
'Hungarus' Consciousness – The Cultural Identity of Ethnicities Living in Hungary in the 18th Century

"Hungarus-tudat - a Magyarországon élő népcsoportok kulturális identitása a 18.században"

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Initially submitted April 20, 2016; accepted for publication May 10, 2016

Abstract:

The "Hungarus-consciousness" is a territorially based cultural identity, which connected people living in Hungary until the late 18th century, regardless of ethnic, linguistic and religious differences between them. The official language in Hungary and the lingua franca of the educated classes and the elites was Latin for several centuries, its use bridging the gap of linguistic divisions and any ethnic antagonisms while at the same time ensuring the equality of the languages of all ethnic groups.

The projected career of the educated elite was at the time to get an European education, join the ranks of Western European science or scholarship, and introduce its results back home to initiate a modern scientific and cultural life in Hungary.

Keywords: Hungarus-consciousness, linguistic and ethnic identity, multilingualism, *peregrinatio academica*, educated intellectual in 18th century

Kulcsszavak: Hungarus tudat, nyelvi és etnikai identitás, a többnyelvűség, peregrináció, művelt értelmiségi a 18. században

1. Introduction

The Hungarus phenomenon is a characteristic of identity in Hungary in the 17th and 18th centuries which gradually disappeared in the early 19th century. Its disappearance was aided by nationalism, the replacement of the word by *Magyar* by linguistic nationalism, which triggered a process of Hungarianization and its opposite, the strengthening of national languages and consciousness. The word *Hungarus* means "of/from Hungary", but scholars working on the topic understand different phenomena by it. Some consider it a notion referring to a community: all people, regardless of differences of estate or nationality, who belonged to the community of the Hungarian state, the shared Hungarian homeland (Soós 2007) The territorially based concept of Hungarus identity is close to this, which refers to those living in Hungary (Kosáry 1983, Bíró 2005). Others narrow Hungarus consciousness and understand it to mean people who reside in Hungary and serve the good of the country

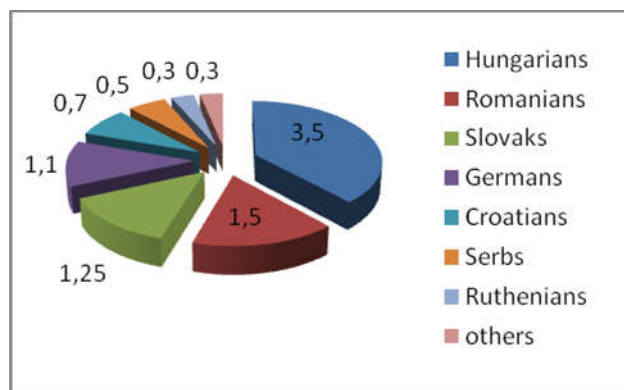
(Tarnai 1978), yet others categorize everyone who has a burgher consciousness here, regardless of mother tongue (Tarnai 1969, Csáky 1981). And finally, some authors take Hungarus consciousness to be the self-definition of all learned people, the intellectuals residing in Hungary.

By Hungarus consciousness I understand the self-identifying consciousness or identity which usually characterized the population of Hungary in the 18th century, regardless of ethnic, religious or social differences. This identity was stronger among intellectuals, who acquired their Protestant knowledge abroad (due to the lack of a Hungarian university). The 'peregrinus students' Hungarus consciousness was strengthened with patriotic self-consciousness: the Hungarian, German, Slovak and Transylvanian peregrinus students all regarded themselves as belonging to the same nation. The shared culture and consciousness as well as the acquired knowledge and their future social role defined their identity. The mentality of the Hungarian intellectual elite is permeated by a shared cultural identity, regardless of origin or language. Their Hungarus consciousness is different from others' in this.

This paper aims to demonstrate, through examples, how the shared Hungarus cultural identity contributed to the development of 18th century Hungarian science and cultural life.

2. Ethnicities in Hungary

Hungary has been a multilingual and multicultural country since the Middle Ages, with ethnic Hungarians (Magyars)¹ then constituting the majority: 66% of the population at the end of the 15th century (Kocsis, Tátrai 2015). Beginning with the 16th century, however, the proportion of Magyars started to decrease in the territorially and politically divided Kingdom of Hungary, and after the ousting of the Ottoman Turks, the territorial integrity of the country was not reinstated. Hungarians lived in „two homelands”, proportionally a minority in both the Kingdom of Hungary and Transylvania. The movement of populations of other ethnic groups to depopulated regions further decreased the proportion of Magyars in the country. According to data from the first ever census of Hungary in 1784-87, less than 40% of the 9.15 million people (including Transylvania, 1.440,986, and the Military Border 600,000) were Magyars (Figure 1).



