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Tekla DOMOTOR, *Hungarian Folk Beliefs*, translated by Christopher M. Hann, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1983. 324 pages, US \$17.50 (cloth)

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Comptes rendus / Book Reviews

Tekla DOMOTOR, *Hungarian Folk Beliefs*, translated by Christopher M. Hann, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1983. 324 pages, US \$17.50 (cloth).

By John Colarusso
McMaster University.

This is a translation of a fascinating and rich book which first appeared in Hungary in 1981. It is a survey of the folk beliefs of the Hungarians, both within and without the boundaries of the present state. It makes available for the first time in one volume extensive information on nearly every aspect of the folk culture of one of Europe's more interesting groups. The book consists of two main sections. The first, and smaller one, entitled "Roots", provides a brief survey of what can be gleaned regarding the history of beliefs among the Hungarians. The headings in this section are: the Ancient Religion of the Hungarians, A People Shall Be Converted, Folk Beliefs at the Time of the Reformation, Witch Trials in Hungary, and Folk Beliefs in the Age of Enlightenment. The second and longer section covers folk beliefs in the 19th and 20th centuries. The main headings here are: Ethnology and Researches into Folk Beliefs, Animistic Beliefs, the "Cunning Folk" (People with Special Skills), Healers and their Cures, Magic, the Magical Power of Words, Man and Nature—the Role of Space and Time in Folk Beliefs—Beliefs Concerning Celestial Bodies, Laicized Traditions of the Church, and the Living and the Dead. Most of these headings themselves fall into numerous sub-headings. Along with this main body of the book are an introduction, an annotated bibliography (which is immensely interesting), a list of illustrations, an index of names and an index of subjects and place-names. The book contains two maps, one of the counties and cities and one of ethnic groups and regions. Between pages 96 and 97 are 16 colour plates, beautifully reproduced, and between pages 224 and 225 are 61 black and white photos. The color plates and a few of the black and white photos depict art work and folk painting or decorations. Most of the black and white photos, however, are of folk practices.

Many of these are fascinating, covering years ranging from 1931 to 1977 and exemplifying topics ranging from religious pilgrimages to mummary and folk cures.

Unique within Europe, the Hungarians are descended from the only group of Ugrian speaking peoples to have left their original homeland centering upon the Ural mountains. After a sojourn in the steppes north of the Caucasus and Black Sea they wandered into their present home in the late 9th Century A.D., absorbing the earlier inhabitants. One might expect, therefore, to find interesting survivals of this unusual origin within the folk culture. While there are some practices that may harken back to this remote period (an interesting form of horse burial or the figure of the *taltos*, which seems to be a survival of an ancient shaman role), for the most part the folk beliefs documented in this volume are remarkably like those of the majority of Europeans. A thousand years of contact and assimilation with European culture have reduced the older Hungarian folk beliefs and practices to all but the faintest echoes. In this regard the Hungarians offer a model of extreme assimilation. Specifically, they offer an historical model of what may have become of the various Hunnic and Iranian hordes (e.g., Scythians, Sarmatians and Alans) which preceded them into Europe and now are no more.

Apart from the wealth of detail which this book contains I might turn to just one interesting point that Domotor makes. She points out at several points that there is a wide disparity between active folk belief and the content of folk tales. For example in folk belief and iconography (that of St. George) the dragon, a prominent element in folk belief, is invariably depicted with one head, yet in the folk tale this creature nearly always has multiple heads (7 or as many as 12), albeit one of them may be the primary one and the others merely ancillary. Domotor speaks vaguely of various assimilatory pressures as lying behind this divergence between the two folk media, but in the case of werewolves (p. 121) and the witch's broomstick (p. 143) there is clear evidence that the tales and epics continue forms of old beliefs that are no longer adhered to. While I do not wish to suggest that everything in the folk tale was at one time an active part of the

belief system if would seem, nevertheless, that a careful perusal of the old tales and epics might offer much rich insight into bygone folk beliefs and help flesh out the woefully thin image of ancient Hungarian customs now available.

