

# BEADWORK OF HUNGARY AND TRANSYLVANIA

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*Beading is a cultural necessity in some rural villages of Hungary and Transylvania, where peasants have used embroidery and beads to lavishly embellish their costumes for hundreds of years. Remaining little changed over several centuries and almost oblivious to beads and beadwork in the rest of the world, the peasants of these villages have slowly evolved their own style of beadwork from thread embroidery and other embellishing methods. Based on field research, this article explores the cultural traditions, rich designs, and techniques of beadwork in four Hungarian villages — three in Transylvania (Romania) and one in southern Hungary.*

## INTRODUCTION

For more than a decade, I have been traveling to Eastern Europe, learning as much as possible about the technology of beadmaking and the customs of beadwork and bead stringing there. I have become particularly fascinated by Hungarian folk arts which in some areas include a continuous tradition of beadwork since the early 1800s.

The purpose of my first trip to Hungary and Transylvania in 1985 was to study Hungarian folk dance. The week-long course, held at the Kölcsey Ferenc Centrum in Debrecen, northern Hungary, included a trip to the Déri Múzeum where a specialist on Hungarian folk costumes gave a lecture and allowed us to see examples from the museum's collection. I was entirely smitten by the beauty and exquisite handwork (embroidery, bead embellishment, etc.) that characterized many of the clothes we saw. And in those moments, part of my heart was captured forever by the Hungarian culture and people. Since then I have returned 11 times with study and field research as a major objective.

Before discussing beadwork, however, it may help to have a little background information about Hungary and Transylvania, both located in Eastern Europe and both under Communist control from the end of WWII until the early 1990s.

Hungary, bordered by Austria, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, the Ukraine, Croatia, and Yugoslavia, is about the size of the state of Indiana, but has double the population of that state. Although the change, in 1990, to free democratic elections and a republican form of government has made some difference in the standard of living there, relatively few people own a car, computer, television, or have a telephone. Although Hungary has had an ongoing program of industrialization since WWII, about one third of its current population still lives in rural villages and towns (*The World Book Encyclopedia* 1998, Vol. 9:438-448).

Transylvania is a mountainous region in the western part of adjacent Romania. Saying "Transylvania" is a little like saying "western states" in the U.S.A. It means different things to different people and is not a recognized area of jurisdiction. It occupies an area of roughly 39,000 sq. mi. (slightly larger than Hungary), and has alternately been controlled by Romania and Hungary.

Because Transylvania is such a loosely defined area, there is no demographic information specific to it, but if we look at the whole of Romania, we get an idea of what Transylvania—which occupies about a third of the country—is like. Romania is 55% urban, 45% rural. During the Communist regime, 90% of the land was taken over by the government which required its former owners to work on collective farms. Recently much of that land has been restored to private

hands (*The World Book Encyclopedia* 1998, Vol. 16:416-427). As measured by private ownership of a car, telephone, and television, Romania has an even lower standard of living than Hungary (*The Dorling Kindersley World Reference Atlas* 1996:453).

Transylvania, primarily a rural area, is occupied by members of four different ethnic groups: Romanians, Hungarians, Gypsies, and Germans. Most of the villages are settled entirely by just one of these groups. Under Communist control from the late 1940s until the overthrow of President Ceausescu in 1989, all minority groups in Romania were restricted from any practices which reflected their ethnic nationality. During this period, the freedom to speak their native tongue in public, to conduct church services in their own language, and to name their children with anything but Romanian names was gradually curtailed. Rebels were severely punished. As we shall see, this had perhaps the reverse effect desired by the government, especially in the villages where the peasants went "underground," developing hidden or secret ways to express and affirm their ethnic identity.

Transylvania has always had a large Hungarian population. Because their roots go back to the early Magyar (Hungarian) tribes which prospered and expanded into the area during the 9th-11th centuries, the Hungarian ethnic minority in Transylvania has very close emotional ties to Hungary (Richardson 1998). Those living in Hungarian villages, and less so those in small towns, struggled and took great risks to maintain their Hungarian identity during the four decades of Communist rule.