¹ In this topic I choose the word „Magyar” for the language and the people, and „Hungarian” for the citizens of the Kingdom of Hungary.

Figure 1. The various populations of the countries of the Kingdom of Hungary in 1784, in millions (Kosáry 1983; Danyi, Dávid 1960)

The ethnic map of Hungary shows unified ethnic chunks, however, in reality the various ethnic groups lived together in ethnically mixed areas. This was especially true for towns, where, in addition to Magyars and Germans, who lived virtually everywhere, depending on the geographic region, various other ethnicities were also found – great numbers of Slovaks in Upper Hungary, of Serbs and Greeks in the newly repopulated towns, and of Romanians in Transylvania. (Figure 2)

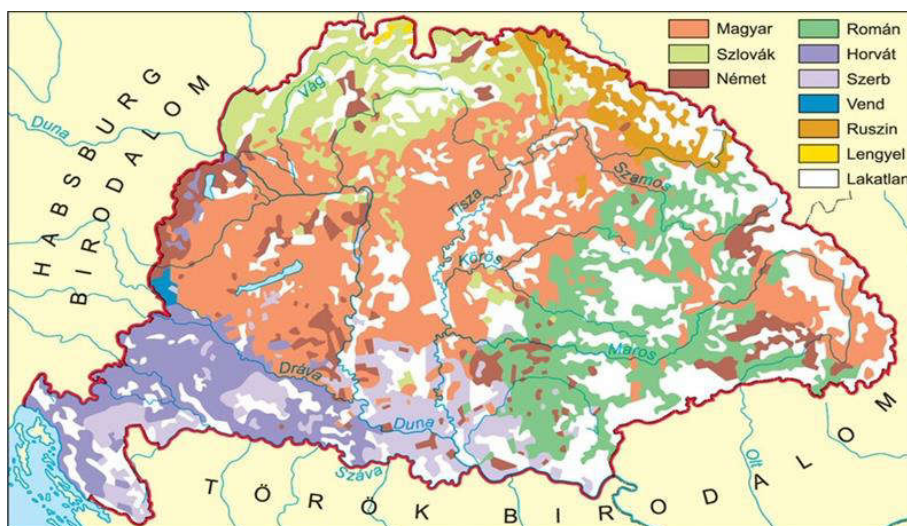


Figure 2. The ethnicities of the Kingdom of Hungary at the end of the 18th century. (Source: www.sulinet.hu)

Group boundaries according to religion imposed further divisions on the population. The majority of Germans in Upper Hungary and Transylvania were Lutherans; the Magyars in Transylvania and Partium were Calvinists, Unitarians, and Roman Catholic; the Romanians in the same area Greek-Orthodox or Greek-Catholic, and the Magyars in Central Hungary, the newly repopulated Germans (Swabians), the Croats and the 70% of Slovaks were Roman Catholic. The ethnicities living dispersed in the country were of various denominations: the Serbs Orthodox, and many of the Magyars and Slovaks of Upper Hungary Lutherans (Kosáry 1983, Kocsis, Tátrai 2015, Nyárády 1997).

3. *Natio hungarica* and the *Hungarus* consciousness

Despite the coexistence of many languages and nations, the Kingdom of Hungary (*Regnum Hungaria*) was considered a historical and cultural unit by both foreigners and the population of the country alike. The consciousness of belonging at this time was embodied by *natio hungarica* (Bíró 2005). The Hungarian nobility played the most influential role in the Monarchy due to its political and economic importance. Belonging to a social estate and estate based consciousness overwrote ethnic consciousness completely. The Hungarian estates – the nobility, the clergy, and the urban burghers – were the building blocks of the

multinational society of Hungary, where rights based on political status were considered more important than linguistic and ethnic identity. This phenomenon was not specific to Hungary in this era: until the end of the Middle Ages European kingdoms were usually multilingual and multiethnic. In France, such a conglomerate developed into an unified nation state, whereas in Hungary the coexisting peoples grew into separate nations and, later, into individual states.

