THE REGIONAL STRUCTURE OF HUNGARIAN TRADITIONAL FOLK CULTURE

Balázs Borsos

During the 19th century, an awareness emerged in international ethnography that the origin and history of cultural phenomena could not be explored or interpreted without considering the spatial aspects of culture. This realization led researchers to examine the different traits characterizing human existence in a spatially structured manner, giving attention to territorially distinct groups even within a given ethnicity. Territorial units can be analysed from two perspectives: the internal and external perspectives. Since a central finding of cultural anthropology is that the identity of groups of people is primarily based on the 'us'/'them' distinction, we might think that we should seek to establish spatial groupings from within. However, it must be acknowledged that while the inhabitants of some settlements have a sense of what distinguishes them from others, such an awareness is formulated less and less frequently as the units increase in size, finally becoming limited to particular communities (i.e. those that are more cohesive for historical reasons). A further problem is that, even in the smaller territorial units, researchers have failed to identify a structure among groups with a community identity that would cover the entire Hungarian-speaking area. All this means that when seeking to define the regional structure of Hungarian folk culture, we have no other option than to use the units defined and named by academic researchers as well as self-definitions and self-naming.

Factors influencing the regional structure of culture

For some decades, it has been acknowledged by both European and Hungarian researchers that the boundaries demarcated in various disciplines often fail to coincide with the cultural boundaries. Nevertheless, it can be stated that the historically durable and well-delineated territorial units are indicative of a coincidence of boundaries based on various criteria, and that these cultural regions can be defined, not on the basis of the existence or non-existence of certain phenomena, but on the basis of the composite categories of phenomena that characterize them.

Geographical features

Among the various geographical features, obstacles to human movement *(mountain ranges and rivers)* have routinely exerted a considerable impact on cultural variation. Although people's ways of life and the associated cultural characteristics are also influenced by other natural phenomena (climate, soil, vegetation), in the Carpathian Basin the influence of these latter factors was of secondary importance. The most important topographic obstacle in the region is the Carpathian range. The first researchers divided the area inhabited by Hungarians into four main parts: Transdanubia, the Alföld ('lowland'), Upper Hungary and Transylvania. All these geographical areas are separated from each other by geographic barriers. Moreover, their names are also rooted in geography. Seen from the Hungarian perspective, the 'fulcrum' of the Hungarian ethnic territory lies

in the Danube–Tisza Midland. This explains why, even in the Alföld, people distinguish the area lying beyond the River Tisza (Tiszántúl). Likewise, the westernmost unit, which is separated from the Danube, is called Transdanubia (Dunántúl). For its part, the northern region with its higher elevations is called Upper Hungary, while further to the east, we find, beyond the wooded mountains, the region of Transylvania. Notwithstanding all this, the geographical spatial divisions are primarily related to the relief, with the boundary of the Alföld being drawn at an elevation of 200 metres above sea level – which means, for example, that the Mezőföld region to the west of the Danube is geographically a part of the Alföld, even though culturally it belongs to Transdanubia. The cultural boundary between the Alföld and Transylvania is also uncertain.

History

A *pronounced group consciousness*, as manifested in each of the various areas of settlement, is tied to the ethnogenesis of Hungarians. Several ethno-cultural subgroups that have been Hungarian speaking in recent centuries can be distinguished based on their names ('*Jász* and *Kun* people' in the Jászság and Kunság regions). The *Székely*-Hungarians have undeniably lived in relative separation from the main body of the Hungarian population throughout their history (Székely Land). [5] [7] The 'we' consciousness of these three groups reflects Hungary's feudal divisions of earlier centuries: the privileges of these groups and the need to protect those privileges strengthened group consciousness over a period of many centuries.

Changes in the *political borders* or, conversely, their stability can also contribute to cultural differences. For most of the past 1000 years, almost the entire Hungarian settlement territory belonged to a single political entity – the Kingdom of Hungary. In the wake of *Ottoman expansion* in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Hungarian ethnic area was divided into three parts. Yet it was only in the east that the unstable boundary between the Kingdom of Hungary and Ottoman Hungary constituted a sharp cultural boundary. [8] [9] [10]

The cultural differences between the two parts of the Alföld can be explained primarily by the varying degree of *destruction* wrought by the Ottomans: whereas smaller villages continued to exist in the northeastern (Habsburg) parts, in the central (Ottoman) regions only the larger settlements survived, around which scattered farmsteads subsequently arose. The cultural distinctiveness of Transylvania dates to this period, with the survival of the Hungarian *Principality of Transylvania* as a partially independent state. Accordingly, even today the *cultural differences* between Transylvania and the rest of the Hungarian ethnic area are rather pronounced. After the expulsion of the Ottomans, the *resettlement* of the depopulated southern and central zones of Hungary entailed the movement of people to these regions from the remaining settled areas and from the Habsburg parts of the country. The Banat region, subject to Ottoman rule for the longest period, remained under Habsburg military administration until 1778 (and in

the border zone until 1873). For this reason it was resettled largely by non-Hungarians. This resulted in a complex cultural patchwork, especially in the southern parts of the Alföld (e.g. in the Bácska and Banat regions). The *Trianon Treaty* of 1920 brought new divisions to the culturally unified Hungarian ethnic areas in the form of the *new national borders*. In the post-WWII period, these boundaries became even more effective obstacles, accentuating the differences [10].

Public administration

During most of the history of Hungary, the noble counties were the administrative units, supplemented by various semi-autonomous areas. This system was put on a new legal footing between 1870 and 1886 [20]. Although the names and territorial extent of the *counties* changed over time, many of Hungary's counties constituted fixed territorial-administrative units for several hundreds of years. Accordingly, in many places, these divisions gave rise to cultural boundaries. For instance, in Transdanubia, the boundaries between the various counties changed only negligibly from the 15th century until the mid-20th century. The historical names of counties are still used in today's county system. Even during the communist period, the territories of the counties underwent a 'rationalization' rather than a full-fledged transformation. Hungary's county boundaries are often linked with natural features. However, even where this is not so (e.g. in Somogy), a distinction still tends to be made in popular consciousness. Research has established, however, that the county borders do not constitute sharp cultural boundaries. Within the various counties, the districts established as administrative units between the 17th and 20th centuries are certainly potential cultural units, but it appears that their impact had been far less significant.

In addition to the aforementioned state administrative units, *ecclesiastical administration* constitutes a further possible influence on the regional structure of folk culture. The outer and inner boundaries of Hungary's dioceses were initially the same as the county boundaries, but this changed over time [7]. The picture is rendered more complex by the fact that, whereas the secular administrative structure remained constant down the centuries, the Protestant denominations that appeared after the Reformation only initially adhered to the previous (Catholic) ecclesiastical administrative framework. Protestant dioceses came into being only in the 18th century. In the case of the Reformed (Calvinist) Church, for instance, the dioceses were based on the military districts rather than on the counties. A unified Hungarian Reformed Church came into being at the Synod of Debrecen in 1881. After the disunity that followed the Treaty of Trianon (1920), it was not until 2009 that a unitary Hungarian Reformed Church once again covered the entire Carpathian Basin.

