

**JÁNOS SIPOS**

**THE EASTERN RELATIONS OF HUNGARIAN FOLK MUSIC**

Musical notation: János Sipsos

Photographs: János Sipsos

On the cover: Light filtering into a yurt through the top

Photo taken by János Sipsos in Mangyshlak province, Southwestern Kazakhstan, 1997

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"Today, Hungarians are the outermost, the most distant branch of the millennia-old tree of the great Asian music culture, rooted in the souls of the various peoples living from China through Central Asia to the Black Sea." Bence Szabolcsi<sup>1</sup>

## PREFACE

Hungarian prehistory shows a particular duality in terms of language and music: the language belongs to the Finno-Ugric language family, while many pre-Conquest<sup>2</sup> folk music layers are related to Turkic peoples. This phenomenon has attracted the attention of our ethno-musicologists from an early stage, and serious comparative work has been undertaken, to mention only the most important ones: Zoltán Kodály presented mainly Cheremis and Chuvash parallels, Béla Bartók drew valid conclusions about the folk music of Anatolia from a small body of material, Lajos Vargyas carried out a broad historical survey of the folk music of the Volga-Kama-Belaya region, and Bence Szabolcsi, after reviewing a huge amount of melodies, pointed out even broader international musical connections. Later, Katalin Paksa explored the eastern affinities of our small-range, tetra- and pentatonic songs, and László Dobszay and Janka Szendrei took a novel approach to Hungarian folk music, including an international survey of the lament- and psalmodic styles.<sup>3</sup>

In accordance with the noblest traditions of Hungarian folk music research, apart from theoretical studies, fieldwork has been and is still being carried out. From the point of view of the present thesis, the most important of the latter are Béla Bartók's collection in Anatolia in 1936, László Vikár's and Gábor Bereczki's research in the Volga-Kama-Belaya region between 1957 and 1978, and, without being immodest, my work on the folk music of Turkic peoples from 1987.<sup>4</sup>

Initially, the aim of the research series was to explore the eastern connections of Hungarian folk music, which gradually expanded into research on the areal folk music of the multi-ethnic Volga-Kama-Belaya area, and then, through my own work, into a comparative study of the folk music of diverse Turkic-speaking populations living in the vast Eurasian territory. Meanwhile, the study of Hungarian prehistoric aspects has been going on uninterrupted.

Research into the folk music of Turkic peoples is justified by the fact that these peoples have long played a prominent role in Asia, and without a comparative exploration of their folk music, it is impossible to understand the musical world of Eurasia. What makes the study all the more instructive is the amazing diversity of these musics and, moreover, the interrelationships between these folk musics fundamentally differ from the connections between the languages concerned.

This work has produced a map of the folk music of a part of the vast area from China to Eastern Europe, inhabited by Turkic-speaking peoples, too. It can also be declared that no previous attempt has been made to analyse and compare the folk music of such a vast area on the basis of fieldwork (map on page &).

The long-term goal of my research is to systematise and compare the *folk songs* of the Turkic peoples and the peoples surrounding them by musical criteria. Accordingly, I will only rarely touch upon instrumental folk music, the repertoire of professional and semi-professional performers, the

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<sup>1</sup> SZABOLCSI 1934.

<sup>2</sup> By Conquest with a capital C, the Hungarians' settlement in the Carpathian Basin around the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD is meant throughout the book.

<sup>3</sup> KODÁLY 1937–1976, BARTÓK 1937a, 1976; VARGYAS 1953, 1980, 1981, 2002; SZABOLCSI 1933, 1934, 1936, 1940, 1947, 1956; PAKSA 1982; DOBSZAY 1983, 1984; DOBSZAY–SZENDREI 1977, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> VIKÁR 1969a-b, 1979, 1982, 1993; VIKÁR–BERECZKI 1971, 1979, 1989, 1999.

newest layers of folk music, as well as art music. Also, the cultural and socio-anthropological aspects of music will also be rarely mentioned. Since Turkic peoples can be considered to be more or less Turkified, they are genetically and culturally related to many non-Turkic peoples through their substrata. Consequently, the research indirectly extends beyond the Turkic-speaking peoples, who are linked through their culture, language and history to the peoples neighbouring them or partially assimilated by them, laying the groundwork for a later, even broader study of comparative Eurasian folk music.

The most detailed presentation will obviously highlight the results of my own collecting work. Over the past 30 years I have spent about a total of 10 years in Turkic-inhabited areas, during which time I have collected and recorded tens of thousands of tunes. Most of the fieldwork was done in small villages, and I left a village when no more than variants of previously recorded songs were available. The Azerbaijani, Kyrgyz, Karachay and Turkmen parts of the created Turkic heritage archive are among the important collections of these peoples in the world, and the Anatolian and Kazakh sections are also significant in terms of the number of songs recorded and analysed. This wealth of melodies has made it possible to achieve unique and reliable results and to produce a work of basic research value.<sup>5</sup>

Naturally, I relied in the analysis on the works of earlier Hungarian researchers of the Volga-Kama region, especially the studies of Zoltán Kodály, Bence Szabolcsi, László Vikár and Lajos Vargyas. Based on these and on the results of local researchers, I also included the music of the Turkic (Chuvash, Tatar, Bashkir) and some Finno-Ugrian (Mordvin, Votyak, Cheremis) peoples of this region in the research.