Turning now to the subject of beads, one approach to the study of the origins of folk costume and adornment is to study the language. Interestingly enough, the Hungarian word for bead (*gyöngy*) is found in records dating back to the 9th century. You may be surprised to know that the words for coat, trousers, skirt, and stockings did not appear until the Middle Ages (Balassa and Ortutay 1974:315). Perhaps this early use of the word was prophetic, because the Hungarian people of both Hungary and Transylvania appear to love beads.

According to Terézia Baloghné Horváth (1996: pers. comm.), textile and jewelry curator at the

National Ethnographic Museum in Budapest, the gentry and ruling class followed closely the tastes and trends of the upper class in Western Europe. For example, during the late Victorian period, when upper-class ladies of England, France, and the United States were knitting bags with incredibly small beads, so were the upper-class ladies of Hungary. The museum collection, including beaded garments, shoes, small bags, and accessories made in the late 1800s and early 1900s, was the subject of a special exhibition a few years ago.

Although old beadwork of the upper class interests me, it does not hold the same fascination as the peasant beadwork, which is unique, long-standing, and ongoing. I have, therefore, concentrated my field research in the two Hungarian regions which have the most significant beading traditions: Kalotaszeg in Transylvania, and Sárköz in southern Hungary.

For the purposes of this article, it is perhaps important to clarify, that by "beadwork" I refer to jewelry and embellishments made primarily with seed beads, those small glass beads which are affordable by nearly all. I will not discuss work that is primarily strung (as opposed to woven or embroidered); e.g., necklaces of strung seed beads, either one or multiple strands.

## BEADWORK OF KALOTASZEG

Peasants living today in the villages of Transylvania, whether of Romanian, Hungarian, German, or Gypsy origin, maintain many traditions of costume, folk arts, and social customs that originated between 100 and 400 or more years ago. In every village I visited, there is some history and current practice of beadwork, and the use of beads as a costume accessory. The preferred colors, techniques, and designs, as well as the parts of the clothing embellished with beads, vary from one region to another. There is also some variation from one village to another within specific regions. In all of Transylvania, however, there is no region that is more in love with seed beads than Kalotaszeg. I have, therefore, concentrated most of my field research and photography on this region.



**Figure 1.** Residents of Vista, Transylvania, in their everyday clothing, preparing food for a wedding feast (all photos by author).

The Kalotaszeg region includes 60 villages (29 of which have exclusively Hungarian populations) with a population of about 1,000 to 2,000 per village. I have made two extended visits to the Hungarian Kalotaszeg villages of Vista, Méra, and Máko, staying in village homes for about a week each time.

From talking with the village elders, looking at family photographs, and from the very limited written material about the Hungarian villages of Kalotaszeg, it is apparent their beadwork tradition dates to the mid 1800s. At first seed beads were used very sparingly to decorate women's aprons. But soon a taste for bead embellishment began to develop, to the point that most of their costumes are currently lavishly encrusted with beads.

Because bead embellishment replaced embroidery and lace decoration on costumes, it is interesting to know a bit about village and costume history. Here again a lack of written material makes research difficult. I was, however, able to find one book about the region, written and published in Hungary in the early 20th century (Dezső 1907). The paintings in this book suggest that the custom of embellishing clothing with beadwork began in the late 1800s. From drawings of grave markers and yard gates, which often have

dates carved in the wood, it is clear that some of the villages go back at least to 1755 (Dezső 1907). The gates so dated look much like the gates of today, and the names on the markers are Hungarian. This large and beautifully illustrated book provides valuable insight into and appreciation for the continuing traditions (for more than two and a half centuries) of folk costume and folk art in Kalotaszeg.

From the paintings and drawings mentioned above, it is clear that at one time the Kalotaszegi peasants wore their "costumes" daily to work in the fields, to tend their animals, and to cook their meals. Now, however, most of the villagers wear "normal clothes" for everyday work: plain, simple dresses or skirts for the women, and heavy trousers and work shirts for the men. Older folks may wear some elements of traditional dress on a daily basis, and most women still cover their heads with a scarf at all times, as is the tradition (Fig. 1). If you transplanted any of the adults into a metropolitan city, they could immediately be recognized as coming from a village. But not so with the children. From spring through fall, most wear shorts, tee-shirts, and tennis shoes, just like anywhere else. In fact, it is the children, with their knowledge of western ways, the occasional viewing of TV and



**Figure 2.** People of Vista, Transylvania, in Sunday garb.

movies, and their rapt attention to western rock music, who will probably break the traditions over the next generation or two. But now, visit the village church on any Sunday and one will see most of the people dressed in their traditional clothes, particularly the women and girls (Fig. 2).