Dialects

Like all languages, Hungarian includes *regional variants (dialects)*. Consequently, an examination of the regional structure of culture cannot ignore the various dialect regions. Linguistics classifies dialects primarily on the

1 HUNGARIAN ETHNOGRAPHIC REGIONS (according to László Kósa)
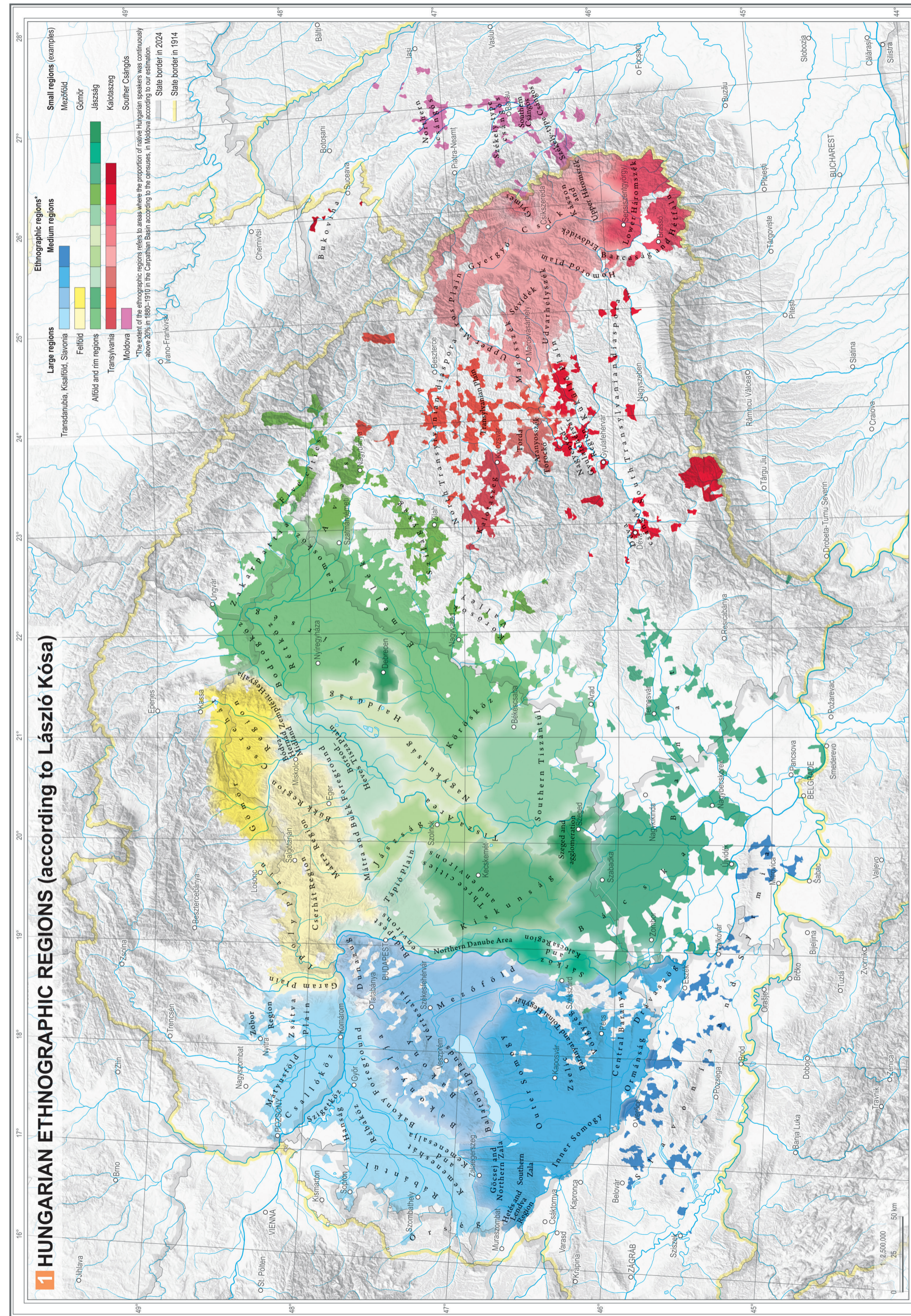
basis of lexical and phonetic differences, and the names given to the various dialect groups are usually linked with geographical place names. Yet, two of Hungary's major *dialect regions* (the Székely and Palóc) are identified by what are essentially folk names. Linguists refer to the culturally scattered Hungarian-speaking groups as dialect islands. Unlike the sharply delineated cultural areas, the dialect regions are characterized by broad transitory areas between individual regions. Moreover, in the Hungarian-speaking area there are 10 linguistic areas (in contrast with the 5 cultural areas) **1**. The biggest difference is seen between the cultural and linguistic regions in the north, where the diffuse border zone of the linguistic Palóc region reaches as far as the Váh/Vág river, while in the east, the Tokaj Mountains already constitutes a transitory zone. In view of the transitory areas, the Alföld dialect areas begin much further south and east: Southern Alföld, the Tisza–Körös and the Northeastern region. The linguistic division of Transdanubia corresponds more or less with the main cultural regional structure, which is also divided into western, central and southern parts. Linguistically speaking, Transylvania comprises the Transylvanian Plain (Mezőség) and the Székely region. Moldova evidently constitutes a special region in this regard too: in addition to their distinctive sounds and morphological features, the Hungarian dialects of Moldova are primarily characterized by the influence of Romanian on vocabulary, having missed out on the Hungarian language innovation of the first half of the 19th century.

Cultural features

In the latter half of the 20th century, it became the consensus in Hungarian ethnography that cultural regions should be defined based on *groups of phenomena* rather than primarily on the basis of regional variations in characteristic phenomena (e.g. dwelling and dance types). Accordingly, whereas ethnographers had for-

merly distinguished separate groups based on striking aspects of material culture (e.g. folk art, clothing), researchers switched to using broader categories of phenomena. In his work published in 1998, *László Kósa* drew a link between the regional structure of culture and peasant urbanization: the most diverse spatial variation occurred during the period of bourgeois social development but before the unifying effects of that development came to fruition at the turn of the 20th century. Kósa listed ten categories of phenomena, which formed the basis for a regional division: clothing, decorative art, housing culture, construction, nutrition, farming, folk music, folk dance, textual folklore and customs/behaviour. Of these phenomena, nutrition had barely been mentioned in earlier analyses, while farming and customs had previously been approached from an exclusively historical perspective **1**.

The greater the number of cultural phenomena included in the analysis, the more evenly the individual branches of folk culture are represented. By extension, the cultural regions established in the course of such complex analysis will be more accurate and reliable than if we were to examine the geographical spread of a single cultural phenomenon. As far as the major subdivisions of culture are concerned, two perspectives can be considered. The first points us to the 26 categories of phenomena identified as the characteristics of culture in complex societies in the series entitled *Hungarian Ethnography in Eight Volumes* (1988–2011). The other directs us to the best-known tool for cross-cultural comparative analysis, namely the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) system, which is associated with the American anthropologist *George Murdock*. The HRAF system characterizes a given culture based on a total of 79 categories, whereby each field can be subdivided into 5–9 subcategories. However, a detailed analysis of subdivisions within a given culture based on all these categories and subcategories has yet to be

completed. The most complex works, the various European ethnographic atlases, contain maps that represent at most a third of the categories of phenomena presented by HRAF (and at most 60–80% of the criteria are listed in the *Hungarian Ethnography in Eight Volumes*). The maps contained in the Hungarian Ethnographic Atlas represent 17 of the 26 categories of phenomena mentioned in the aforementioned series and 23 of the 79 categories presented by HRAF: based on all this, the Hungarian atlas can be regarded as one of the most diverse among the various European ethnographic atlases. A computerized cluster analysis was also performed using the atlas, with the aim of identifying and defining cultural regions in the Hungarian ethnic area.

