarterly* Vol. 29 No. 4 (1988), pp. 89-98 (97).

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁹I am indebted to Mihály Sárkány for suggesting this line of argument. The point is not to pretend that Stephen has no presence at all in the folk stream of Hungarian culture, but to suggest that his image is weakly developed and largely restricted to the sphere of state political domination. Gábor Klaniczay argues that the failure of the legends concerning Stephen to connect with pagan or folk mythologies was quite deliberate and consistent with a wider European pattern. See 'Szent István Legendái a Középkorban' in Glatz and Kardos, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-96. For further comparative discussion of the political functions and social meanings of saints in the Christian tradition see also Stephen Wilson, 'Introduction' in *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History*, edited by Stephen Wilson (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 1-51.

cross, sword etc.). The circulation of these texts and portraits was limited. Although Stephen's sarcophagus was placed (Byzantine style) in the cathedral of Székesfehérvár, and relics were displayed in other religious centres, there seem to have been few popular cults surrounding the founder of the state.

There were changes of emphasis in later centuries. When a strong Hapsburg state emerged in Hungary after the retreat of the Ottoman Turks, a common theme of Jesuit activities during the Counter-Reformation was adapted to the Hungarian context. This involved the idea of Stephen offering up his country to the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary; and Mary, now officially deemed to be 'the Queen of Hungary', came to be a sort of partner for Stephen, a relationship which has been reactivated again recently, as we shall see below.²⁰

Only in the age of modern nationalism, when political society expanded to include the mass of the peasant population, has Stephen made the transition from remote potentate to prime national hero. His role was highlighted by the intervening periods of Ottoman occupation and Hapsburg absolutist domination: he was needed precisely to remind all Hungarians that they could claim a long history of independent statehood. This process was in full swing in the latter half of the 19th century, when Hungarian national identity was very strongly emphasised, both in relation to Austria and in relation to the subject peoples of the Hapsburg monarchy. Many monuments to Stephen were erected all over the country, including the most famous of all next to the Mathias Church in Budapest (unveiled in 1906). Stephen's prime function during this period was as a political symbol, yet it was the church which played a major part in popularising him. The largest ecclesiastical building in the new capital was called the Saint Stephen Basilica; and there was now systematic propagation of Stephen's cult, with the main focus being his embalmed 'Holy Right' (Hand) (the Hungarian designation omits the word hand — *Szent Jobb*).

In the first half of the 20th century the political aspects remained uppermost, and the 1938 Congress in Budapest can be seen as an

²⁰Note, however, that the Jesuits were able to work with promising materials in the local culture. There were indeed historical sources dating from the German Bishop Hartvik's legend compiled in the early 12th century to facilitate the establishment of a link with Mary. (As noted by Gábor Klaniczay, 'From Sacral Kingship to Self-Representation. Hungarian and European Royal Saints in the 11th-13th centuries' in *Continuity and Change* edited by E. Vestergaard (Odense, 1986), pp. 61-83 (76)). Stephen's church at Székesfehérvár was dedicated to Mary and, most conveniently, Stephen had died on a major Marian feast day, that of the Assumption (15 August). I shall refrain from speculation as to why a ruling class which forcibly imposed a Christian feudal state on a recalcitrant tribal society might have gone out of its way to encourage devotion to Mary, beyond noting that the tribal Hungarians were, of course, being asked to give up their own female deities.

expression of Stephen's importance in Hungarian nationalist ideology, in the context of the deep-seated discontent which pervaded the country after the territorial losses of the Trianon Peace Treaty in 1920. Artists continued to produce representations of the Saint King, and there were many commissions in 1938 in monumental genre. A typical example was a giant tapestry by Noémi Ferenczy: 'The holy king is seated in front of a church, palace or royal mansion under construction as he receives the homage and gifts from his people. By showing a wall still in the process of being built the artist wished to refer to Saint Stephen's work as a nation builder.'²¹ In this commentary on one of the objects in a 1988 exhibition at the National Museum the critic is of course articulating modern perceptions of Stephen, for, as Szűcs points out, in Stephen's age politics simply did not include the masses.²² It could be argued just as plausibly that the *divisive* effects of Stephen's rule were more important than his unifying impact. Nevertheless, although the modern Hungarian nation is in some ways best seen as the product of a 'revival' which really took off only in the 19th century, it is important to understand that the essential icons of this national movement were by no means entirely new and artificial. Rather, they were built upon cultural foundations developed over many centuries among elite groups and already partially diffused into popular culture. The Stephen tradition was consistently prominent from the moment of Ladislas' restoration, and in this sense Stephen can indeed be seen as a builder of the nation.

