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The Figure of Lajos Kossuth in the Folk Music of Minority Hungarians

Antal Szerb writes in his greeting to the reader in the foreword of his book *The History of Hungarian Literature*: “Only common culture and human values we experience together can keep the all so dispersed Hungarians united. Today, being a Hungarian does not mean one’s belonging to a state but a specific manner of feelings and thoughts, which has filtered through the values of a thousand years: that is, culture. In our days, the goal of all historiography and every work in humanities is to teach cultural loyalty. As long as we are loyal to our culture, we are loyal to ourselves (Szerb 1934.⁵1972: 27.)”

The researcher of folk culture – and folk music within it – feels in particular the weight of the words of Antal Szerb, since only a decade after the beginning of the modern age of the Hungarian folk music research (1905), it also became a research of minorities. The first recordings of folk songs (and the folk songs noted down on the spot) in connection to the tradition of 1848 – and primarily the figure of Lajos Kossuth – were prepared among the inhabitants of villages that would acquire a minority situation later on. The explanation of this is that the first collections (mostly using the phonograph) mainly focused on border areas, since it was supposed that an older tradition could have been conserved in farther and more secluded parts. The gathered material proved that this idea of Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály (and, in part, even Béla Vikár) was right. The folk song treasure collected in the border areas prior to WWI soon became part of the folk music collection of Hungarian minorities, since much of the material gathered came exactly from the areas detached later. These included the collection of Kodály in Mátyusföld, Kodály and Béla Vikár in Zoboralja, Bartók, Kodály, László Lajtha and Antal Molnár along the Ipoly, Kodály and Lajtha in Gömör (Gemér) county, their work in Székely Land and that of Kodály in Bukovina, as well as the material of Ákos Garay gathered in Kórógy (Korođ) in Slavonia. We must not forget about the Transylvanians among the collectors, including first of all János Seprődi, who conducted research in Kibéd in Maros-Torda county (Mures-Turda), and the student of Bartók, Imre Balabán, who gathered material in Kolozs (Cluj) county in 1912. The material collected in a rather great quantity in a short time at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries proved already in the beginning what a decisive event the war of independence was for the Hungarians and what a strong impression it left in their memory especially with respect to the figure of Lajos Kossuth. It is due exactly to the remembrance to the war of independence that the first currently known Hungarian phonograph recording was made on the play of a village gypsy band. The sound (and also photograph) recording was prepared in Medesér in Udvarhely (Odorheiu) county on March 15, 1900, with

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the paper *Székelyudvarhely* reporting on the event in its issue of April 18, 1900. It turns out from this that Béla Vikár stopped in Medesér during his collecting trip in Székely Land. He planned to arrive the day before but the weather that suddenly turned winterly hindered him (he could not reach 8–10 villages of the surroundings at all because of the snowfall). Thus, he arrived during a snowstorm on March 15 – according to the report, in light clothes for spring – exactly at the time of the remembrance ceremony. János Balogh, leader, and his band took part at the event, playing, among others, the popular tune named after Kossuth. Béla Vikár joined the ceremony not only with an improvised commemorative speech but also as a collector: he did not waste his time but recorded the play of the three-member band at once.