Therefore, the most accurate view of the regional structure of traditional Hungarian folk culture can be obtained by comparing the following three sources: 1. the geographical, historical-administrative, and linguistic divisions; 2. the Kósa system, which synthesizes the findings of earlier ethnographic research; and 3. the analytical maps of the Hungarian Ethnographic Atlas. In addition, we should also consider a number of cultural aspects (e.g. construction, ceramic art, decorative art, folk music and folk dance) that Hungarian ethnog-

1 *House facade, Nemesvita (Veszprém County, 1964)*

2 *Horn salt-holder with sealing wax decoration (Mernye, Somogy County, second half of the 19th century)*

3 *Chest painted with tulips, Bánffyhunyad (Kolozs County, 1817)*

4 *Earthenware jars, Csákvár (Fejér County, early 20th century) and Nádudvar (Hajdú County, early 20th century)*

raphers have examined in the course of their research, thereby establishing regional patterns covering the entire Hungarian ethnic area.

Among the various aspects of Hungarian folk culture, regional variation in construction type is one of the best elaborated. According to *Jenő Barabás*, who further developed the regional structure outlined by *Zsigmond Bátky* in 1930, the regional variation of dwellings took shape everywhere by the end of the 18th century. Based on the type and number of heat sources and the floor plan of the dwelling, Bátky identified five regional variants, which Barabás later increased to seven, having taken into account roof structure and construction materials. More recently, researchers have also