This link has not been seriously weakened in the socialist period. Not much was heard about Stephen in the first decades of socialist rule, and whilst this is not surprising so far as the authorities were concerned (this was the 'messianic' phase of a new 'secular theology' which at the time had no room for kings or saints and little for national symbols of any kind), it is perhaps more curious that neither Stephen in particular nor religious factors in general were prominent themes in the opposition which culminated in 1956. However, as already noted, with the maturing and later the souring of the 'Kádár settlement' the last decade has witnessed a strong resurgence of historical thinking among Hungarians, including government spokesmen, churchmen, and large numbers of artists and intellectuals. The theme of Stephen became prominent again in popular discourse long before the 1988 anniversary, thanks in particular to a rock opera based on Stephen's life, performed with spectacular success by some of the country's most gifted 'pop' musicians in 1983. Through

²¹ Gizella Willhelmb Cenner, *The Image of Saint Stephen in Hungarian History*, a brochure accompanying the exhibition at the Hungarian National Museum August-October 1988 (Budapest, 1988).

²² *Ibid.*, p. 97.

discussing the impact of this work with friends in Hungary I began to realise how the Stephen symbols were continuing to function.²³

The most important aspect, insofar as the majority of Hungarians were concerned, was undoubtedly the general patriotic one. The rock opera was a celebration of the life and work of Stephen as a national hero. He was shown, amidst great spectacle, to be the founder of the state and the vanquisher of all challengers. Anachronistic from the point of view of contemporary verisimilitude, but in keeping with the nationalist spirit of the work, some of the costumes could be identified with the Transylvanian regions contested over the centuries with Romania. Stephen's crown, lance, insignia etc. were all prominently displayed, not only at the public performances (initially in the open-air, in front of vast crowds, before transferring to a downtown theatre for a successful run) but also on the covers of books, magazines, records, film posters etc. (The film version scored a *succès d'estime* at the 1984 Cannes Festival, under the title *Étienne le Roi*.)

Stephen's main challengers in the rock opera are also Hungarians, wild men who boast loudly of their patriotism, and ridicule Stephen for (among other faults) bringing in foreign troops to the country and acknowledging a God who cannot speak Hungarian! These pagans look to their leader Koppány to preserve their old tribal society. Some of their pre-Christian motifs also figure prominently in the content and publicity of the opera, and it is important to note that this strand too is dealt with respectfully. This confirms John Armstrong's theory that the Hungarians have continued to make use of a double legitimating myth: alongside Stephen they have also needed to stress the distinctiveness of their origins, as nomads, in comparison to their neighbours who became settled agriculturalists much earlier in history.²⁴ These signs of difference served also to emphasise the antiquity of Hungarian settlement in Europe. One design could be widely associated with the work of a popularising archeologist who has put forward some unorthodox but implicitly patriotic theories about the early Hungarians. The image derives from a celebrated find in Transylvania.²⁵

This rock opera emphasises Stephen's political significance and was presumably seen in these terms by the authorities who permitted

²³For a wider range of opinions and fascinating discussions involving many of those who created the rock opera see Gábor Koltay, *István a Király* (Budapest, 1984). For criticism of the enterprise from an academic expert see Gábor Klaniczay, 'Rockvázeat, történelmi háttérrel', *Filmvilág*, 1984 No. 5, pp. 17-19. For more radical analysis of the political motives of the work (and of the authorities in allowing it to be staged) see the article signed by 'Emericus', 'János, a király', *Hirmondó* 1984-85 (an unofficial publication: Budapest).

²⁴*Op. cit.*, pp. 47-51.