That we have this gathered material is thanks to the coincidence of the dates, since our songs referring to 1848 are not among those that could be sung at any time, irrespective of the occasion. What is more, during the years when cultural politics was under central control, they could not be sung in public at all and it was even more so outside the borders. After 1948, researchers found it better not to ask for 1848 tunes for the sake of the singers. When they did, it happened that the singer refused the request or evaded answering it. The case of a 64-year-old man deported from the Csallóköz in 1955 is good example for this: he did not let the collector write down the words starting with *Szomorúan sűt az ősz nap sugara* [The rays of the autumn sun shine with sorrow] on the martyrs of Arad because “*it is now prohibited*”. The singer could have experienced intimidation during his deportation and did not want to get into trouble because of a song. According to one of the most recently collected data from the Southern Regions, after a party in a pub, the Serbs denounced a Hungarian man for having sung the Kossuth song in public. The barkeeper was also summoned before the court as a witness. He did not want to cause harm to his compatriot but he did not want to bring himself into trouble because of perjury. Therefore, at the question on what the man sang, he made something up for the Kossuth song and closed the song by singing: “Long live King Alexander! Long live Serbia!”. The man was thus acquitted because singing a song cheering for Serbia was allowed (collected by Anikó Bodor and István Németh, March 2000). On my travels collecting folk music, I myself also experienced (especially among the Hungarians in Slovakia) that even the most helpful singer became mistrustful and careful when I asked about songs on 1848 and the Rákóczi march. Suspecting a trap, they tried to evade the answer. This happened for example in Szeszta (Cestice) in Abaúj-Torna county in 1989, when a 71-year-old woman, more timid even than the others, only dared to recite the words of the Kossuth song in a low voice. Naturally, others dared to manifest their Hungarian identity even in front of an unknown collector.

In Nagyida (Viile Techii), in 1988, Gál Mária, Mrs. András Csályi (born in Szúrte, Ung county, in 1914) sang the Kossuth song in the following order: Verse 1: The rain falls in droplets, Verse 2: Lajos Kossuth penman, Verse 3: Lajos Kossuth sent this message. In 1989, in Rozsnyórudna (formerly in Gömör-

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Kishont county, now Rudná, Slovakia), the 84-year-old cimbalom player Ferenc Gonosz set an example regarding the cultivation of Hungarian identity in a minority status. He was born as the child of emigrants in America and returned to his old homeland with his parents still as a child. He worked as a miner in Belgium between 1930 and 1940, so he had quite a lot of experiences about minority existence, moreover he could not be intimidated because of his age. (The classification number of the Kossuth song he sang in the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences [IM HAS] is: AP 16 391/0₂).

Music 1

Rubato ♩=88
Kos - suth La - jos azt ü - zen - te,

♩=76 *rall.* ♩=60
El - fo-gyott a re - ge - ment - je.

♩=63
Ha még egy - szer azt ü - ze - ni,

♩=84
Mind - nyá - junk - nak el kell mén - ni,

Él - jen a ma - gyar sza - bad - ság,

Él - jen a ha - za!

T.f.

Naturally, the political transformations starting in 1990 brought changes in this respect as well. My collecting trip in Zoboralja and Gömör in 1997 clearly proved that the Hungarians living beyond the borders did not forget these songs, what is more, the singers bravely undertook the singing of 1848 songs, among them primarily the Kossuth song.