considered such factors as the location of dwellings and the types of additional buildings. Overall, therefore, a total of 11 criteria *(Iván M. Balassa)* or 19 criteria *(Imre Harkai)* have been identified in the case of larger territorial units **2 1**.
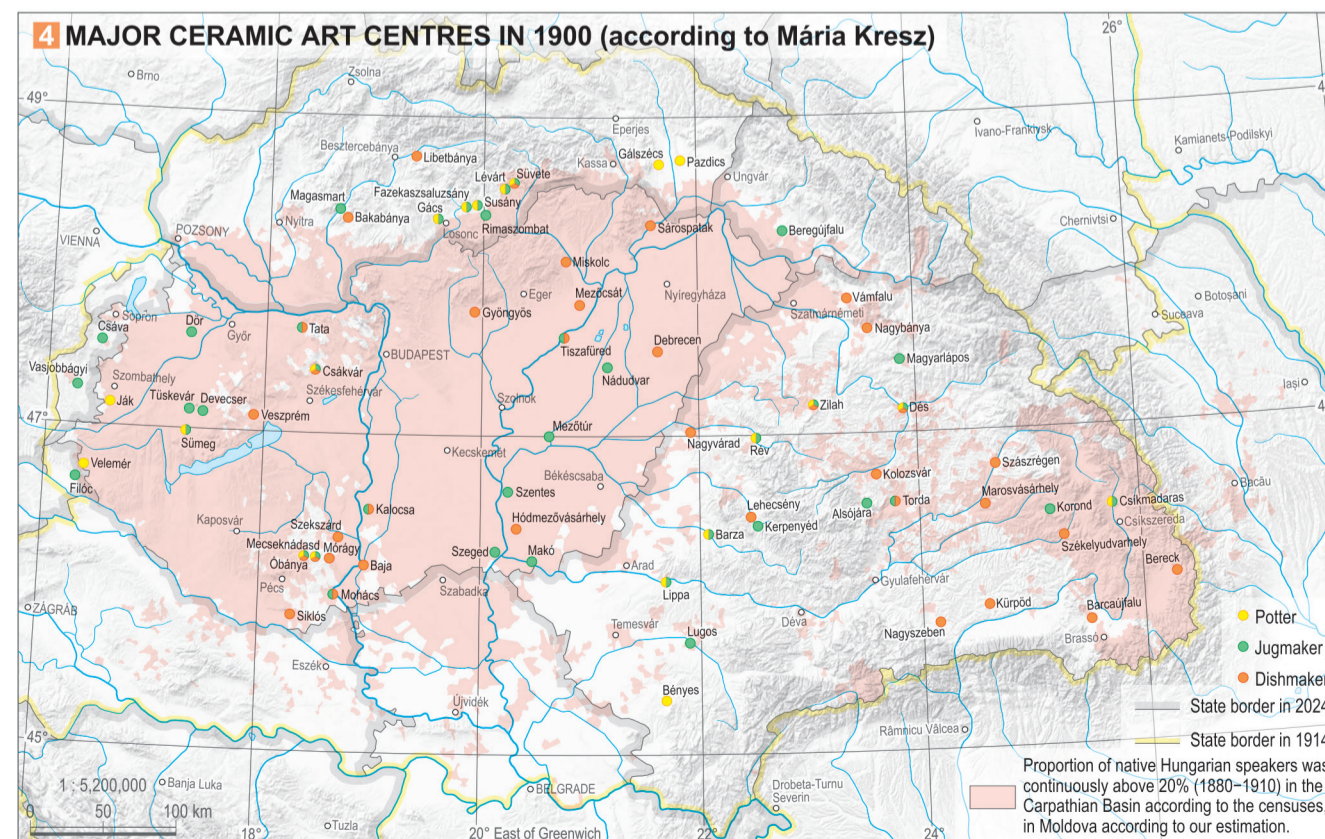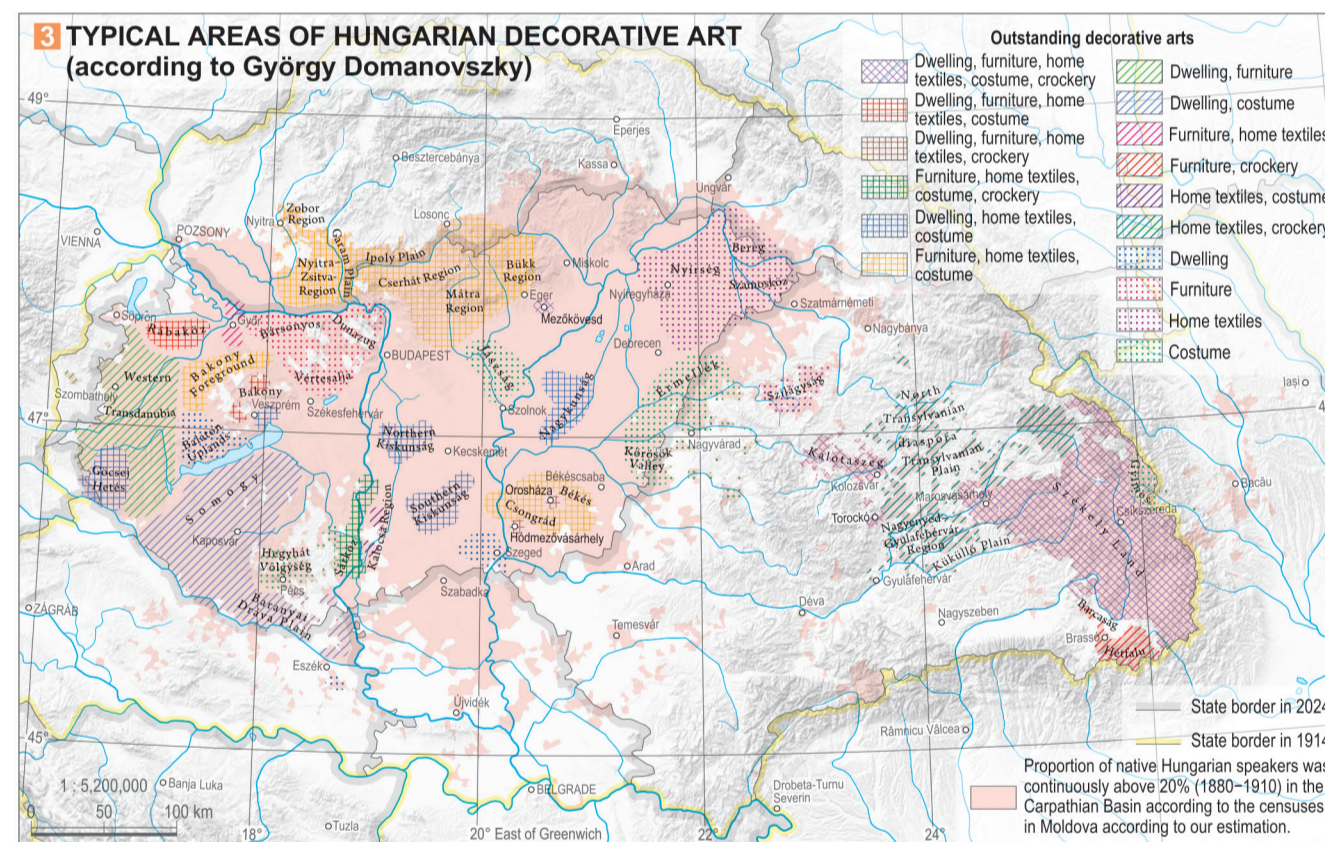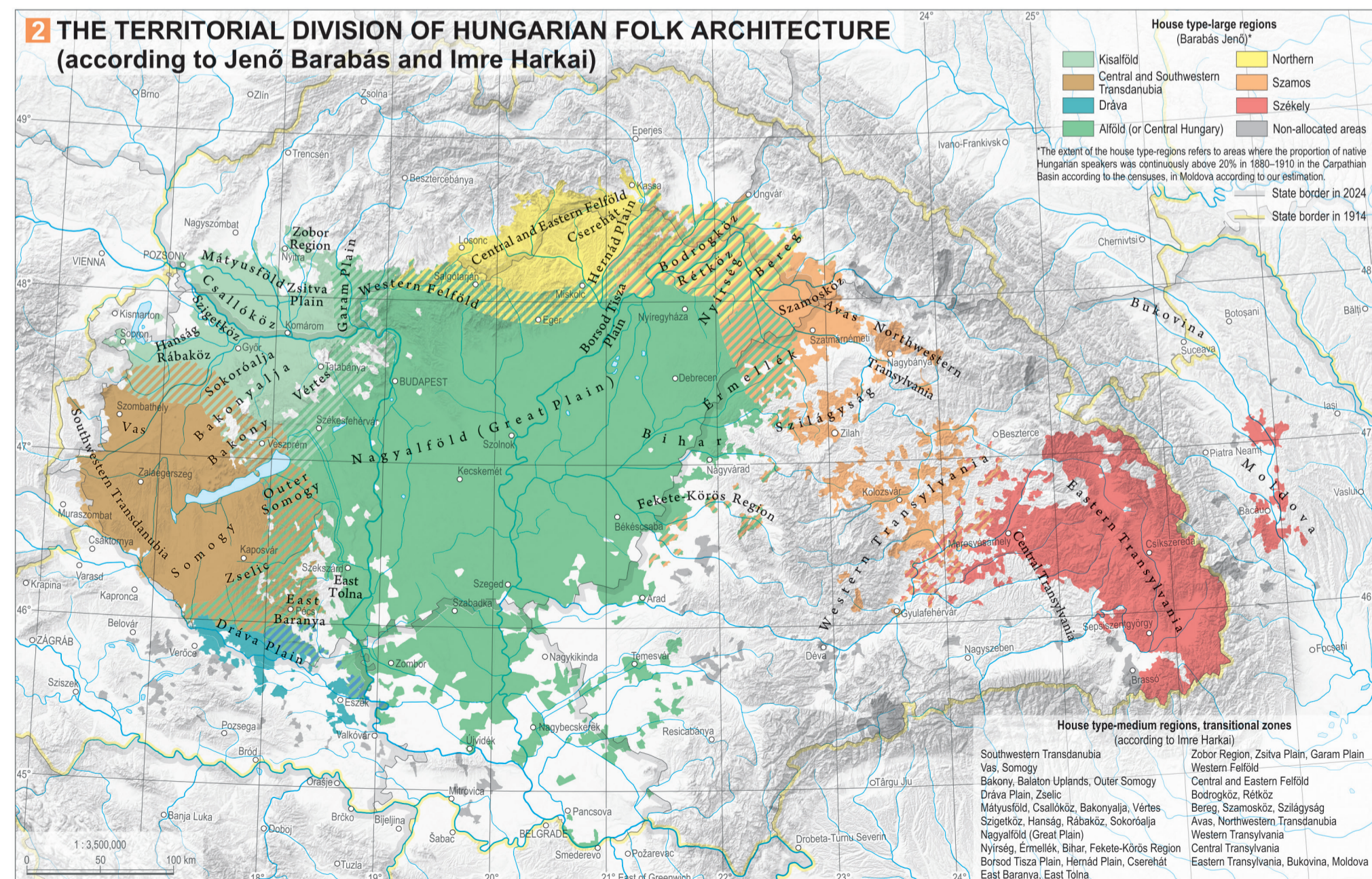
In *decorative art*, it is impossible to develop a spatial variation for the entire Hungarian settlement area. At the same time, certain regional groupings can be made, based on the existence and artistic qualities of extant types of decorative art. In 1981, *György Domanovszky* identified regions where one or more branches of decorative art have outstanding artistic qualities **2 3**. Among these, the most famous are where all five art forms are found in significant quantities, namely in Me-

zőkövesd, Călata region/Kalotaszeg, Rimetea/Torockó and Székely Land, or where three to four of such forms are present: Rábaköz, Bakony, Sárköz, Nagykunság, Kiskunság, Palócföld, Csongrád and Békés **3**.

In 1991, *Mária Kresz* established, during an analysis of *ceramic (crockery) art*, ten regions in the Hungarian ethnic area, doing so based on such criteria as the use of fired or unfired clay, the type of ceramic craftsmanship (potter, pitcher, bowler), the presence and type of glaze, and the decoration. The ceramic regions are: 1. Western Transdanubia, 2. Northern Transdanubia, 3. Sárköz–Baranya, 4. Gömör, 5. Alföld (Mezőtúr and its surroundings), 6. Hódmezővásárhely, 7. Central Tisza region, 8. Upper Tisza region, 9. Western Transylvania–Bihar, 10. Székely Land/Barcaság **4 4**.