²⁵Gyula László is the archeologist in question. See Gyula László and István Rácz, *A Nagyszentmiklósi Kincs* (Budapest, 1977).

publication and performances. It is entitled *King Stephen*, rather than *Saint Stephen*. However the work in no way belittles his religious significance. Christians in the audiences were not made to feel that their saint was being distorted to fit a socialist mould. Much of the music has a hymn-like quality, and some of the lyrics seem to me to convey a powerful religiosity.²⁶

The ability of this one cultural work to offer different messages to different people did not stop there. Among intellectuals, there were those who quickly tired of the publicity given to the opera. Some were inclined to see it as an attempt by the authorities to stimulate an anodyne patriotism to divert citizens' attention away from the serious problems facing the country at home and abroad. Others, knowing that some of those involved with the work were themselves thoughtful intellectuals who had in the past tried to convey political messages in their pop songs, looked for profundity in the lyrics of *King Stephen*, and found it. Thus, when Stephen faced his most awkward dilemma — was he prepared to use highly unpleasant methods to preserve the unity of the nation and the structure of the state? — audiences could detect parallels with Hungary's modern situation, compromising in order to survive. More specifically, some saw a subtle commentary on the post-1956 settlement. Like Stephen's firm handling of his own internal counter-revolution it could be seen as painful but essential. Of course the commentary was not exact, some informants told me (but by this point they had to set the text aside and rely on their own intuitive interpretations); for whereas in Stephen's time the threat to the Hungarians came from powerful states to the West, everyone in Hungary knew from which direction their statehood was threatened in the second half of the 20th century.

The 'Holy Right'

The music from the *King Stephen* rock opera was still frequently heard (even in church services) when the 1988 anniversaries came along. The constellation of messages was broadly as identified above. From the point of view of the authorities, in the general commemorative activities greater emphasis was placed now upon Stephen's role as a moderniser, as a leader who wished to incorporate his people into the West, just as the new and highly technocratic

²⁶For example several Latin texts are set to music to good effect, and the hero sings verses such as the following: 'Speak my God/Make manifest to me/Your infinite power/Show me the meaning of my life/Speak my God/Give me a sign now/Give me strength to fight/Let my life be worthy of you/Beautiful and good/Grant then/That in Accordance with your wish/This should become Your country/And I shall entrust my life to You.'

leadership of Károly Grósz attempted to present itself as tackling a serious economic crisis by improving relations with the West. (These policies included the promotion of elements of political pluralism as well as attempts to improve the working of the economy and were associated particularly with Imre Pozsgay and his faction of 'reform communists' in the party leadership.)²⁷ However, the Stephen symbol was more dramatically taken up in 1988 by the Roman Catholic Church, and it is to this we now turn.

The Catholic Church in Hungary has faced an awkward dilemma in recent decades. Policies of tough resistance to the atheistic socialist government were pursued in the 1940s and 1950s, and were epitomised by the hardline stance of Cardinal Mindszenty. But when hardline dogmatism faded on the government side after the Kádár settlement, the church took some time to adapt and find a new direction. The 1970s saw the development of a much warmer relationship with the secular authorities which did little to reassure ordinary believers. Some began to criticise their own leaders for going too far in fruitless dialogues with socialists, whilst neglecting the moral and spiritual foundations of their faithful.²⁸ These criticisms gained in force with the seemingly steady advance of 'materialist' values which accompanied the economic reforms after 1968. Criticisms of the stance taken by the hierarchy in Hungary were often emphasised by comparisons with the strength of Catholicism in Poland, especially after the election of a Polish cardinal as Pope. During the 1980s there was an emerging consensus among Hungarian Catholics that some major initiative was needed to regain ground lost by the church, and the Stephen anniversary provided an ideal opportunity.

The most conspicuous example of the church's harnessing of the anniversary was the decision to launch the country's most holy relic, Stephen's Right Hand, on a nationwide tour to all diocesan centres and certain other places of religious significance, culminating in the extensive (and televised) ritual exposure on 20 August, Saint Stephen's Day. The history of this relic is in itself of some interest here.²⁹ The

²⁷ Grósz had become prime minister in 1987 and he replaced János Kádár as party secretary in May 1988, before losing the political struggle to 'reform communists' in 1989. For discussion of the 'technocratic' orientation see Paul Lendvai, *Hungary: The Art of Survival* (London, 1988), chapter 10.

²⁸ For regular monitoring of the position of the church in Hungary, including the radical stance of György Bulányi and the 'basis community' groups, see various past numbers of this journal notably *RCL* Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 346-50, and other publications of Keston College.