The woman's costume of today is generally a full skirt of wool challis, pleated all the way down, sometimes smocked or embellished at the top, and trimmed along the bottom edge with wide (1-3 in.; 25-75 mm) machine-embroidered ribbons. The skirt, which opens at the front and ties at the waist, is worn over several underskirts which may be decorated with embroidery, crocheted lace, and/or ribbons. Over the skirt is an apron, which is highly embellished, mostly with bead embroidery and ribbon trim. The apron, skirt, and underskirts are all long, extending to just below the calf (Pl. IA).

There is considerable variation in the blouse, vest, and jacket, depending on the social status and age of the wearer, and the time of year. Younger women tend to wear a white or blue homespun blouse with very dense wool embroidery at the neck, cuffs, shoulders, and down the length of the sleeve. The neck is collarless with a slit down the front and ribbon ties. Over the blouse they often wear a sheepskin vest

solidly embroidered with wool or, in more recent times, a vest of heavy fabric solidly embroidered with seed beads in the same colors and designs as the older style (Pl. IB top and bottom). A boiled wool jacket, decorated with beads and trims, may be worn over the blouse in cold weather.

Young married women tend to wear a long-sleeved blouse of wool challis, trimmed at the neck, collar, and cuffs with ribbon and beads in a similar manner to the apron and skirt. Sometimes a vest, as described above, is worn over this type of blouse, but not always. Young married and unmarried women further adorn themselves with beaded tassels which hang from the center of the waist at the back to the length of the skirt (Pl. IC top), and another type of beaded tassel which hangs from the blouse closure at the neck and/or from the cuff ties (Fig. 3).

The fabric, ribbon, and bead colors depend primarily on the wearer's age. Young women wear bright colors; middle-aged women wear darker shades of the same colors; and old women or women in mourning wear very dark colors (indigo, black, or very dark green).

Prior to the fall of the Communist regime in 1989, the minority people of Transylvania had to "go underground" to protect their ethnic identity and to



**Figure 3.** Young, confirmed (but unmarried) girl from Vista, with headdress and neck and sleeve tassels.

rebel against the government which forbade expressions of cultural identity among ethnic minority groups. One of the ways the peasants of Kalotaszeg did this was to use the colors of the Hungarian flag (red, white, and green) as the predominant colors of their costumes (fabrics, ribbons, and beads) and other decorative arts (painted furniture, linens, pottery, etc.). It was also common to embroider or bead a representation of the Hungarian crest somewhere on most costume pieces. The placement of the crest on the costume was either where it could not be seen (i.e., on the inside of a jacket or vest) or where it could be covered by another part of the costume, such as a scarf, or by the wearer's hands if a stranger entered the village (one who might report the "crime" to the Communist authorities) (Pl. IC bottom).

On my first trip, knowing that I would be going to Kalotaszeg, and hoping to work with women who bead, I gathered many beads from my personal collection to take as gifts. I thought the new Japanese seed beads would interest them, especially the iris and metallic colors (violet, peach, and olive). But when I gave these beads to the village women, I could tell at once by their facial expressions that this selection missed the mark. Later, when we knew each other better, they asked me to bring

them the all-important flag colors (opaque red, white, and green) and a few yellow, orange, and blue beads the next time I came. These basic opaque colors, plus black, represent an estimated 95% of the beads they use on their costumes.

Costumes are worn every Sunday, on religious holidays, and for special events like weddings, confirmation, baptisms, and funerals. Changes and additions are made to the basic costume described above to mark life transitions and identify social status or particular holidays. For example, confirmation (most people attend the Reformation Church, which is a reformed Calvinist Protestant church) is a very important event in a young girl's or boy's life. A girl, once she has been confirmed, wears a special headdress which she makes and embellishes with beads and bead embroidery or bead weaving. Social custom deems that only she may touch her *párta*, as it is called in Hungarian. She wears the *párta* whenever she is in full costume until she marries (Pl. ID).