Folk music is one of the areas of traditional Hungarian folk culture where a regional structure was noted even by the earliest researchers. Among the three basic styles of folk music (old and new style, mixed), *Béla Bartók* identified spatial variations only in the case of the old-style melodies. Based on melodic characteristics and the number of syllables in a strophe, Bartók established four so-called dialectal regions, which are the same as those in use today (i.e. Transdanubia, Northern, Alföld, Transylvania) **5 6 7**. Subsequent researchers expanded and nuanced Bartók's findings, identifying nine regions based on the strophic melodies; *Lajos Vargyas* and the editors of the Hungarian Folk Music Anthology created an even more detailed regional typology **5**.

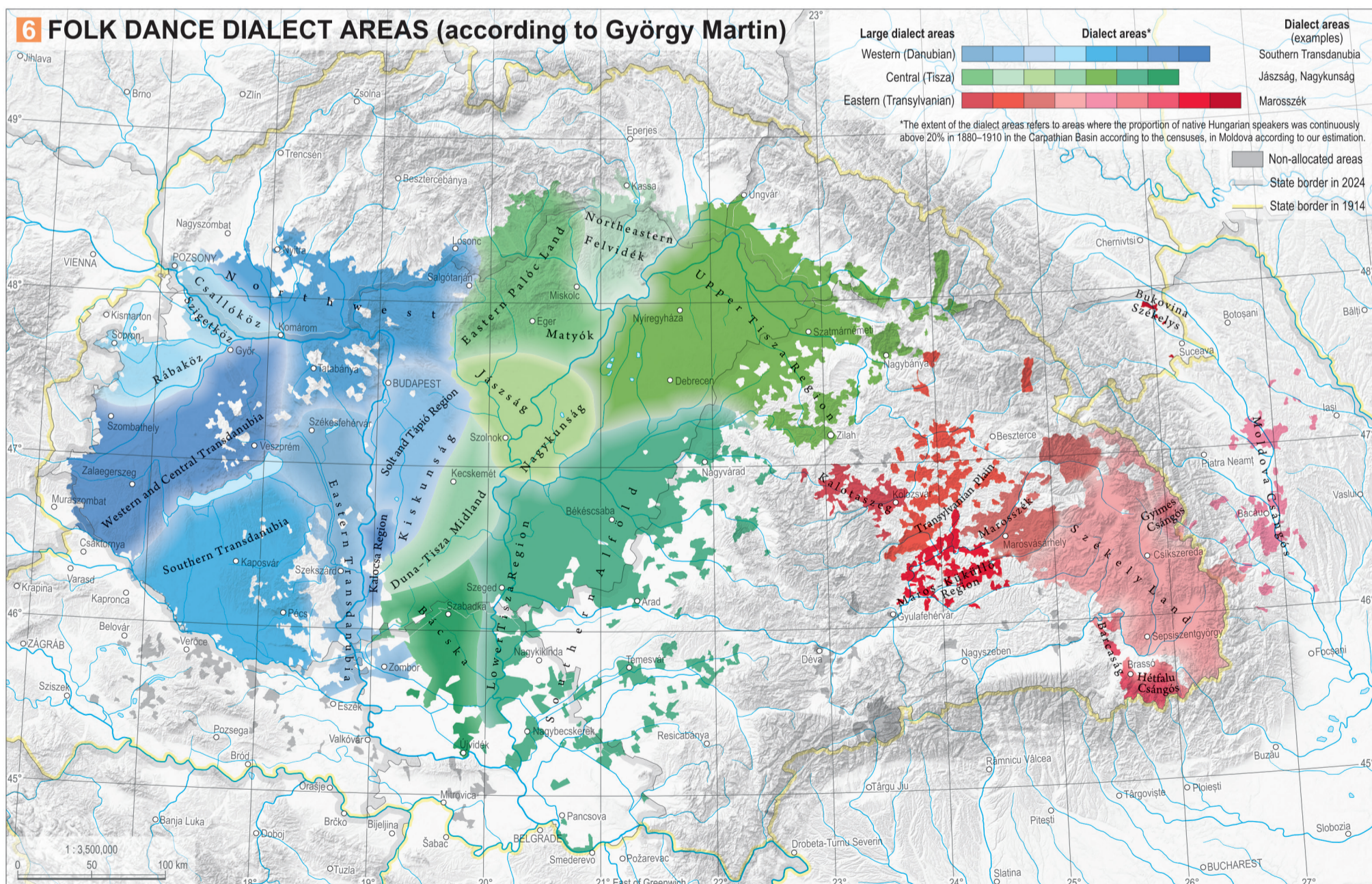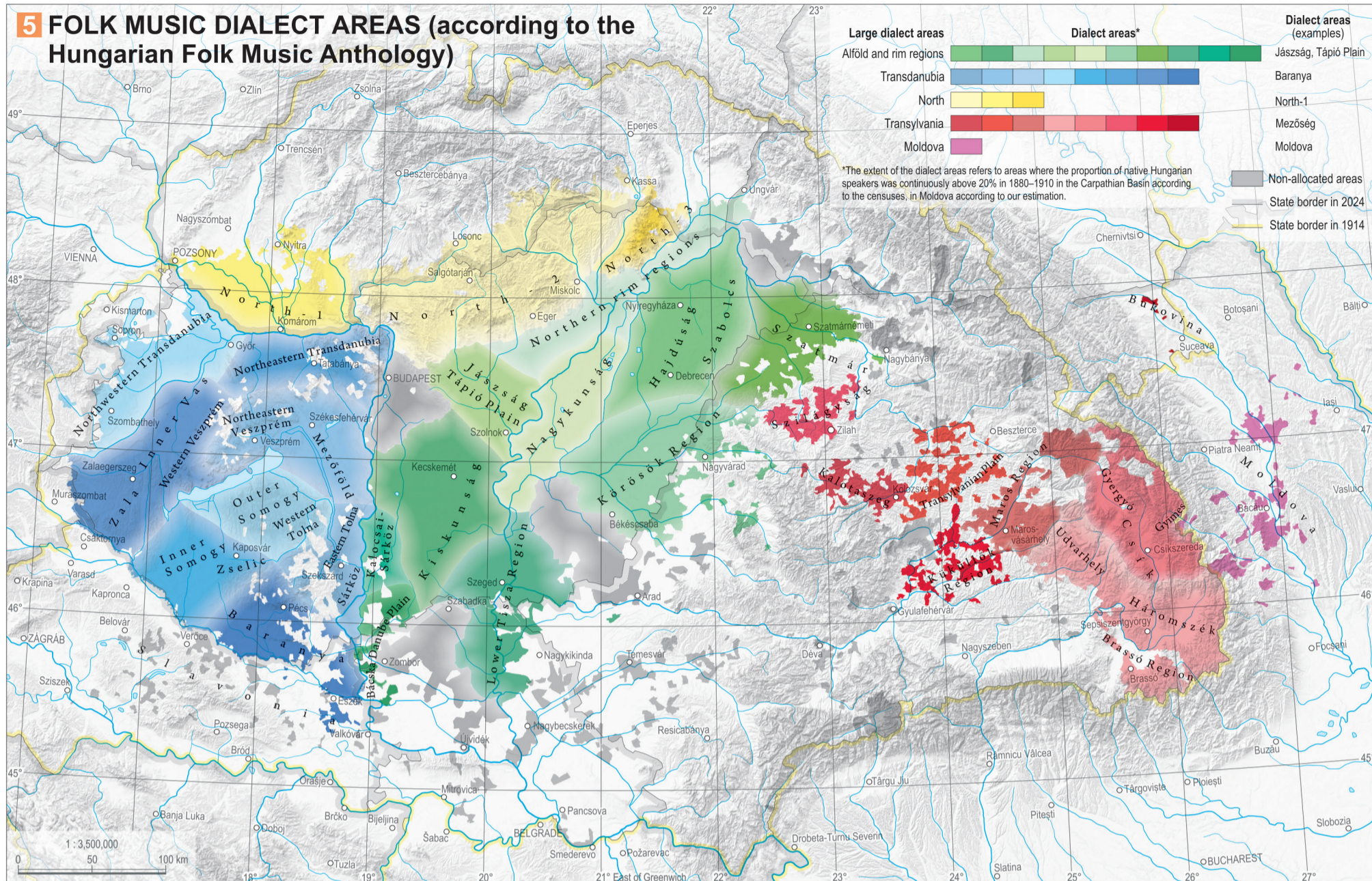In the 1970s and 1980s, *György Martin* summarized the regional structure of Hungarian *folk dance*. Ever