²⁹ Although the 1988 nationwide tour of the 'Holy Right' regularly included a talk by a senior churchman about the history of the relic, I was unable to find a full scholarly account. Some conflicting accounts, including that of Györfly, *op. cit.*, are probed by Péter Ruffy, *Magyar Erektlyék, Magyar Jelképek* (Budapest, 1988); see also Konrád Szántó, 'A Szent Jobb Tisztelete a Középkorban' in Glatz and Kardos (editors), *op. cit.*, pp. 173-79.

leading contemporary scholar of Stephen's period regards its authenticity as highly probable. It seems clear that it was first invested with great symbolic significance in the period of feudal consolidation which took place under King Ladislas, half a century after Stephen's death. It was an object of some veneration for much of the medieval period, but it did not become an object of popular devotion throughout the country. This point seems to be confirmed by a divergence of views among scholars as to when the relic left Hungary: it was probably either in the course of the Tatar invasion of 1241, or alternatively in 1541, when much of the country was under Ottoman occupation. Nor is there full agreement among the experts as to when and in how many stages a complete right arm was shortened into the stump of the hand which has been displayed to pilgrims over the last few hundred years. It turned up in Dubrovnik in 1590, and seems to have become an object of mass devotion there. In 1771 its return to Hungary was organised by Maria Theresa, the reigning Hapsburg monarch, upon advice received from a Jesuit, György Pray. Pray was also a key figure in the intellectual revival which was just beginning to take place in Hungary, and which can be seen as laying the groundwork for the era of mass nationalism. One might go so far as to suggest that this Jesuit 'created' the modern symbol, whilst remembering that he too was working within a cultural context that proved fertile for his purposive creation. Pray purported also to discover authenticating texts in medieval Latin accompanying the relic. These disappeared mysteriously in the mid-19th century. They were apparently found again in 1940 and even photographed, but both the pictures and the original disappeared at the end of the war. But the relic itself survived, and since 1950 it has been prominently displayed in Saint Stephen's Basilica in Budapest.

Between 1777 and 1882 the 'Holy Right' was preserved in a chapel of the Royal Palace in Buda, where it was in the custody of a German order, the Knights of the Star Cross. After 1882 its guardians were regular Hungarian clergy, but its location was still not conducive to mass pilgrimages. The major new departure, greatly increasing the exposure of the Holy Right Hand, came in the inter-war period when

cont. from overleaf

From a comparative anthropological perspective it is significant that it was the *right* hand which came to outweigh various other Stephen relics in circulation. (Cf. Robert Hertz, 'The Pre-eminence of the Right Hand: a study in religious polarity' in Robert Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand*, (Aberdeen, 1960 (1909)). I believe this also has political significance, the power of the right arm (later reduced to knuckles and fist when the relic was divided) linking with the domination established by Stephen in his new state. In Hungarian the word *jobb* today means 'right' (opposite of left); it also means 'better' (comparative form of *jó*, 'good'); in the early medieval period it was apparently interchangeable with *jog* which today is the standard Hungarian term for 'law', as well as 'right' in the sense of 'title' or 'claim'.

it was given pride of place annually in the 20 August procession in Budapest. In 1938 it was circulated systematically around the country as part of the 900th anniversary celebrations and the International Congress held in Hungary that year. Photographs of the 'golden train' used to take the relic around the country in 1938 were reproduced in the Catholic press in 1988.

Of course the rituals of 1988 necessarily differed in the details. Black cars replaced the golden train, and ceremonies were confined to the spaces inside and immediately adjacent to the major religious centres visited by the 'Holy Right'. Newspapers, both secular and ecclesiastical, reported the speeches made on these occasions by the two sets of authorities, religious and secular. The reporting styles were remarkably similar, with the Catholic press concentrating on formal lists of religious dignitaries present in order of seniority, exactly as the socialist media listed the secular bigwigs. (It was thus easy to see how some Hungarian Catholics had come over the years to perceive their own leadership as little different from the hierarchies of secular power.) Typically, the secular representatives (regional party officials and the like) would emphasise Stephen as the founder of the Nation-State and a moderniser who 'chose Europe', whilst the religious authorities stressed his activities on behalf of the church, but often placed greater emphasis themselves upon his nation-building activities. The state spokesmen were gracious in recognising the role of the church in Hungarian history, whilst the church spokesmen gave full recognition to Stephen's activities outside the specific sphere of religion. Beneath the compliments and mutual congratulation of the formal speeches, both church and state were out to claim Stephen for rather different legitimating purposes; but the emphasis on the *national* importance was common to both camps.³⁰