There are several hair and headwear traditions that come into play during the week or more of marriage activities, culminating at midnight on the eve of the church wedding (as opposed to the civil ceremony which happens earlier). At that time the bride is



**Figure 4.** *Kati néni*, friend and teacher from Vista.

dressed in traditional married woman's clothes and presented to her husband. Only then is she considered really married (Pl. IIA). Her hair is now braided and wound in a coil on her head; a small embroidered and sometimes beaded cap is placed over the coil; a beaded band (either woven or embroidered with seed beads) 2-3 in. (50-75 mm) wide is placed over her forehead; and, finally, a large white scarf of fine netting, decorated with embroidered ribbons and beads, is placed over her head and tied under the chin (Pl. IIB).

One important wedding tradition (which Western women might envy) is that the groom's family is responsible for providing the bride (whom they now welcome into their family) with a minimum of three complete outfits, including beaded aprons, skirts, jackets, vests, headbands, hair covers, and scarves. All



**Figure 5.** *Kati néni* as she looked the day she was married at age 14.

of these are to be made with the greatest care and the best materials available.

The boys and men have similar costume variations. The most interesting costume piece (for those interested in beads) is the man's wedding hat (Pl. IIC top). A fedora-style hat of dark green wool felt is lavishly decorated with beads by the groom's mother or female relative. The crown of the hat is decorated on one side with a beaded plaque about 5 by 5 in. (125 mm) which itself is decorated with beaded flowers (on fine wire) that extend above the crown of the hat. A second beaded plaque, somewhat smaller, adorns the front of the crown. Men and boys may also wear beaded handkerchiefs and/or beaded brooches (Pl. IIC bottom) made for them by the women in their lives (wife, girlfriend, mother, sister) to decorate their



**Figure 6.** An elderly woman of Vista in her pretty room (*szép szoba*).

boiled-wool jackets or vests. It is said the purpose of wearing the beaded pin (over the heart) and the one on the front of the hat is so that the boy or man will keep the woman who made it for him in heart and mind at all times.

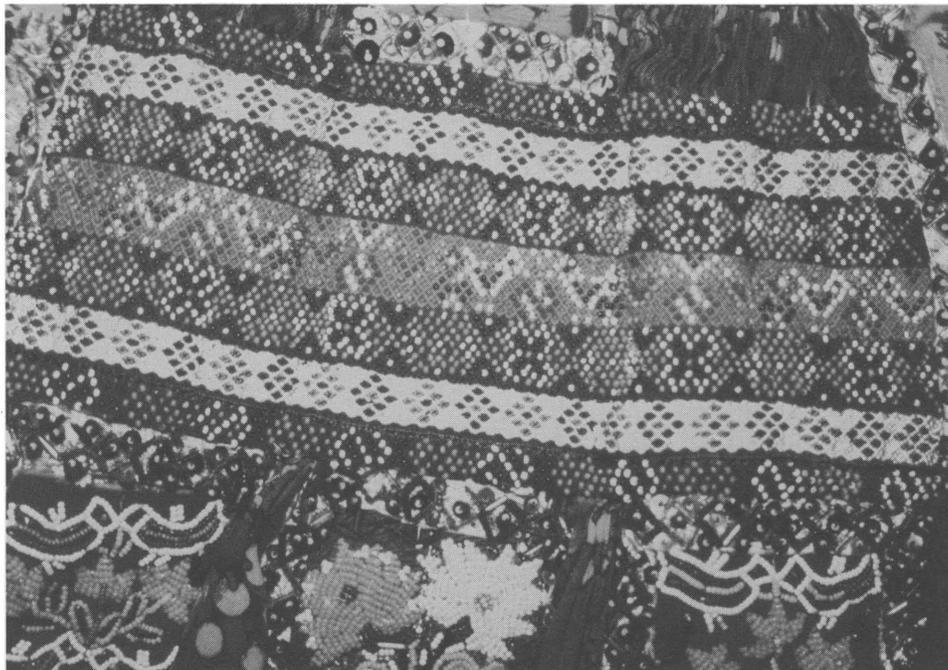
Even the costumes of very old women are embellished with beads. Black seed and bugle beads are embroidered on the collar and cuffs of a dark cotton satin blouse. The apron is moderately or heavily embellished with black beads. The black clothes of women in mourning are also decorated with black beads.