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Let us turn to the presentation of the folk songs in connection to Kossuth. It is to note that a significant quantity of professional literature is at our disposal on this topic, especially from the field of the folklore of words (see the selected literature on the works that most closely concern this subject). Therefore, we will only give a brief summary on the memory of Kossuth folk songs among the Hungarians living beyond the borders. Kossuth quickly found a way to Hungarians and foreigners living among them who did not even speak this language, with his ideas aiming at the establishment of an independent civic nation state and his personal charm already prior to 1848. From among the foreigners, as many as two musicians wrote a work dedicated to him: Ferenc Doppler: *Kossuth march*, 1847; József Müller: *Four Hungarian military marches*. Movement 1: *Kossuth March*, early spring, 1848). The country moved and took up arms voluntarily at the call of Kossuth. The songs connected to his figure, which originated from 1848–49 and later turned into folk songs, also expressed the feelings of the entire nation and they were sung with one voice by several social strata. The memory of the war of independence deeply integrated into the culture of the peasants, most strongly into their music, in only fifty years, and it also left its mark on other works of folk poetry (e.g. legends, sagas) and folk art (wood carving, ceramics, textiles, etc.). The peasants, who had lived in serfhood for centuries, preserved the figure of Kossuth the nicest in their songs and stories from among the memories connected to the war of independence. His name has been included in songs in many ways and in forms due heroes, since they felt Kossuth was the true leader and they hoped he would bring an improvement in both their own fate and that of the country. This is why they bless him in the Kossuth song with the following words: *Valahány csepp esik rája/Annyi áldás szálljon rája!* [So many drops fall on him/So many times may he be blessed!]. They also ask for a blessing for the Hungarian nation, as for example in the version collected by Lajos Kiss in Kórógy, Slavonia, in 1960: *Isten áldja meg a magyart/Tartson élte, míg e föld tart!* [God bless the Hungarians/May they live until this world lasts!] (see Tari 1998. Music 6). The Kossuth song, given its plentiful varieties and general diffusion, is the eponym of a larger group, including textual and musical varieties: the group of the so-called *Kossuth songs*. The Kossuth song, our folk song beginning with *Lajos Kossuth sent this message...* is only one in a series of folk songs preserving the memory of Lajos Kossuth but it ranks first among the folk songs related to the revolution and war of independence of 1849–49 and the figure of Kossuth. At the same time, it became a national symbol in the moment of its composition (the *Éljen a magyar szabadság/Éljen a haza!* [Long live Hungarian freedom/Long live the homeland!]) closing theme of its melody is the signal of the Kossuth channel of the Hungarian Radio), so it did not happen by chance that most of the song prohibitions concerned this song starting from the fall of the was of independence. Both in words and melody, it is this folk song that preserves the memory of Lajos Kossuth in the most colourful and warmest way all over the Hungarian language area. For example, in the northern territories (e.g. Nógrád, Gömör and Zemplén counties) not *Éljen a haza!* [Long live the homeland!] but *Éljen Kossuth Lajos!* [Long live Lajos

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Kossuth!] is sung, as shown by a note of Zoltán Kodály from 1922 and several other data. As one of the words-collecting trip of Kodály in Zoborvidék has revealed, following all the forced recruiting and the military service in the Austrian army abroad, the melody of the Kossuth song was sung with self-evident love for the homeland: Mikor szültem az világra/Akkor azt mondta apám,/Katonának nevelt anyám,/Éljen az magyar! [When I came to this world/My father told me/My mother brought me up to be a soldier/Long live the Hungarians!]. Kossuth was respected as the father of the Hungarian nation and called him in everyday life as “our father Kossuth”, while in the Kossuth song as *Kossuth Lajos édesapánk* [our dear father Kossuth] and *édesapám* [my dear father Kossuth], and his wife as *édesanyánk* [our dear mother Kossuth] (*édesanyám* [my dear mother Kossuth]). And, indeed, people had a filial affection towards him, which is expressed in the warm, lyrical tone and often a bit free rhythm of the performance of the Kossuth songs. (The refrain of the Kossuth songs is much more variegated in the oldest recordings than the ones we know today: it either contains varied additional elements or it is a single short section.) Kossuth is often endowed with particular characteristics due the heroes of tales, as revealed by verses 2 and 3 of the following Székely folk song from Bukovina.

Music 2

Poco rubato ♩ = 80

Kos - suth La - jos azt i - zen - te,
 Nem tót ki a re - ge - ment - je.
 Ha még egy - szer meg - i - ze - ni,
 Mind - nyá - junk - nak el kell men - ni,
 Él - jen az ma - gyar szá - bad - ság,
 Él - jen az ma - gyar!

T.f.

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Kossuth Lajos íródéák,/Nem kell néki gyertyavilág./Megírja (j)ő a levelet,/Az ragyogós csillag mellett,/Éljen az magyar szabadság,/Éljen a haza!

Kossuth Lajos ablakába,/Kinyílt a rózsa magába./Akkorára nyílt az ága,/Bort ittam az árnyékába,/Éljen az magyar szabadság,/Éljen a haza!

Esik eső karikára,/Kossuth Lajos kalapjára./Valahány csepp esik rája,/Annyi áldás szálljon rája,/Éljen az magyar szabadság,/Éljen a haza!