The rituals were apparently much the same throughout the summer's touring, though local themes were highlighted wherever possible. My village falls in the diocese of Kalocsa, and when the 'Holy Right' visited for a weekend in mid-June there was great play on the fact that this was the diocese of Anastasias (Asztrik), the bishop who brought Stephen his sacred crown from the Pope at the turn of the millennium. Later in the summer, just before the saint's feast day,

³⁰It is very easy to find examples in the media of church spokesmen digressing into secular topics, above all concerning Hungarian identity and the values of a 'small nation'. For example: 'The future of the small nation can be summed up in three words: to be different. This is Saint Stephen's programme. This is the guarantee of progress and victory.' This was uttered by the Bishop of Kalocsa, as reported in *Új Ember*, 3 July 1988. The secular speakers frequently invoked 'our national relic' and sometimes invoked ideals more commonly associated with religious teachings, including family values and the need to improve moral standards. For another interesting example of the 'dialogue' between church and state spokesmen on these ritual occasions see the reports of speeches at Vác in early August (*Katolikus Szó*, 28 August 1988).

a newly commissioned statue of Stephen was unveiled on the square in front of the cathedral, and a new permanent exhibition of ecclesiastical treasures was opened with formal speeches from representatives of both church and state, who had combined to organise it.³¹

Inevitably, most publicity focused on the major celebrations in the capital, outside Saint Stephen's Basilica, on 20 August itself. There was prolonged applause from the massive congregation thronging the square and adjacent streets when it was announced that the secular authorities were extending an official invitation to Pope John Paul II to visit Hungary. The Pope's own long letter, read out on this occasion, included a careful appreciation of Stephen's role in Hungarian history. Relations with Romania over the Transylvanian issue were exceptionally strained at this time, and it could be observed that standing guard ceremonially on the public podium beside the 'Holy Right' was a female writer dressed in the folk costume of one of the best known districts of Transylvania.³²

Another exceptionally interesting weekend in the tour was that which the 'Holy Right' spent in Székesfehérvár, centre of the state and church in Stephen's own time, and the site of his grave from which various relics disappeared so mysteriously. The cathedral already housed a relic supposed to be part of Istvan's head, with a history almost as confused as that of the Holy Right Hand, but not so infused with either patriotic or religious significance (at least not in recent times). When the 'Holy Right' arrived at the cathedral entrance it was greeted by the Head Relic (*Fejereklye*) and both were placed together in the sanctuary. The local bishop made a speech in which he suggested that, with these two relics together again, Stephen could be perceived almost as a 'living figure'. Such themes were, however, accompanied and to some extent overshadowed by secular messages. On this same occasion another speech was made by the county secretary of the Patriotic People's Front, a secular organisation under the control of the socialist authorities, which suggested parallels, by now familiar to audiences, between Stephen's state formation at the beginning of the millennium, and the current need at the end of the millennium to 'catch up with the European leaders, by modernising economic and social life'.³³

³¹Newspaper reports (*Új Ember*, 11 September 1988) introduced the sculptor as Károly Kirchmayer, adding, as is usual in such reports but somewhat incongruously in this case, his claim to fame as a 'Trades Union Congress Prizewinner'. The article went on to quote the bishop's clear awareness that, in consigning to the exhibition room many of the cathedral's most treasured objects, he was launching them into new contexts which would include cultural education within Hungary, the edification of tourists, and the circulation of the objects through the national network of museums.

³²A full account of the celebrations of 20 August, including the complete text of the papal letter, can be found in *Katolikus Szó*, 28 August 1988.

³³*Ibid.*

I was able to observe proceedings in the southern city of Szeged, close to the Yugoslav border, on Sunday 25 September. Crowds were large and very well ordered, marshalled by hundreds of stewards. Mass was celebrated by the local bishop and temporary stands were erected to enable a congregation of several thousands to participate in the Holy Mass, both inside and outside the cathedral. Most of us joined a queue to file past the Holy Right Hand, positioned in front of the main altar, but we were allowed only a few seconds to view the object itself, and not a great deal longer to inspect a small accompanying exhibition of photographs and texts. Outside, however, there was ample opportunity to buy souvenirs of the occasion, which ranged from expensive reprints of the 1938 commemorative albums to cheap lapel badges. Several private entrepreneurs were vying for position alongside the stalls of the major ecclesiastical publishers, and the hot dogs were cheaper than some of the prayer cards on offer.