On my first trip to Kalotaszeg, I stayed in the village of Vista because a bead friend in Budapest happened to know a woman there who had an area-wide reputation for her beautiful beadwork. A sweet, generous woman of 72, I called her *Kati néni* (Auntie Kathy) just like all the other younger women in the village who come to her for advice on their beading projects (Figs. 4-5). I spent three wonderful days in her kitchen beading with her. Although I only speak a little Hungarian and she not one word of English, we managed to communicate well with signs, gestures, drawings, and “universal bead talk.” *Kati néni* showed me at least 25 beaded aprons, vests, and blouses that she had made over the years for herself and her daughter. I photographed them, as well as the wedding

hat she had made for her son, her daughter’s *párta*, and much more.

Every woman in the village has at least 10 complete costumes, often many more. Each woman keeps her costumes in a very special room in the house called the “pretty room” or *szép szoba* in Hungarian. In otherwise drab and somewhat primitive homes (they have electricity, but many still use outdoor plumbing and have no running hot water), the pretty room is a totally amazing experience. All the furniture is brightly painted with red flowers (accented by green leaves and small yellow, pink, and/or blue flowers) on a white background. The walls are covered with porcelain plates, each painted differently with predominately red flowers. A bed (for guests) is stacked high with covered pillows, lavishly embroidered, woven, or hand crocheted. Gaily painted cabinets hold her costume treasures, her wedding dowry of clothing. Guests take off their shoes before entering. Husbands stand proudly smiling at the door, rarely venturing beyond the threshold to this woman’s domain (Fig. 6; Pl. IID top).

In addition to photographing much of *Kati néni*’s beadwork, I worked with her to learn and practice some of the techniques they use. Most of the work in Vista is bead embroidery. They use a combination of



**Figure 7.** Netted apron girdle of Vista, showing some parts of the design made with seed beads and other parts made with thread knots.

back stitch and couching, and occasionally lazy stitch. *Kati néni* could see at once that I already knew how to do the stitches, so she began to teach me some of the typical motifs, such as birds, crosses, the letter S on its side (which signifies “eternal love”), and flowers. Red is almost always the predominant color, frequently on a white or black background. Green and yellow are also popular.

One technique of special note is their method of making beaded beads for neck and wrist tassels. A woodworker in the village first makes lathe-turned wooden beads about 1¼ in. (25 mm) in diameter and 2.0 in. (50 mm) in length. Then the top of an old wool sock, too worn to be mended again, is unraveled and the yarn used to cover the wooden bead. Finally, seed beads are sewn to the wool netting using normal bead embroidery stitches (Pl. IID bottom). For smaller beaded beads (wrist tassels and decorations for pins), a small branch is cut into ¾-in. (20 mm) lengths, and each length is wrapped with cloth scraps which are then embroidered with beads. An awl is subsequently used to punch a hole through the center of the wood core so the bead may be strung.

There is another technique which is not currently popular, but worth describing. The aprons always have a decorated horizontal panel (or “girdle”) and one, two, or three vertical panels. The girdle on some of the older aprons (late 1800s and early 1900s) was constructed by making a piece of tight netting, the “walls” of which were relatively thick. The netting was woven with a needle, the same way needle lace is made, using a heavy black or red thread with a silky sheen. The finished netting was appliquéd to a backing fabric and then embellished with French knots made with colored embroidery thread. A design was created by filling only certain of the holes with the knots. In later versions of this style of apron girdle, seed beads were sewn (using the seed or single stitch) in the holes of the netting where formerly there had been French knots. In some panels, there was a combination of knots and beads. A local woman explained that if a certain color of bead needed for the design was not available, the maker would substitute knots of the correctly colored thread (Fig. 7; Pl. IIIA top).