In parallel with *natio hungarica*, another identity also developed in Hungary: as early as in the Middle Ages, regardless of ethnicity, learned people confessed to be belonging to a common homeland (referred to as *patria nostra, mea Hungaria, communis patria, cf.*) (Klaniczay 2001). In the early modern era students from Hungary studying at universities abroad (who were called *peregrini*) provided the label “*Hungarus*” in university registries, which meant ‘from Hungary’, and sometimes also added reference to their narrower place of origin, such as, for instance, *Posoniensis-Hungarus*, for Pozsony, *i.e.* present-day Bratislava. For educated people, who were usually independent of the social estates, territorially based identity was usually more important than a language- and ethnicity based one. This form of self-identification is what is commonly referred to as *Hungarus consciousness*, which connected not only educated people but generally people living in Hungary until the late 18th century, regardless of ethnic, linguistic and religious differences between them.

4. Multilingualism

Multilingualism was a characteristic of the *Hungarus consciousness*. It was also a factual characteristic of individuals, communities in the villages, towns, and the state in Hungary. Investigating language use in towns in the late medieval Hungary, Székely demonstrated that the administration of towns was usually in the hands of German patricians, but the official language use was always dependent on the composition of the population. Royal decrees were written in Latin but announced in German, Hungarian, and, in some places, in Slovak. The town of Pozsony looked for a scrivener who could write in Hungarian, Czech, German and also, of course, Latin, as early as in 1436. The town of Sopron prescribed in 1599 that Germans living there had to know Hungarian (Székely 1974). Student mobility was very high within the country. German speaking students from the Pozsony lycée went to study Hungarian in Debrecen, Sárospatak, and Transylvania, whereas Transylvanian-Hungarians went to Saxon lycées, while Protestant Hungarian students went to schools in Upper Hungary to study German. Slovaks sent their children to German gymnasia where they could also study Hungarian.

A burgher in the multilingual territories of Hungary typically spoke two or more languages in addition to their mother tongue and could practice their religion in the language prescribed by their church in the latter. This phenomenon was described in the reform ordinance *Ratio Educationis* in 1777, whose basic point of departure was that “the inhabitants of Hungary and of the countries associated with it are people who differ from each other in their nationality, language and religion... children no longer speak just one language but two or even three... in many regions it does not cause any difficulty to use different languages...proficiency in Latin is definitely necessary” (Mészáros 1981:62).

The University of Vienna entered the languages spoken by students in its registry beginning with 1780. *Hungarus* students always had a minimum of three languages – Hungarian, German, and Latin – entered against their names, but other languages – such as Slovak,

Czech, Polish, Romanian, Croatian, or Serbian – were also found in the records of students according to their ethnic or geographic origin. For instance, Mathias Dewitsch of Buda knew Croatian and Slovak, Joannes Komáromi of Eperies, *i.e.* present-day Prešov, Czech, Pál Steiner of Pozsony Slovak, and Andreas Kielsch of Nagyszeben, *i.e.* present-day Sibiu Romanian in addition to the three “default” languages (Kiss 2000).

The official language in Hungary and the *lingua franca* of the educated classes and the elites was Latin for several centuries, its use bridging the gap of linguistic divisions and any ethnic antagonisms while at the same time ensuring the equality of the languages of all ethnic groups. Enlightened absolutism provided mother tongue schooling, curriculum, and teachers, encouraged proficiency in Latin, „The use of Latin in Hungary is normal” (Mészáros 1981), but surreptitiously brought in German and wanted to elevate it above the other languages. The Hungarian striving for identity strengthened in the face of such Germanization and sparked an autonomous Magyarizing process which led to the disintegration of the shared Hungarus consciousness. However, no unified nation state was formed: the Slovak, Croatian and Romanian national movements developed alongside the Magyar-nationalism that undermined the Hungarus consciousness.

The Hungarian scholarly literature regards the Hungarus phenomenon, this feature of Hungarian history, unanimously positively. Pukánszky (Pukánszky 1940) stresses loyalty and motivation on the part of the German ethnicity towards the shared homeland, while Tarnai (Tarnai 1969) emphasizes the common scholarly and political role played in the interest of the country. Kosáry (Kosáry 1983) writes about the strengthening of the educated burghers, and Bíró (Bíró 2005) talks about peace and patriotic self-awareness among the nations. Miskolczy (Miskolczy 2012) underlines the continuation of the tradition of independence and the importance of the shared homeland that is above ethnic nations.