I have no doubt that for some pilgrims to Szeged on that September Sunday the occasion provided a satisfying religious experience, above all simply because of the throng and the sense that after so many years the Catholic Church could again demonstrate its vitality on the city streets. (I have witnessed an enhanced version of a similar phenomenon when the centres of Polish cities were transformed during John Paul II's first return to Poland in 1979.) At the same time for many Catholics (I suspect the large majority) it remained rather a superficial occasion. Families were out for the day (some had come earlier from Yugoslavia especially for the occasion — there are many Hungarians in Vojvodina Province); and although grandmother might be close to tears as the memories of a 1938 visit to Budapest came flooding back, her children looked more keen to visit the Sunday market (which was open for business as usual), and her grandchildren frankly bored by both. In short, I doubt whether the Stephen celebrations evoked any intense 'private' religiosity, and I do not think the church really sought to exploit Stephen in this way. By and large clergymen too were content to praise Stephen for his national role, and for building up the institutional framework of the church in Hungary; for more profoundly evocative areas of consciousness they could draw on other resources, and herein lies the secret of their great advantage over the secular authorities.³⁴

³⁴ In addition to emphasising Stephen's political contribution it should also be pointed out that some interpreters sought also to direct attention to another level, the familial. This was attempted most clearly by the Pope himself in his letter (*ibid.*): '... his family life was similarly exemplary. He was a caring husband to Blessed Gizella of Bavaria, sister of the Emperor Henry. Inspired by deep faith he established a monastery next to his palace in order to be able constantly to pray for his family and his people. He sought to provide for his succession like a good father worrying about the fate of his people. . . ' But I think it is clear even here that the family element is subordinated to the political.

The Marian Complement

The modern representations of Stephen, certainly those of the last hundred years or so, show a very male figure, often astride a horse which is also of exceptionally powerful appearance. This seems to fit well with the main role that Stephen is called upon to play, as *national* hero for a Hungarian people which has had to fight to maintain its space in a hotly contested area of Europe. He is able to play this role equally well for Protestants, as well as for the small population of Eastern-rite Catholics (Uniates), and indeed for all Hungarians.³⁵ This role was highlighted in 1988 by the very bad relations between Hungary and Romania. Looking back over the speeches made by church leaders that year it is extraordinary to see how much publicity they gave to the plight of the Hungarian minority in Romania. Although many Hungarian inhabitants of Transylvania are Protestant rather than Catholic, Stephen clearly remains of great importance in the legitimization of a state identity which would have included the Transylvanian territories; the church can in this way commend itself to all those Hungarians who still have not accepted the borders established at the Trianon Treaty (1920), to which the present secular authorities, in contrast to the pre-socialist regimes, are firmly committed. For this reason the church is able to say more through the Stephen symbol than the contemporary socialist authorities, even in purely secular contexts.

But the church can also penetrate important areas of identity which socialists neglect or ignore. I suggest that the figure of Mary plays a very different and complementary role to that of Stephen in Hungarian Catholicism, and that this role was seen especially clearly in 1988. Formally, as stated above, Mary is the Queen of Hungary, just as she is the Queen of Poland. In practice, despite the political origins of the modern Marian cults in the Counter-Reformation period, her role has not spilled over to the 'political' sphere as it has in Poland. The contrast may well predate the appearance of lasting and significant Protestant minorities in Hungary, for there was never a

³⁵ The position of Eastern-rite (Uniate) Catholics in Hungary is interesting, as they look to Stephen as a convert to the Byzantine rite rather than to that of the Roman Church. They see him as the forerunner of the same combination which they practise today, viz. political recognition of the papacy and membership of the international Catholic community, combined with loyalty to the rites and customs of the East (approximating those of the Orthodox churches). The itinerary of the 'Holy Right' included a weekend at Mariapócs, which is not only a major centre for the 200,000 Uniates in Hungary, but also a centre of Marian devotion for all Catholics in the country.