3 TYPICAL AREAS OF HUNGARIAN DECORATIVE ART (according to György Domanovszky)

4 MAJOR CERAMIC ART CENTRES IN 1900 (according to Mária Kresz)

5 *Wind instrument band of the village at play, Kereki (Somogy County, 1967)*

6 *Tambura band in Bácska, Bátmonostor (1966)*

2 THE TERRITORIAL DIVISION OF HUNGARIAN FOLK ARCHITECTURE (according to Jenő Barabás and Imre Harkai)

5 FOLK MUSIC DIALECT AREAS (according to the Hungarian Folk Music Anthology)

Large dialect areas	Dialect areas*	Dialect areas (examples)
Alföld and rim regions		Jászság, Tápió Plain
Transdanubia		Baranya
North		North-1
Transylvania		Mezőség
Moldova		Moldova

*The extent of the dialect areas refers to areas where the proportion of native Hungarian speakers was continuously above 20% in 1880–1910 in the Carpathian Basin according to the censuses, in Moldova according to our estimation.

Non-allocated areas
State border in 2024
State border in 1914

1 : 3,500,000

6 FOLK DANCE DIALECT AREAS (according to György Martin)

Large dialect areas	Dialect areas*	Dialect areas (examples)
Western (Danubian)		Southern Transdanubia
Central (Tisza)		Jászság, Nagykunság
Eastern (Transylvanian)		Marosszék

*The extent of the dialect areas refers to areas where the proportion of native Hungarian speakers was continuously above 20% in 1880–1910 in the Carpathian Basin according to the censuses, in Moldova according to our estimation.

Non-allocated areas
State border in 2024
State border in 1914

1 : 3,500,000

since then, spatial variations have been explored based on this structural foundation. Researchers established the various dialects by looking at the terminology of dance and its role in peasant life, as well as the related musical accompaniments, the structure of the dances,

the motifs, the spatial forms, and regional patterns in the use of dance motifs 8 9 10. Martin himself identified large and medium-sized dialect areas. Although he did not publish a map, the units can usually be clearly demarcated on the basis of his descriptions 6.

Regions of Hungarian folk culture

It should be emphasized that the following description of spatial variation in folk culture relates to the most developed period at the turn of the 20th century. Ow-

7 Musicians of the harvest festival, Porcsalma (Szabolcs-Szatmár County, 1951)

8 Dance greeting the bridal wreath in the Bodrogköz (Alsóberecki, Zemplén County, 1936)

ing to changes and shifts in cultural phenomena, the overall structure has undergone constant change down the centuries. Indeed, the outline given here is also partly the result of historical processes. According to Jenő Barabás, 'certain differences of landscape may be regarded as being nothing more than differences in time'. Developments in the 20th century evidently led to a blurring of regional differences. The regulation of Hungary's rivers in the 19th century meant that such natural obstacles could be overcome more easily. Technological developments and the construction of roads, bridges and railways steadily diminished the importance of topography as a divider. Although the new political and administrative boundaries strengthened the dividing lines, migration within and between countries served to reduce spatial separation. In Hungary, a decline in the roles of the counties accelerated the fading away of spatial differences. Further, a possible outcome of the dominance of mass communication and the use of the standard Budapest way of speaking in the media is the decline of regional language variants, although certain regional variations remain.

Current research defines the regional structure of Hungarian folk culture at three levels: *large, medium and small regions* 7. Some small regions, however, may also include *microregions* covering only a few settlements, which are separated from their immediate surroundings for some reason (insular character, a marked 'we' or 'they' consciousness). There is a consensus in ethnography about the existence of large and small regions (as well as microregions). In contrast, the medium level is regarded as more problematic. It is no coincidence that research at this level has only recently emerged.

Large regions of folk culture

The identification of large regions has been structurally the same ever since the advent of the geographical approach (i.e. since the beginning of the 19th century). The large regions reflect the geographical structure and political-administrative divisions of the Carpathian Basin. The Alföld is separated from the hillier western part of Hungary by the Danube and from the northern and eastern areas by the hills at the edge of the lowland. In addition to the geographical obstacles, the separation of the latter is also supported by hundreds of years of separate administration. A century after these large re-

gions were identified, a fifth large unit lying outside the Hungarian historical borders was defined, relating primarily to the Hungarians living in Moldova 11. Recent computer analysis of the data contained in the maps of the Hungarian Ethnographic Atlas has revealed that in cultural terms Moldova cannot be sharply distinguished from the eastern ethnological area as researchers once had assumed based on the political and linguistic approach. At the same time, however, the Alföld can now be divided into two large regions, with the dividing line running from Lipova in the south via Oradea/Nagyvárad and Debrecen to Miskolc in the north. This line corresponds with the eastern fringe of the area occupied by the Turks as well as with the old boundary between the dense forest zone and the woodland steppe.

When naming the five large cultural regions defined in this way, geographic designations can be used (Western, Northern, Central, Transitional, and Eastern). However, with a view to facilitating their identification, the regions are usually designated by geographical proper names (Transdanubia–Kisalföld, Alföld, Northeastern Alföld or Upper Tisza Region, Upper Hungary, and Transylvania–Moldova). Four of these five large regions form a contiguous series running from west to east: the fifth, exceptional region is Upper Hungary, which is located north of the Alföld. Whereas the other large regions can be easily separated from each other based on geographical, administrative or settlement network factors, the Northern large region (Upper Hungary) is the least clearly defined in terms of both its name and its geographical extent. Indeed, based on some of its cultural aspects, such as folk dance, it does not even represent a separate region. Rather, its territory is split into two parts (along the Zagyva), with western and central dance dialects. Only the Northern large region's northern boundary, which runs along the Hungarian–Slovak language border, is clearly perceptible. The large region's eastern boundary (Bodrog) is less controversial, but the dividing lines in the west and south have been variably identified by researchers according to their respective criteria. The ongoing cultural connections between the uplands and the lowlands (i.e. between Upper Hungary and the Alföld or Kisalföld) may explain the blurring of these two boundaries. The specific circumstances of the Northern large

9 Little girls' round dance, Sióagárd (Tolna County, 1928)

10 Dancing couples, Méra (Kolozs County, 1941)

11 Round dance of Csángó girls, Cleja/Klézse (Bacău County, 1931)

region explain why there is just a single 'point' where, according to both traditional and computer analysis, the three (Western, Northern and Central) regions come together: namely in the agglomeration of Budapest. According to computer analysis, Miskolc, one of the most populous cities in contemporary Hungary, lies near the intersection of the Northern, Central and Transitional large regions.