5. The formation of the educated Hungarus estate

The Hungarus consciousness owed its strengthening to the appearance of the enlightened and educated people of primarily burgher background. The clichés about the natural richness and military successes used earlier were slowly forgotten, and Hungary’s assessment abroad became more negative starting in the mid-17th century, with negative and often malicious stereotypes of Hungarians floating around.

The academics returning home from universities abroad were faced with the backwardness of the country, but this and the negative publicity strengthened their patriotic consciousness. In order to reestablish the good reputation of their country, the Hungarus university graduates started to uncover, through scholarly activities, the past and the achievements of their country with great devotion and independently of their mother tongue, be it Hungarian, German or Slovak. They carried out their work with no religious or ethnic prejudice, regarding themselves to be members of a larger community, that of *respublica litteraria* (Szelestei 2010:36). Most of them had completed studies in theology and pursued research and publication activities regarding Hungary in addition to serving their churches. The minister’s and teacher’s profession grew to be separate in time, the latter (well-qualified) became highly valued. By the mid-18th century the educated elite became further differentiated, serving the state’s enlightened reforms.

In the first half of the 18th century 79% of the Transylvanian university graduates became ministers or teachers, whereas in the second half only 63.6% did so. The proportion of those choosing lay professions increased from 20.7% to 36.3% (Szabó-Szögi 1998:36). The diversity of professions followed from the needs of the era: health care, public administration, the technical and military professions, and even the arts and agriculture all started to be pursued by educated people. The number of professions requiring education (although not necessarily university education) also increased and were filled by graduates of lycées, referred to as *domi doctus* at the time. The projected career of the educated elite was at the time to get European education, join the ranks of Western European science or scholarship, and introduce its results back home. Few of the *peregrinus* students did not return to Hungary after graduation – they wanted to use their acquired knowledge at home, but the ties to church or to patrons who funded theirs studied also required that they return.

The census of 1784 also recorded the male population's professions. According to its results, more than 5 thousand "men of honorable character" (*honoracior*), *i.e.* usually university educated non-nobility who worked as doctors, lawyers and administrators in the service of the king, their town, or their landlord in Hungary. This was, however, not the total number of educated people. The census recorded 18,487 priests and ministers of various denominations, and there is no information how teachers working in villages and small towns were officially categorized (Danyi-Dávid 1960). Kosáry estimates the number of Hungary's intellectuals at 20,000 (0.18%) at this time (Kosáry 1983). It is important to also note the social background of the university graduates. While in the 16-17th centuries 58% of them came from educated burgher families in Transylvania, by the 18th century their ratio increased to 81% (Szabó 1980:160). The proportions are different in the rest of Hungary though, as far as we know from data on passport applications of *peregrinus* students. According to the database of the Hungarian National Archives, between 1743 and 1779 1,231 people applied for passports to study abroad, and, as part of the application procedure, had information on their social backgrounds recorded: in Hungary, 30% of the applicants were of the nobility, 21.5% burghers, 18% clerics, and 10% free citizens (MOL-HL Database).

All of these data indicate an increase in the value of having professional education, and, at the individual level, also a development of dynasties within the educated elite. Three generations of the Pataki family of Kolozsvár were physicians in the 18th century, getting their education at Dutch and German universities. Sámuel I. Pataki (1692-1766) was able to study abroad with support from Count Pál Teleki, while his son's and grandson's educations were financed by their own family, which gained considerable respect and wealth by then. The first generation of the Torkos family of Győr, András Torkos, studied in Halle to be a Pietist minister, sending one of his sons to become a physician, the other to be a minister at universities abroad, with the same pattern repeating in the third generation. More than three generations of men studying abroad can be found in many ministers' families. People who managed to study abroad sent their sons to do the same. Data from German universities regarding foreign students show that they came from urban centers: in the 18th century, one-third (1299) of them came from market towns, while areas depopulated during Hungary's occupation by Ottomans (such as the Great Hungarian Plain, Bácska and Bánát) were underrepresented, of the Transylvanian students abroad, 60% were of Saxon origin, and usually urban (Tar 2000:42). (Figure 3)