Lajos Kossuth penman,/He needs no candlelight./He writes the letter,/By the light of the star,/Long live Hungarian freedom,/Long live the homeland!

In the window of Lajos Kossuth,/The rose came into bloom./Its branch extended long,/I drank wine in its shade,/Long live Hungarian freedom,/Long live the homeland!

The rain falls in droplets,/On the hat of Lajos Kossuth./So many drops fall on him/So many times may he be blessed!/Long live Hungarian freedom,/Long live the homeland!

The verse beginning with *Esik eső karikára* [The rain falls in droplets] has also been sung, among others, in Szék in the former Szolnok-Doboka (Solnoc-Dobâca) county, and in Dezsánovác (Dezanovac) in the former Pozsega (Požega) county – the first is proved by the collection of István Volly of 1940, while the latter by a collection of Lajos Kiss from 1969 (see Tari 1998. Music 11).

The picture of Kossuth as a penman writing the lines *A ragyogós csillag mellett* [By the light of the star] reveals the respect for the patriot who works untiringly, until late in the night. This penman is capable of strange things, indeed, as shown by the following version from Nyitra nagyker (Milanovce) I collected in 1997 (IM HAS: Dat 250, Nyitra (Nitra) county, Vel'ký Kýr Slovakia, singer: Dénes Szabó, born in 1923).

Kossuth Lajos íródéák,/Nem kell annak gyertyavilág./Megírja ő a levelet,/Magyarország szabad lehet!/Éljen a magyar szabadság, éljen a haza!

Lajos Kossuth penman,/He needs no candlelight./He writes the letter,/Hungary can become free,/Long live Hungarian freedom,/Long live the homeland!

Certain poems on Kossuth were permeated by an almost religious affection, as in the case of the following version of the words from Upper Hungary:

Kossuth Lajos arany bárány,/Arany csillag van a vállán./Aki aztat elolvassa,/Az lehet a Kossuth fia,/Éljen a magyar szabadság, éljen a haza!

Lajos Kossuth a golden lamb,/With a golden star on its back./Who is able to read that,/He can be the son of Kossuth,/Long live Hungarian freedom,/Long live the homeland!

The role of Kossuth as an ideal only grew with the diffusion of the songs of 1848 and others related to him as well as with the fall of the war of independence and the exile of Kossuth. The prohibition of the Kossuth song had a reverse effect as well: it intensified the respect for him even more. In the times of the oppression, the mere mentioning of his name was a solace. Following the suppression of the war of independence, Sámuel Almási wrote in his collection of notes entitled *Magyar Dalnok* [Hungarian Singer] the following section, which preserves the memory of the role of Kossuth as an initiator and his special talent as an orator:

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Kossuth volt az indítója (sic!)/Magyarország Szoszólója. (sic!)

Kossuth was the initiator (sic!)/The Advocate of Hungary. (sic!)

Almost in the same time when Kossuth left for exile, the people started to wait for his return. The words of the following folk song, the melody of which comes from times prior to the war, make it evident that it emerged subsequent to the war: *Emlékezzünk Kossuth Lajosra/Visszagyű még mi országunkba!* [Let us remember of Lajos Kossuth/He will return in our homeland!] It is the great respect for Kossuth again that becomes manifest in the fact that the people accepted his emigration, what is more, considered it the only possible solution. This is revealed by the line *Jobban tette, hogy elillantott/A törökhöz hogy általugrott* [He was right to escape/To go to the Turkish] that ethnographer Ákos Garay recorded on phonograph in Slavonia.

Music 3



Em - lé - köz - zünk Kos - suth La - jos - ra,
Visz - sza - gyű még mi or - szá - gun - k - ra.
m - Még - ad - ja a - mit szí - vünk ki - ván,
Né - mēt Ma - gyar - or - szág - or - szá - got ír - ja.