Whilst arguing that all Hungarians are profoundly aware of the Stephen symbol I would not deny that there are probably many non-believers and Protestants who are resentful of the Catholic Church's attempts to monopolise Stephen, and who are possibly more sensitive to this than they are to similar aspirations on the part of the secular authorities.

single dominant cult centre such as Polish Catholics had at Czestochowa.³⁶ Although Mary certainly has her cult centres in Hungary, they have been largely devoid of political significance in the life of the nation.

In recent years the Polish Pope has been doing much to stimulate Mariology in many parts of the world. In doing so he seems to be promoting a combination of established (though far from ancient) elements of the folk tradition in Christianity — contact with the deity through the mediation of Jesus's mother — with a more modern emphasis upon spiritual meditation that posits Mary as the source of enduring Christian values, including those most threatened in contemporary materialist civilisation. The Catholic Church's declaration of a Marian Year in 1987-88 therefore offered Hungarians the chance to link their national celebrations with a very active strand in international Catholicism. Stephen was widely reputed to have offered up his kingdom to Mary. Many of the sermons and church publications connected with Stephen in 1988 make a great play on this relationship. In some contexts they appear as equivalents: for example, both Mary and Stephen could be asked to intercede on behalf of ethnic brothers in Romania.³⁷ However at other times it is apparent that they are by no means interchangeable, and that the renewal of Christian commitment which the Catholic Church in Hungary called upon its followers to make in 1988 also had a spiritual dimension focused upon Mary. In any case, the future of the people/nation was dependent also upon Mary's motherly love and concern, qualities not strongly associated with Stephen.³⁸

The implication, it seems to me, is that the virile, male symbol of national identity is inadequate in itself, and it needs to be subordinated to some 'higher' symbol. As Stephen offered up his country to Mary, so today Catholics are to renew his offering by dedicating themselves to her. Thus, in the modern setting, the Virgin Mary is for Hungarian Catholics both a symbol of their international Catholic identity, and at the same time a focus for moral anxieties and spiritual needs for which neither Stephen nor the deity himself are available. I am sure that village grandmothers are not the only Catholics who pray devoutly to Mary, but I doubt that many Hungarian Catholics address Stephen with such intensity.

It seems worth attempting to compare these suggestions with recent anthropological approaches to the sexual division of labour in religion and ritual, and to the whole question of gender in religious

³⁶On the special position of Mary in Polish political and religious culture see Bohdan Szajkowski, *Next to God . . . Poland. Politics and Religion in Contemporary Poland* (London, 1983).

³⁷The cardinal's speech is given in full in *Új Ember*, 31 July 1988.

³⁸See for example, later sections of the same speech by Cardinal Paskai, *ibid.*

symbolism. For example, whereas John Davis³⁹ sets out to explain sharp imbalances in the degree of religiosity shown by men and women in Catholic and Islamic areas of the Mediterranean, Caroline Walker Bynum and others⁴⁰ have set themselves the still more ambitious task of explaining why the central symbols of religious systems should themselves be gendered as they are. In the context of this paper the recent work of Cornelia Sorabji on Bosnian Muslim identity is also highly relevant.⁴¹ She is able to show that in Sarajevo certain ritual activities of men relate primarily to an international context of identity (as Muslims), whilst those of women relate to the national level (as Bosnians). The roles are complementary and equally respected.

I wish here to suggest that the Stephen-Mary polarity works similarly to express different aspects of identity in contemporary Hungary. Two levels need to be distinguished analytically. Firstly (and this is less important to my argument) I think this symbolic pairing is reflected in the 'sexual division of religious labour' among Hungarian Catholics, with men viewing Stephen more enthusiastically than do women and the latter always more prominent as devotees of Mary, in groupings such as the Rosary Societies that were ubiquitous in Catholic parishes in the pre-socialist period. Secondly, I am arguing that for both men and women Mary is a figure of richer and deeper potential than Stephen, able to satisfy more fundamental identity needs. Such generalisations need to be treated very cautiously for a socialist industrial society such as contemporary Hungary — e.g. age may well be a more crucial characteristic than gender among some groups. But if this is correct, the pattern which then emerges is the reverse of Sorabji's Bosnian model, since we find that in Hungary the male side emphasises a national identity and the female side an 'external' and international religious identity. However it is also the female side which seems to bear greater 'internal' religious weight, i.e. Mary serves as the major focus for spirituality, 'private' religiosity, as Davis would expect.⁴²

All this perhaps exaggerates the religious significance of the 1988 anniversaries. The state's problem is that not only does it have to

³⁹ John Davis, 'The Sexual Division of (religious) Labour in the Mediterranean' in *Religion, Power and Protest in Local Communities: the Northern shore of the Mediterranean* edited by Eric R. Wolf, (Berlin, 1984), pp. 17-50. This article also contains a stimulating appraisal of Mary's rise to prominence in the folk Catholicism of southern Europe in recent centuries (pp. 26-29) and raises a number of issues which deserve further examination in the East European context.