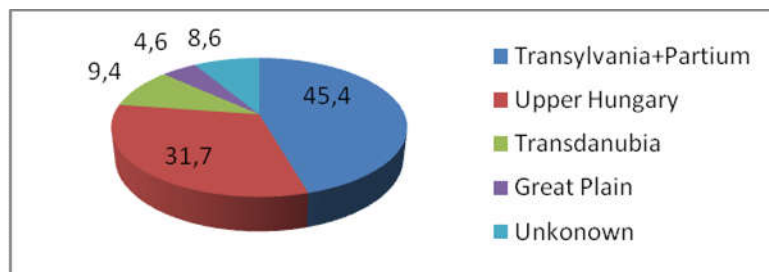


Figure 3. Students from Hungary and Transylvania at the German Universities, 1694-1789)

6. The prototype of the educated intellectual

A prototypical example of the Hungarus educated intellectual was Mátyás Bél [Matej Bel, Matthias Bel] (1684-1749), who described his own identity as follows: „a Slav by language, a Hungarus by nation, and a German by erudition” (*lingua Slavus, natione Hungarus, eruditione Germanus*). Bél was responsible for reforms introduced in the Pozsony lycée, which influenced the Debrecen syllabus too: a series of textbooks, in which he added explanations in German, Hungarian and Slovak to the Latin language texts, a grammar of Hungarian written for Germans, a Bible translation into Slovak, and a Latin language *Notitia Hungariae*, i.e. a historical and geographical description of Hungary. His aim with the latter was to dispel the anti-Hungary bias abroad. His venture was viewed with suspicion in Vienna and in the Hungarian counties alike at first, and Bél was believed to be an agent, but in the end he managed to get permission for his undertaking from the king. He planned to carry out his ambitious work “with the assistance of learned men from Hungary and abroad” (Kapronczay 2007:123). In the sample volume published in 1723 he listed all his collaborators – renowned doctors, historians, and scientists. He involved the students of the Pozsony lycée and his own former students in the collection of the data as well. His venture was assisted by high nobility and burghers, Catholics and Protestants, Germans, Hungarians and Slovaks – by people of Hungarus consciousness, in short. *Notitia* was recommended as a school textbook in Ratio Educationis.

Mihály Rotarides (1715-1747) also had an individual initiative. As a student from Gömör county starting his studies abroad, he stated the goal of his studies on the cover page of his album amicorum as follows: *rerum patriae studiosissimus* (“a great supporter of the cause of the homeland”). His grand plan was to append Dávid Czvittinger’s (1680?-1743) 1711 *Specimen Hungariae Literatae*. Like Czvittinger, he aimed to collect the works of those writing in Transylvania and Hungary. He traveled all around Hungary, visited schools, ministers, and all sorts of people dealing with books. He did research in all the major libraries of Germany, gaining access with his letter of recommendation from the University of Wittenberg. His album amicorum used during his studies abroad is a good source of information on where he collected data (Kárpáti-Szentiványi-Tarnai 1965). However, he managed to publish only a fraction of his enormous planned work, the introduction. The material collected by him was scattered after his untimely death, and only small parts of it are preserved in various German, Slovak and Hungarian collections. Czvittinger’s *Specimen* served as the point of departure for everyone working on literary history, something to be

developed rather than rejected. In the first half of the 18th century it was expanded with more than a dozen addendums in the form of manuscripts (Szelestei 2010:165).

These works were still written in the spirit of *historia litteraria Hungariae*, but in the mid-18th century specialization into disciplines began. The first discipline to become independent was medicine. This is indicated by István Weszprémi's (1723-1799) detailed biography of medical history, *Succincta medicorum Hungariae et Transilvaniae biographia*. Similarly to other initiatives of the era, this one was also prompted by a Hungarus pride and a desire to be useful. Even though the work bears Weszprémi's name, many people contributed to it. The material was collected through the communication channel of the day, correspondence, and new information was immediately passed on. Mapping this network of correspondence could contribute greatly to our knowledge of the history of Hungarian science and scholarship.