Medium regions of folk culture

Regarding the various levels below the large regions, it should be acknowledged that research has failed to elaborate a consistent structure embracing the entire Hungarian ethnic area. Even if we focus on the small regions covering a few settlements, there will still be areas that cannot be defined or classified, owing to the deficiencies of research. In such instances, researchers must focus on the geographical aspects. However, a division at the medium regional level is even more problematic. Indeed, it serves more as a tool for organizing the smaller units into larger groups distinguishable based on geography, public law or cultural criteria.

In his synthesis, *László Kósa* divided the Hungarian language area into as many as 26 medium territorial units. Cluster analysis of the cultural phenomena identified in the maps of the Hungarian Ethnographic Atlas determined *18 medium regions* (including Moldova). However, except for Western Transylvania and Upper Hungary, the regional structures of the two divisions do not differ significantly.

Based on geographical and cultural aspects, Kósa divided the *Western large region* into three units: 1. Kisalföld–Western Transdanubia; 2. Southern Transdanubia; and 3. Central and Eastern Transdanubia. Regarding administrative and cultural groups, he separated from these three transitory units the Hungarian language islands in Slavonia. Cultural cluster analysis essentially confirmed this spatial division, but classified Slavonia with Southern Transdanubia, while at the same time showing the population area to the north of the Danube as a separate unit. Although linguistics also distinguishes three dialect regions, the cultural and linguistic boundaries do not coincide. For instance, the Kisalföld region is placed not in the western but in the central linguistic region. Although the Western large region can be divided up geographically, it is more difficult to divide the Central region into well-defined small regions. Indeed, owing to modern social development, folk culture at the turn of the 20th century was more unified here than in the Alföld region. The large regional centres and the centre-periphery relations observed there, cannot be perceived here.

It must have been difficult to define smaller units in the *Northern large region*, for here too, ethnographic research is informed primarily by geographical and linguistic divisions. Although *Fábián Szeder*'s study (1819) on the Palóc ethno-cultural subgroup can be considered the very first work of Hungarian landscape research, the definition of the Northern large region as an area inhabited by this group is still a source of
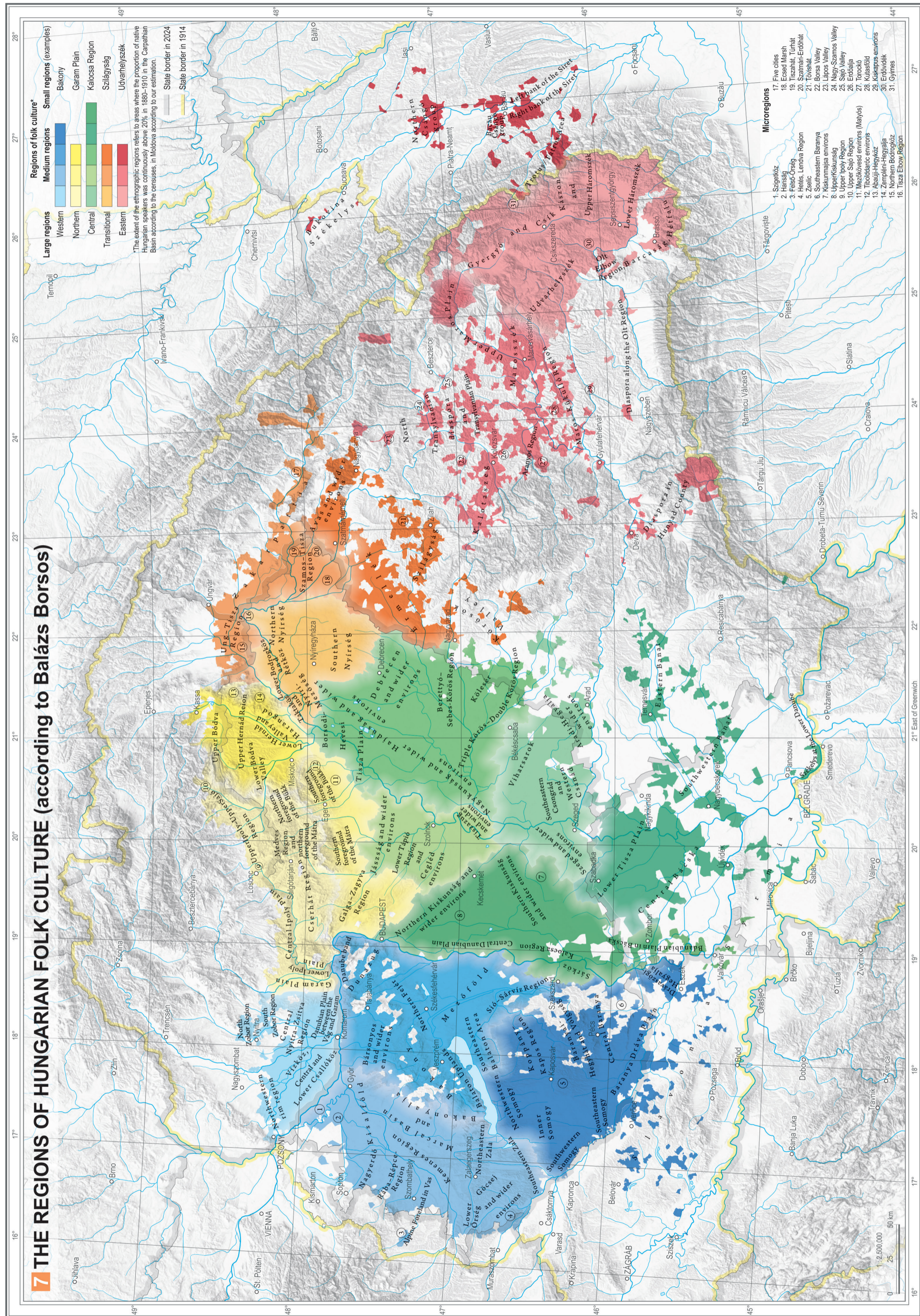
7 THE REGIONS OF HUNGARIAN FOLK CULTURE (according to Balázs Borsos)

12 Hungarians of the Fekete-Körös region, Magyarremete (Bihar County, 1911)

14 Day of the Thousand Székely Girls, Csíksomlyó (Csík County, 1933)

academic debate. Neither its identity as an ethnic group nor its distinct ethnic and cultural character could be convincingly proven. Moreover, the group has never customarily used the term Palóc to name itself; in fact, a linguistic definition seems to have entered the ethnological literature. Employing cultural cluster analysis a cultural boundary could be discovered along the North Hungarian Range, between the culture of the Nógrád–Abaúj Depression and that of the North Alföld.