I present the folk music of several Turkic peoples on the basis of publications by researchers of the peoples concerned or, where none existed, on the basis of sound material transcribed by me. These groups include the Dobrujan Tatar, Gagauz; Kumyk, Nogai, Karaim; Karakalpak, Yughur; Altai Turkic, Khakas, Shor, Tuvan and Yakut people. For various reasons, I have not yet dealt with the Turkmen, Uyghur and some small Turkic peoples, who in many cases maintain their original culture only to a limited extent. It seems, however, that the folk music of the omitted groups, apart perhaps from a few layers of Uyghur music, has little to do with Hungarian folk music. At the same time, I have obtained some surprising results when examining the music of some non-Turkic peoples (e.g. in Anatolia, the North and South Caucasus and the Volga-Kama region).

The collected melodies were written down, those from other authors were standardized, and the entire stock was systematised by modifying the methods of the scholarly predecessors<sup>6</sup> to fit the criteria dictated by the Turkic material. I could not choose strictly uniform principles for classifying the folk songs under discussion, because the widely differing folk music materials required different aspects of ordering. (For example, Azeri, Turkmen or Uzbek songs moving in short lines built from a few adjacent notes require different criteria of arrangement than four-line pentatonic fifth-shifting tunes descending on a broad ambitus.) I have mostly chosen the melodic line as the main criterion for the classifications, since other musical features (e.g. rhythm pattern, syllable count, tone range, etc.) are usually less characteristic of the melody, and the classes formed on their basis can be well described in tables.

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<sup>5</sup> Although articles and sometimes books on these Turkic folk songs have been published before (Anatolian Turks, Kazakhs), often only a larger selection of tunes was available (Azeris, Karachay-Balkars, Kyrgyz people) or none at all (Turkmens). I have studied the works of local and foreign folk music scholars, most of which are not classificatory and especially not comparative, and I will discuss these in the individual folk music sections. I will now mention only a few of them, which use at least partly comparative methods: LACH 1926–1958; BARTÓK 1976; BELIAEV 1975; VINOGRADOV 1958 and REINHARD 1957. Video and audio recordings of my own collections, as well as relevant publications and e-books, can be consulted on my website.

<sup>6</sup> KODÁLY 1937–1976; JÁRDÁNYI–KERÉNYI 1961; VARGYAS 2002; DOBSZAY–SZENDREI 1977; DOBSZAY 1983. In the comparison of the Turkic material with Hungarian folk music I often relied on the style concept of DOBSZAY–SZENDREI 1992.

I would like to emphasize that the three major novelties of the volume are: 1) the presentation of different Turkic folk musics (Chapter 2), a comprehensive comparative overview of these folk musics (Chapter 3), and 3) the more recent findings on the eastern connections of Hungarian folk music (Chapter 4). Although the focus of the book is on my findings in comparative Turkic folk music research, I also consider some elements of the Turkic folk music corpus as possible early roots of Hungarian folk music, and, where appropriate, place them in a Hungarian prehistoric and cultural-historical framework, and draw cautious conclusions. The intended readership may therefore be heterogeneous. There will be those who are well versed in musical analysis but unfamiliar with the history of Turkic peoples, or vice versa, and there will be those interested in Hungarian prehistory who may not be comfortable in either discipline at a deeper professional level.

Therefore, some summarizing background works on the main processes of Turkic history, as well as on the basic principles of the scientific methodology of ethnological analysis are recommended for those who would like to deepen their knowledge in one or the other of these fields.

As for writings on Hungarian folk music and its links with the East, we are overwhelmed by the abundance. It is almost impossible to classify them, so I will only draw your attention to the works under the names of Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, Bence Szabolcsi, Lajos Vargyas, László Dobszay, Katalin Paksa, László Vikár in the Bibliography. Due to the extremely high quality of Hungarian comparative and analytical folk music research, all these writings give a reliable picture of the state of research at their time. There is also an 'Explanation of Signs and Terms', which summarizes and explains the musical terms used in the Hungarian–Turkic musical comparison.

A short, updated summary of the ethnic communities speaking Turkic languages has been published in London recently.<sup>7</sup> Another writing about early Turkic history<sup>8</sup> is also useful in the mentioned volume. On some Inner Asian and Siberian Turkic communities see the book by Lars Johanson.<sup>9</sup>

New archaeo-genetic publications on the locations and duration of Hungarian–Turkic historical relations before the Conquest have also appeared and are still appearing, with conclusions that differ from previous results based on linguistic reconstruction.<sup>10</sup> In a volume of a conference proceedings titled *Párhuzamos történetek* [Parallel Stories] edited by Attila Türk and László Klima (Budapest, Pázmány Péter University, 2021) I recommend two articles by Attila Türk to your attention: 'Magyar nyomok a Dél-Urál és Káma-vidék kora középkori régészeti emlékeiben' [Hungarian Traces in the Early Mediaeval Archaeological Remains of the Southern Urals and the Kama Region] and 'A magyar–török kapcsolatok régészeti vetülete' [The Archaeological Dimension of the Hungarian–Turkic Relations].

Before turning to the folk music of Turkic peoples, let us review the main issues examined and results achieved by the study of the Oriental connections of the old layers of Hungarian folk music.

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<sup>7</sup> Hendryk BOESCHOTEN's The Speakers of Turkic Languages. In: *The Turkic Languages*. ed. by L. JOHANSON–É. Á. CSATÓ. ed., Routledge, London – New York, 1998, 33–46; 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed.: 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Peter GOLDEN, *The Turkic Peoples. A Historical Sketch*, 47–61.

<sup>9</sup> *Discoveries on the Turkic Linguistic Map*, Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, Stockholm, 2001 (Publications 5.).

<sup>10</sup> One of them is, for example, KOMAR 2018.