On the first trip, I also visited two other villages in the Kalotaszeg region, Méra and Máko. One woman



**Figure 8.** *Máko Kati néni* demonstrating her technique for making a woven panel with seed beads.

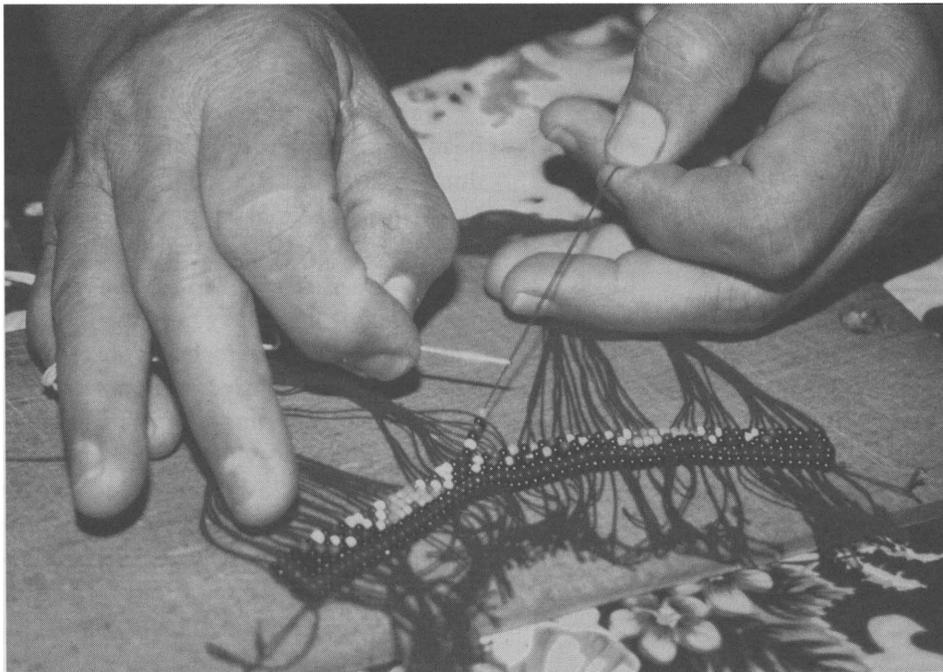
would introduce me to another. I would be invited into the pretty room of each to see and photograph their most prized embroidered linens, costumes, and beadwork. (I got so low on film, I sometimes had to fake the photography so as not to hurt anyone's feelings.) The costumes and beadwork of Méra were very similar to those of Vista. For example, in both villages, modern aprons were embellished using techniques of bead embroidery. But in Máko, a different technique predominates: beadweaving. Apron girdle panels, wedding hat plaques (Pl. IIIA bottom), and the back panels of the headdresses appeared to be formed of loom-woven beads, rather than bead embroidery as in the other two villages. Luckily, I eventually met *Máko Kati néni*, an elderly woman of Máko, who is reputed to be the best beader in her village. She showed me the technique she uses to

make these panels, which I now refer to as "false loom work" (Figs. 8-9).

False loom work looks exactly like loom woven beadwork. If you took it apart, you would think it was done on a loom. But it is not. The technique is fast (*Máko Kati néni* claims she knows about looms and her way is faster) and well-suited to the wide pieces (which are difficult on a loom because of limited needle length). A heavy cord the width of the finished work plus a couple of inches is tacked onto both ends of a board. The warp threads are cut double the length of the finished piece plus several inches and tied over the cord, dangling loose off the board. The weft thread is threaded through a beading needle and used double. One bead at a time is put on the weft thread, and the warp thread next to it is pulled through the doubled weft. The pattern emerges one bead at a time, which eliminates the problem in loom work of misloading the row. Watching *Máko Kati néni* work, I was amazed at how fast she was, even with her arthritic fingers and lack of good glasses.