Unlike the Western and Northern large regions, the *Central large region* exhibits a far more definitive structure at the medium level of ethnographic research, allowing for the identification of large landscape centres as well as central and peripheral areas. These features appeared mainly owing to efforts to preserve feudal privileges as well as during the changes and adaptations that took place during the bourgeois development of the country. The research singled out two large regional centres in the Alföld, with Szeged extending its influence over a much larger area than Debrecen. The 'Three cities' subregion (Kecskemét, Nagykőrös and Cegléd) is not a truly separate area, for it shares multiple features with the Kiskunság region. The territorially separate Jász and Kun (Cuman) privileged territories (Jászság, Kiskunság and Nagykunság) form the heart of a larger unit that also includes the Hajdúság, a region distinct for its military privileges rather than its ethnicity. By synthesizing the results of ethnological research, it is possible to define areas forming the periphery based on geographical factors. Such peripheral areas include parts of the Banat and Bačka/Bácska regions, both of which were officially recognized territories during the 18th century and had a mixed population. (Here, the Tisza district was steadily repopulated by Hungarians.) In addition to the Bácska-Banat area, ethnographic research identified the Danubian Plain, the North Alföld Periphery, the Körösök Region and Southern Tiszántúl as medium units in the central region. Cultural cluster analysis established an essentially similar system, but one that consists of fewer units as medium regions. The Kiskunság, Jászság and Nagykunság–Hajdúság areas form the core of a central region. The former extends westward the Danube, while the latter extends eastward to the Körös rivers and the edge of the large region. South Tiszántúl, the Bácska and Banat regions form separately a medium cultural region.

The *Transitional large region* can be subdivided based on geographical features: both the Nyírség area and its broader environs as well as the northeastern edge of the Alföld are medium regions. The centre of the region is the slightly elevated sandy area of the Nyírség, which is surrounded by a lower-lying plain that is often inundated by floods. Although differences can be perceived in terms of the cultural phenomena (costume, construction, decorative art), the lower-lying part can be further subdivided into small regions based on the natural features (rivers and marshes). Computer data analysis showed that the two banks of the Tisza are also linked with this large region, owing to the adaptation

to a similar natural environment. The peripheral areas of the Alföld extend eastward especially in the valleys of Criș/Körös rivers **12** and as far as the natural geographical boundaries (mountain passes) of Transylvania. However, the Sălaj/Szilágyság region, which lies to the north of the latter, has a mixed Romanian-Hungarian population. Its relief is less pronounced, and it forms a cultural transition towards Transylvania. The Hungarian villages to the west of the Oaș/Avas Mountains and the towns in the Upper Tisza valley are scattered among Romanian and Rusyn populations.

In view of its location and the several centuries of administrative separation, the *Eastern large region* is the most distinct from the other large regions. Furthermore, its ethnic composition also differs (most of its inhabitants are of Romanian ethnicity). In light of the fragmentation of the geographical environment and the insular or dispersed nature of some of the medium and small regions, this region is easier to subdivide into smaller territorial units. Moldova and Székely Land form two medium regions, identified as such not only by historical and ethnographic researchers but also through cluster analysis. Such analysis places the Ghimeș/Gyimes region, Bukovina and the scattered areas along the Olt in the latter region. In essence, Western Transylvania also constitutes a single medium cultural region, although it can be subdivided into several geographically defined smaller units (e.g. Călata region/Kalotaszeg **13**, the Arieș/Aranyos region and Rimetea/Torockó, the Transylvanian Plain, and the Mureș/Maros–Târnava/Küküllő Region). Among these regions, homogenous Hungarian-inhabited areas can only be found in some parts of the Călata region/Kalotaszeg and Transylvanian Plain. In the North Transylvanian areas there are only a few dozen ethnic Hungarian villages. In recent centuries, Southern Transylvania has been inhabited predominantly by Romanian- and German-speaking (Saxon) populations. Here, along the Târnava/Küküllő rivers, in the vicinity of Hunedoara/Vajdahunyad, and in the broader area of the Olt, we find a scattered Hungarian population. The valley of the Upper Mureș/Maros, however, has direct contact with a relatively homogeneous ethnic Hungarian area, namely Székely Land. Although traces of the Székelys (as a military frontier population) can be found in many parts of the Carpathian Basin, it is only here in the Eastern Carpathians that they have a collective identity stretching back centuries. The internal division of this medium region, which was regarded as unified for a long time due to its historical separation, was reviewed based on the administrative units (Ciuc/Csíkszék **14**, Trei scaune/Háromszék, Mureș/Marosszék, Odorhei/Udvarhelyszék), but this sharp demarcation was only partially confirmed by recent research. The Mureș/Marosszék and Odorhei/Udvarhelyszék regions, for example, can be subdivided based on the river valleys rather than on the former administrative boundaries. The Ghimeș/Gyimes region can be considered

a separate small region in view of its upland settlement network and culture. Research traditionally divides the Moldovan Hungarians beyond the Carpathians into northern, southern and Székely-type groups based on language.

Small (and micro-) regions of folk culture

Subdividing areas into small regions and micro-regions depends on the researcher's intention. *Károly Viski* was the first researcher to undertake such a subdivision, and his work bears significance beyond the historical interest. In 1938, Viski identified more than a hundred small units based on ethnographic, 'ethnic', geographical and public legal factors. Among these, there were hardly any that were not then later identified under the same name in subsequent research. Only a very few ethnographic landscapes and smaller cultural units were not mentioned by Viski. There were many that he did mention, at least in passing. Nevertheless, it is still possible to find areas that do not fall under a typical geographic or folk name. In naming them, Viski took the counties as his departure point.

The regional structure produced by the ethnographic study has remained largely unchanged ever since Viski. He brought to the public's attention some new landscape definitions derived from folk culture or rooted in academic research. He did so, alongside his main task: the clarification of groups of criteria and the demarcation of territorial units. In a summary that drew on data from previous ethnographic research, László Kósa identified as many as *90 ethnographic small regions* in the late 20th century. At the same time, researchers of some cultural aspects (e.g. folk music, folk dance) have developed a far larger number of small units (more than 130 in the case of new-style folk music, and at least 140 in the case of folk dance). Cluster analysis of the data contained in the Hungarian Ethnographic Atlas viewed *77 small cultural regions* as typical small-scale divisions. Combined with computerized cross-cultural analysis (also based on the atlas data), the divisions gave rise to a synthesis incorporating geographical, linguistic and ethnographic criteria. In this way, 103 small regions were established, a structure that can be supplemented with another 31 distinct microregions within 15 small regions. However, the latter division is not and cannot be the same as the spatial structure created in the course of the folk cultural spatial research. It is also obvious that *the 103+31 small and microregions defined in this academic synthesis* have not all been researched to an equal degree by ethnographers. It should also be reiterated that this opulent regional structure relates primarily to the 19th and 20th centuries. The changes in folk culture in the 20th century (primarily in the area of material culture) have influenced the development of the various regions and their unification. Although regional differences in the Hungarian ethnic area will probably continue to exist for some time, they are today on a much smaller scale. In future, it may well be that they will reveal themselves only in cultural nuances and will tend to be linked with consciousness.

13 People from Kalotaszeg on their way to church, Körösfő (Kolozs County, 1930s)

NATIONAL ATLAS OF HUNGARY
STATE AND NATION

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