7. Hungary and Europe

The correspondence extended beyond Hungary's borders to include the scientists and scholars of the whole of Europe. Those in Hungary drew the attention of their European colleagues to themselves with their activities, publishing their results following international models and becoming members of the European *respublica litteraria*. All of this was greatly aided by the shared language of science, Latin, and later by German. Hungarus scientists and scholars were invited to join the membership of European learned societies and then strove to found similar organizations and journals in Hungary. Mátyás Bél planned to organize a learned society as early as 1718, to encompass all disciplines. Dániel Fischer 's (1695-1746) *Eruditus Pannoniae*, founded in 1730, included only *historia naturalis*. Anybody could seek membership in the Pozsony learned society founded by Károly Windisch (1725-1793) in 1752, regardless of their religion, rank, or nation. The lectures of the society were published. In 1764 Windisch founded (and then edited, for 10 years) the first Pozsony newspaper, *Pressburger Zeitung*. Ferenc Á. Kollár, [Adam František Kollár] (1718-1783) planned to organize a nation-wide learned society to propagate knowledge about the country called *Societas litteraria*, in which the members were to keep in touch via correspondence (Kapronczay 2007).

The network of those engaged in scientific work was strengthened by their ties to Freemasonry. The movement, which began in the mid-18th century, had about 3 thousand members in Hungary and Transylvania by the 1780s (H. Balázs 1979). In the Masonic lodges rank, language and religion did not matter, the members were united in their desire to better the country and the world and to serve reforms. Freemasonry provided a network of connections and letters of recommendation, opened doors, and served as a source of assistance all around Europe.

Several more notable 18th century Hungarus learned men could be mentioned here: polymaths, who, depending on the goal of their publications and language of their audience, wrote in Latin, Hungarian or German, and founded science in Hungary. Well-known or forgotten ministers or teachers could also be listed who contributed to the improvement of the state of the country. The Josephinist Roman Catholic and Protestant high nobility who enriched Hungary with their collections were also regarded as Hungari. Count Sámuel Teleki, Chancellor of Transylvania and founder of the Teleki Library (1802) was also a peregrinus student; the Roman Catholic Count György Festetich founded a library as well as a college of economy on his estate. Count Ferenc Széchenyi presented his collection of books of

Hungarian relevance to the country, cataloguing them and sending the list to the European scientists, writers and politicians of the era, 553 persons in all, regardless of their social standing or ethnicity (Deák-Zvara 2012). The catalogue is a proud summary of books of Hungarian relevance. August Schlözer, renowned professor of the University of Göttingen praised Széchényi's catalogue as follows: "This way the Hungarian nation has hope for a full range of literary apparatus the like of which few other nations possess" (*So hat die Ungrische Nation zu einem so vollständigen Apparatu litterario Hoffnung, dessen gleichen sich wenig andere Nationen zu rühmen haben*) (Schlözer 1803:665). The Göttingen Royal Academy of Science, *Societas Regiae Scientiarum* invited all three Hungarian aristocrats to be honorary members.

8. Conclusion: The role of peregrinus students

The role of peregrinus intellectuals in culture transmission cannot be overemphasized. These people saw the world and became a part of the European cultural mainstream. Their alba amicorum with inscriptions from abroad clearly show that they made connections with renowned personalities of the era – philosophers, scientists, physicians, and teachers. Those studying in Halle in the early 18th century taught in Francke's school, if they had a chance, in order to learn his method. Mátyás Bél used his experience gathered here to elevate the Pozsony lycée to be the best Lutheran educational institution of the country. Those studying in Göttingen went to Dessau on pilgrimage in order to learn about Basedow's philanthropic school model so that, upon their return home, they could introduce the same methods in their own schools, investing the spiritual capital they brought home into the cultural development of the country. They wrote textbooks and educated generations in this spirit, publishing in journals abroad. Through their network of correspondence they were up-to-date about the newest books published in other countries, ordering and reading them just like the European elite.

Starting with the early 19th century Hungarian Reform Era, Hungarian historiography treated the foreign educated Hungarus intellectuals very harshly. The representatives of the Hungarian enlightenment had few peregrinus Hungarus men among them. The central issue of the Reform Era was the Language Renewal with its motto "every nation relied on their own language in becoming learned". However, learned Europeans did not speak Hungarian, and thus the process that began as a result of the activities of the Hungarus intellectuals in the 18th century, during which they showed Hungarian culture to Europe in Latin and German, stalled. The international isolation of Hungary in science and culture was, paradoxically, the result of its greatest patriotic project, the making of the Hungarian language official.

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