As I visited pretty rooms, looking at 10 to 20 costumes at each stop, I began to see a pattern, the developmental history of bead lust in Kalotaszeg. Why there and not in the villages of the surrounding regions? Women in nearby regions string and wear many beads around their necks, but only in Kalotaszeg do they spend so many countless hours sewing beads on their clothes and accessories. Perhaps, looking at the older costumes, still kept lovingly in the pretty rooms, the clue is in their passion for embellishment, period. Before beads, they covered their aprons, blouses, skirts, and vests with hand embroidery. *Kati néni* said that when times were hard and they had no money to buy machine-embroidered ribbons (made in Slovakia), they simulated machine-made ribbons by hand embroidering intricate flower designs on satin fabrics. The amount of time and effort was not important, so long as they could embellish their clothing.

It may be that some beautiful young girl, upon seeing beads on a rare trip to a larger town, was inspired to use them to decorate her confirmation apron. Others, seeing her apron, copied her, and over the decades which followed, bead embellishment slowly took over and dominated all other methods of decoration. So attached are the Kalotaszegi



**Figure 9.** Close-up of *Máko Kati néni* demonstrating her technique.

inhabitants to their beaded costumes and accessories that they refuse to sell them at any price. When I asked *Kati néni* and others to help me find some examples to buy, they could only direct me to those who had poor-quality work or damaged pieces.

The following story illustrates just how strong the bead passion of the locals is. During the 45-year period of Communist control after WWII, the freedoms of peasants were greatly restricted, and the country as a whole was extremely poor. Ordinary citizens, including peasants, were not allowed to leave the country for any reason. In the towns, stores were nearly empty. Every day men and women stood in long lines to buy basics like bread and meat. Glass seed beads, ribbons, and other supplies used to decorate their costumes were not to be found or bought anywhere in Romania. So, the resourceful women of Kalotaszeg found their own solution.

When supplies were needed, they chose several brave young girls to make their way to Czechoslovakia (the present-day Czech Republic), where they bought as many beads and ribbons as they could carry back home. They traveled by foot and hitched rides with farmers, crossing the borders illegally at night (not on the roads, but across fields in unpopulated areas).

These trips were dangerous and long (sometimes taking several weeks), especially for young women. But it was they who had to go because if men or boys, or perhaps even older women, were caught crossing the border, extremely stiff punishment (perhaps death) would follow. Young girls seemed less likely to be noticed (caught), and more likely to be let off the hook if they were.

## BEADWORK OF SÁRKÖZ

As in Transylvania, the peasants of rural villages in Hungary have also maintained some of their traditional costumes, folk arts, folklore, and social customs over many decades. The roots of their folklife can be traced back two or more centuries in some cases. There is much less current practice than in Transylvania, however.

In several regions of Hungary, there is evidence of a tradition of broad collars woven with seed beads and worn by women of all ages. The Ethnographic Museum in Budapest and several small-town historical museums have examples of these broad collars, dating to the mid and late 1800s. For the purposes of this



**Figure 10.** Wedding parade in Decs, in the Sárköz region of southern Hungary.



**Figure 11.** Closeup of the young unmarried women in the wedding parade.

article, however, I will only discuss the broad collars from the region of Sárköz because there it is still very much a living tradition for women to dress in costume

and wear their beaded collars on special occasions. This tradition has been more or less lost in other regions in recent decades.

Sárköz is a region in southern Hungary along the Danube River. Its rich land, plentiful water, and long growing season make this area ideal for double-crop farming. For this reason the local peasants are wealthy in comparison to those in other parts of Hungary. They have money for quality fabrics, trims, beads, and other decorations for their clothing. And perhaps more important, profitable farming means that the young people stay around to carry on the traditional way of life there.

The women of the region don't use seed beads to embellish their clothing. Rather, for more than 100 years, they have been making netted broad collar necklaces to wear with their costumes. Girls, from the age of two or three years, and women up to middle-age wear them.

I visited two of the villages in the region (Decs and Ócsény) on two different trips, attending a wedding festival each time. Every other summer, in celebration of their regional heritage, the village leaders organize this festival. A young girl (who wishes to have a very publicly celebrated wedding) is chosen to be married as part of the week-long festivities. Everyone wears their most beautiful costume and beaded collar. There are folk dances, exhibitions, a folk art market, and a big wedding parade (Figs. 10-11).