Jobban tette, hogy elillantott,/Az törökhöz hogy általugrott,/Onnan elment a franciához,/Rendőbe tette kato-, katonaságot.

He was right to escape/To go to the Turkish/And then to the French,/He sorted the military out.

The following generally known verse was recorded already in the 1860s, and Kodály wrote it down in Mohi (today a nuclear power plant stands in its place), in former Bars county, in 1914:

Debrecentől Nagyváradig/Mégy az út, mégy az út,/Azon mēnt el, azon mēnt el/a Kossúth, a Kossúth.

From Debrecen to Nagyvárad/The road runs, the road runs,/He left that way, he left that way/the Kossuth, the Kossuth.

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Other varieties formulate this as follows: *Elkészült már a vasút, a vasút/Azon gyűn Garibaldi Kossuth* [Ready is the railway, the railway/Garibaldi Kossuth arrive that way]. In our folk song *Garibaldi csárdás kiskalapja* [The little csardas hat of Garibaldi] (with other words: *Cifra szűröm szegre van akasztva* [My fancy cloak is hanged on a nail]) known in all areas – and consciously preserved among the Hungarians of the Csallóköz up to our days – as we all know, *Kossuth Lajos neve ragyog* [the name of Kossuth shines] on the hat of Garibaldi. One of the Garibaldi songs, the well-known *Kerek ez a zsemle* [This roll is round] song (which dates back to prior to 1848) written in the style of folk songs survived in Transylvania and among the Székely of Bukovina in the version beginning with *Szennyes az én ingem* [My shirt is dirty] (with the encouraging *Majd hoz Kossuth tisztát/Türr Pista meg puskát* [Kossuth will bring a clean one/And Pista Türr a gun] lines). Among those in Bukovina – as shown by the collection of Mária Domonkos from 1979) “The name of Lajos Kossuth is frequently mentioned, for he was a hero of Hungarian liberty!” One of their greatly skilled singer sang the folk song like this (see Tari 1998. Music 69):

Garibaldi vagyok,/Senkitől sem tartok./Kossuth a pajtásom, Klapka a barátom,/Éljen mind a három!

[Garibaldi I am,/I fear no men./Kossuth is my mate, Kalpka is my friend,/Long live all three of them!]

As a witness of the people waiting for Kossuth the return we have only a march-like *Jő, jő, jő, jő, jő Kossuth, jő* [Comes, comes, comes, comes, comes, Kossuth, comes] song, the music of which was recorded by István Bartalus in the 19th century. It was sung during the Austrian-Italian-French war in the hope that Kossuth can regain the liberty of Hungary with English, French and Turkish assistance (see Tari 1998. Music 79)

The name of Kossuth was even more spiritualised after his death, as revealed by the varieties of the Kossuth song and other folk songs referring to historic circumstances and the songs about his figure that emerged in later times. His name and figure were really integrated into tradition, since the words of the known Kossuth song were connected to former melodies already according to the earliest collections. Béla Vikár recorded on the phonograph a noble folk song in 1903, the words of which are those of the well-known Kossuth song, while its melody belongs among those pentatonic folk songs performed *parlando rubato* that fundamentally changed earlier ideas concerning Hungarian folk music thanks to the research of Bartók and Kodály. Already this recording – which he noted down with Bartók subsequently – indicated that the memory of Kossuth and the respect for the ideas of 1848 have been a continuously present reality among the peasants and that the words of the Kossuth song, beyond the most widely known melody, was also combined with many other from among various stylistic layers of our folk music. Subsequent folk music collections revealed that these words were added to old dancing tunes as well. One like this is the *egyházásfalu* (Vlahita) in former Udvarhely (Odorhei) county in 1960.

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Music 4

• = /o

Kos-suth La - jos azt ü - zen - te

El - fo-gyott a re - ge - ment - je

Ha még egy - szer azt ü - ze - ni

Mind-nyá - junk - nak el kell men - ni. T.f.