I have a few adverse comments to make about the present volume. First, while I cannot judge the accuracy of the translation there are a few spots in which it reads somewhat roughly or jerkily. More seriously, there are a number of places where the translator has not done his job. For example, on page 212 there is an incantation in Latin. Given that Latin is no longer an essential part of the repertoire of most scholars today, this passage should have been translated. As just one instance of a number, on page 36 there is the sentence, "There are certainly female deities (among the ancient Hungarians—reviewer) in existence as well: the Hungarian names for the feast of the Virgin Mary (*Nagyboldogasszony*, *Kisasszony*) and the images associated with them establish this beyond all reasonable doubt." That there is no real discussion of the images is Domotor's fault, but Mr. Hann should have provided some explanation for these terms. As Hungarian—English dictionaries are surprisingly hard to find, I was able to rely upon a Hungarian-speaking colleague and to learn that the first name is *Nagy-boldog-asszony* Great-blessed-woman, and that the second is *Kis(as)-asszony* young/noble-woman, though I am still no clearer as to why these appellations should be of such significance except to note that elsewhere in the book a female demon, depicted as young and beautiful (pages 92, 100) is also called *Kisasszony*. I also had to rely upon my colleague to learn that the *halottlato* (pages 136-139), glossed as 'Seer', is literally *halott-lat-o* dead-see-er. In short, Professor Domotor, as she should, has made use of etymological facts wherever possible. Mr. Hann, by not explaining these points, has effectively minimized this important aspect of folk study.

I should mention, however, that Mr. Hann has managed to achieve one remarkable effect very well indeed. Scattered throughout this book are numerous quotes from informants taken down in the course of fieldwork by Domotor and others. Much of this must have been in dialect. Mr. Hann has done a marvelous job, better than any other I have seen in fact, of rendering such quotes into a sort of bucolic English. The effect is charming.

Setting much minor criticism aside, however, I heartily endorse this volume to all who care about folk beliefs in general and the folk culture of Europe in particular. It is a welcome introduction into a rich world which for linguistic reasons remains

largely inaccessible to most Western scholars. It is certainly a welcome corrective to the images of Hungarian folk culture, which many of us still carry with us from childhood, of vampires and monsters bestowed upon us by Hollywood at the expense of this culture!

Maurice GODELIER, *La production des Grands Hommes*, Paris, Arthème Fayard, 1982. 370 pages, 115 FF (broché).

Par John LeRoy
Université de Colombie britannique

Cette intéressante ethnographie d'une tribu des hautes montagnes de Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée, est l'œuvre d'un anthropologue qui jouit déjà d'une solide réputation comme chef de file de l'anthropologie marxiste. Les travaux de Godelier publiés jusqu'à présent sembleront techniques, ardues et obscurs à qui ne connaît pas très bien la théorie marxiste, la philosophie européenne et l'économie politique. Pour comprendre l'entreprise de Godelier, il faut savoir que sa formation d'anthropologue est passée par des études de philosophie et d'économie politique. Par le biais de l'anthropologie, Godelier essaie de répondre à des questions laissées en suspens par ces deux autres disciplines et entre autres celles-ci: Quelle est la rationalité d'une économie tribale? Que signifie le terme «économie» dans une société dépourvue d'institutions économiques? Que devient l'infrastructure lorsque les rapports de production se confondent avec les rapports de parenté? Sans vouloir nier l'importance de ces problèmes théoriques, certains lecteurs de Godelier ont depuis longtemps l'impression que la question-clé est ailleurs: l'anthropologie marxiste est-elle capable de nous dévoiler de nouveaux aspects des cultures concrètes? Car ce sont après tout les phénomènes tangibles qui forment l'objet essentiel de l'anthropologie et, comme l'a si bien remarqué Marcel Mauss, «le donné, c'est (...) le Mélanésien de telle ou telle île». L'anthropologie marxiste est-elle capable de cerner un objet ou une signification qui a échappé à d'autres écoles (fonctionnalisme, écologie culturelle, anthropologie symbolique, etc.)?

Ce livre, le premier que Godelier consacre aux groupes baruya qu'il étudie depuis quinze ans déjà, ne répond pas clairement à ces questions. Pourquoi? Peut-être parce qu'il s'adresse à la fois à des spécialistes et au grand public. Ce n'est ni une