As one method of researching the costume traditions of Sárköz, I asked people to show me their old family photographs and old costumes (Fig. 12). Although each village has its own variations of the beaded collar, the style and manner of wearing them has remained constant over the past three generations.

Generally, children and young girls wear their beaded collars over the simple "jewel neckline" of their blouse (*see cover*). But as they get to marriageable age, or as young married women, they often wear a fabric "ruffle" over the necklace so that only the bottom one or two rows of it can be seen (Fig. 13; Pl. IIIB). The reason for the ruffle (as well as the lace-topped band on many of the broad collars) is because women were not allowed to show their necks in the previous century, and that rule apparently became a custom carried into modern times (Balogné Horváth 1983:22).

The broad collars of the region are made using a horizontal netting technique. Size 10° seed beads are



**Figure 12.** A wedding couple in Decs, 1950. Note that the woman's costume is very similar to that used in the present-day ceremony.

the most commonly used, though I have seen collars made with size 9° and 11° beads, as well as combinations thereof. The first row is either a string of beads about the size of the wearer's neck or, more commonly, a fabric band which is embroidered with seed and bugle beads, or occasionally, a flat peyote stitch band. Subsequent rows are worked horizontally, making loops of odd numbers of seed beads and sometimes bugle beads (generally five to nine for each loop in the first row). Threading back for the second row, each new loop is sewn through the center bead of the loop above it. Each subsequent row is made the same way, except that the number of beads per loop in each row is gradually increased so the collar will spread in a circle. The total number of rows depends on



**Figure 13.** Young bride from Decs wearing the typical-style collar, partially covered by a ruffle.

the wearer's age and size, but generally about eight or nine rows are made. The finished necklace is tied in the back with ribbons.

One interesting variation of this broad collar has "twisted" loops (Pl. IIIC top). It looks hard to make, but is actually not too difficult. When a loop in the current row is joined to the one above it, the needle is inserted into the bead in the reverse direction from that row's construction. Another variation, seen in the village of Ócsény, has double loops which intertwine with each other (Pls. IIIC bottom and IIID top).

The colors of the beads used for these collars depend on what is available, and the age and personal taste of the wearer. Necklaces worn by children and young women are generally brightly colored, with each row being a different color. Most have a row in

each of the Hungarian flag colors (red, white, and green). Sometimes a flower pattern is established at each loop intersection; sometimes larger (size 6") beads are used for the center bead of each loop (Pl. IIID bottom). Older women tend to wear darker-colored or black beads.

Although buying beads was never as difficult in Hungary as it was in Transylvania, the peasants didn't have bead stores the way we do. From the early 1900s until just recently, there was only one source of beads in the whole country. That was in Budapest at a sewing-trims and button shop. In all the visits I made to this shop, they never carried more than three colors of size 9" or 10" beads at one time. When those colors were sold out, the store would order some other colors. That means peasants from Sárköz would have to buy beads on every trip to Budapest (a day's journey, and very few had an automobile) and share with others in the village or region in order to accumulate the palette of colors needed for their broad collars.

## CONCLUSION

Beadwork in Eastern Europe is a wide-open topic, ripe for research and documentation. Most of the countries have some rural populations that maintain at least part of their traditional folk arts, including bead-embellished costumes and beaded accessories. Yet, as these countries modernize and exposure to modern and western influences increases, the folk traditions are in danger of being lost.

Although museums are an important source of information about and house examples of these traditions, I have noticed that often their beadwork collections are very sterile. Techniques, social customs, and individual variations are lost in the dust of the storage boxes and shelves on which they are kept. Sometimes the recorded information is misleading or incorrect. For example, at the ethnographic museum in Gura Humorului, Romania, beadwork and costumes from the Hungarian village of Vista (well known to me) were simply and incorrectly identified as "Romanian costumes."

Fortunately, in the villages themselves, women recognized as accomplished beadworkers are teaching their techniques and designs to younger village women and sometimes field researchers from large urban centers

like Budapest. Visiting artists and researchers, in turn, are teaching others at folk-arts camps, in studios, and in homes. Through these efforts, many of the techniques are being kept alive along with the relevant cultural history. It is certainly one of my greatest lifetime pleasures to have studied and learned in the homes of village elders in the villages described above.

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