⁴⁰ Caroline Walker Bynum, Steven Harrell and Paula Richman (editors), *Gender and Religion: on the Complexity of Symbols* (Boston, 1986).

⁴¹ Cornelia Sorabji, *Muslim Identity and Islamic Faith in Sarajevo*, (unpublished PhD. dissertation: University of Cambridge, 1989).

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

compete hard with the church to uphold its own claim on Stephen as a national figure, but it really can put up no fight at all when the ground shifts away from specifically national symbolism. In theory the complementary elements, both the 'international' and the 'internal', should be supplied by socialist ideology; perhaps indeed Marxism-Leninism did so, for some of its faithful; for a short period of history. But socialism in Hungary, as a result of the course it has followed under the Kádár settlement (though the picture does not seem much different under other kinds of socialist regime), has long ceased to be able to operate in these dimensions. Consequently, whilst the Catholic Church can claim Stephen as a saint *and* national hero, *and* invoke Mary to satisfy other identity needs, the secular authorities can orchestrate rival claims about Stephen — but that is all they can do. There is nothing in contemporary socialism that seems remotely suited to this 'female' role.

Conclusion

This paper has touched briefly upon five phases in Hungarian history, a pre-Christian (tribal) phase, a feudal monarchy-phase, an absolutist monarchy phase (this as foreign, i.e. Hapsburg dominated), and finally the phases of bourgeois nationalism and socialist nationalism. The original Stephen was the instrument of the transition from phase one to phase two, a very radical transition by any standards. His symbolic importance in the life of the nation has been great, at least since the consolidation achieved under King Ladislas, when Stephen was elevated to the company of the royal saints. However he did not fit the image of other 'popular' saints, and it is suggested here that his importance has always been primarily political: the strong right hand which destroyed the old society earned him respect but did not endear him to the people. The Stephen symbol acquired a new role when Hungary fell under foreign rule, and again when political society was widened to include all members of the nation. This process began at the end of phase three, and seems to be culminating in phase five, when we can observe both the socialist state and the Catholic Church making extensive use of Stephen for their different legitimating purposes. I have suggested that the symbol was modified through the different phases of Hungarian history, and that it was always a question of reworking older materials rather than starting afresh. In the contemporary situation it is not unusual to find images of Stephen surrounded by a kaleidoscope ranging from pre-Christian insignia to 19th century folk costumes. All this merely helps facilitate the simultaneous communication of several rather different messages.

The main argument is that the Stephen symbol, when complemented by that of Mary, provides Hungarian Catholics with a totalising ideological system which operates at individual and international as well as at national levels. The socialist state, though to some extent successful in projecting Stephen as a national hero, has not succeeded in adding any suitable symbolic foci for other human needs and levels of identity. For the state, then, participating in competition to appropriate this symbol, rather than fostering legitimation, may in the end highlight serious deficiencies of socialist systems.

It might be suggested that this socialist state has been forced to turn more and more to the powerful symbols of the national past because it has given up the very elements in its own ideology which might have provided alternative sources of symbolic support. The more 'utopian' elements of the socialist programme were jettisoned in the name of Kádárist 'pragmatism' after the disasters of the Stalinist era. So long as economic performance was satisfactory, legitimation problems did not really surface. But as soon as the economy began to go seriously wrong, compensating efforts in the symbolic dimension were called for. Hence the authorisation of rock operas on the theme of King Stephen, and the state's initiative in organising joint church-state celebrations of Stephen's 950th anniversary. But, given that no secular authorities can ever entirely succeed in appropriating Stephen from the Catholics, and given that in the symbolic world of Hungarian Catholicism Stephen has powerful allies beyond the reach of secular manipulation, it would seem more logical for the state to concentrate upon improving its performance in other dimensions — sponsoring fewer historical extravaganzas and turning instead to radical economic and political reforms.