New folk songs, in which Kossuth was the protagonist also emerged after his death and elements concerning Kossuth were added to the words of earlier songs. Among these, the *Ha a Kossuth-bankó folyna, többet adnék rája!* [If Kossuth notes were flowing, I would care more!] part of our folk song *Hej, a mohi hegy borának száz forint az ára* [Hey, the wine of the Mohi hill costs a hundred] that preserves the musical heritage of the Rákóczi era. This became known among the folks songs collected by Kodály in Mohi, in former Bars county. These folk songs show it clearly that the melodies of the verses on Kossuth that became folk songs are varied with respect to their musical style. We can find among them folk songs – the words and melodies of which originated prior to 1848 –, which were connected to the figure of Kossuth during the war of independence or subsequent to it. The song *Kossuth Lajos táborában/Két szál majoranna* [In the camp of Lajos Kossuth/Two leaves of marjoram] is like this (it also survived among the Székely in Bukovina) (see Tari 1998. Music 18), together with the well-known folk song *Most szép lenni katonának/Mert Kossuthnak verbuválnak* [It is nice to be a soldier now/Because we are recruited to Kossuth]. Although this folk song became generally known starting out from Zala county, it has also been preserved in Székely Land and Maros-Torda county as an instrumental dance tune (see Tari 1998. Music 29). From among our folk songs of some other old style, we can find words referring to Kossuth among the 11-syllabic, sung dance tunes from the Mezőség. The collections conducted between the two world wars were also recorded new data, for example, from Székely Land. One of these (*Kossuth izenete eljött/Magyar nemzet talán győzött* [The message of Kossuth has arrived/ The Hungarian nation might have won]) has been published in the

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publication containing songs on 1848. (Mathia 1948. Music 3). With respect both to words and melody, we have a rich song material concerning Kossuth, connected to the new style of Hungarian folk songs which had expanded by the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. A few pieces of it can also be found among the Hungarians living outside the borders. One such folk song is the one beginning with *Kossuth Lajos udvarába van egy rezgő nyárfa* [There is a trembling aspen in the garden of Lajos Kossuth], which can be found in the repertory of both the Hungarians in Upper Hungary and those e.g. along the Kis-Küküllő – also as a dance tune among the latter.

Historical circumstances, unfortunately, have not made it possible for folk music researchers to gather the musical heritage in connection to Lajos Kossuth from all over and in their fullness. This way, the overview based on collections conducted among Hungarians living beyond the borders cannot be but disproportionate, since we hardly have any data e.g. from Ruthenia and Burgenland. Should we establish a list on the quantity of the collections in this subject matter, we could rank Transylvania as first (within it, Székely Land) and Bukovina, the northern dialect area of folk music as second, and the Southern Regions as third. We have little data from Moldova (we found one melody in the volume on folk songs on 1848: *Kossuth lova megérdemli a zabot* [The horse of Kossuth deserves the oat], see Mathia 1948. Music 7). We have not even tried to discuss these traditions of Hungarians living in other parts of the world, since we have no adequate data at our disposal. Still, the number and richness of songs connected to the figure of Kossuth remain almost inexhaustible. It is already of particular importance in the history of folk music that folk songs were sung about someone in his life and they have not lost from their impact ever since. On the contrary, the folk songs on Lajos Kossuth that expanded in number after 1850, greatly contributed to the renewal and enrichment of our minstrelsy and folk music. The respect, and the wish to remember and remind people of Kossuth that lived in the peasants, found its proper form of expression in every new guise as the style of music was changing. In their songs and instrumental pieces, the Hungarian folk have worthily preserved, with respect and love due only heroes, the figure of the outstanding patriot and the ideas of 1848, even in a minority status. They gave the most beautiful thing to Kossuth: their own songs and, through them, eternity. In our days, where common singing still has a tradition and a space between the new frameworks – e.g. in Nagycétény (Vel'ky Cetín) and Nyitraňagykér in the former Nyitra county – the spirit of singing Kossuth songs has revived with renewed vigour.

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