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THE ULYSSES OF SZOMBATHELY

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There were two people in early 20th century Trieste, who were deeply involved with the *Odyssey*: James Joyce and Marino de Szombathely. Although they were not friends, they nevertheless met on occasions, exchanged views and voiced their opinions in debate. They, of course, were colleagues: Joyce had been teaching at the Berlitz School, de Szombathely at the Dante Grammar. Szombathely was deeply involved in translating Homer's *Odyssey*; making notes, writing explanations, trying to achieve perfection in transplanting the 'great work' from the original Greek into Italian. His translation of the *Odyssey* first appeared in print in 1920, published by Capelli at Bologna. A number of further editions followed, while in various essays he returned time and again to the subject, trying to identify the places featured in the *Odyssey* and clarify many of its concepts. His essay 'The Return of Ulysses' (*Il ritorno di Ulisse*) was also published as a book. At the same time as Marino de Szombathely, James Joyce worked on another interpretation of the story of Ulysses. His hero makes his long journey, covering thousands of miles and many years in just 24 hours. His travels are not on the high seas; the commercial traveller Leopold Bloom roams the streets visiting the various offices and inns in the city. We may consider that one *Odyssey* originated from Szombathely, the other, Leopold Bloom, out of Szombathely. One of the inspirations for Joyce, without a doubt, must have been Marino de Szombathely, and conversely, Marino de Szombathely may have pondered upon and seen a parallel between the wanderings and journeys of *Odyssey* and his own ancestors. So, just who were the Szombathelys, usually referred to in Trieste in the early 1900's as "the Hungarians" (*gli ungheresi*)? Marino de Szombathely's son, Gabrio, keeps notes on the family's history. Although he had a suspicion of his ancestors originating from Szombathely, Hungary, but using the archives in Trieste, he could trace his family back to the 1780's only. However, according to the documents available in Hungarian archives, his ancestors really did come from Szombathely! In 1632, János Szombathely, who at that time lived "in his Majesty's almshouse" at Győr, sold his deserted quarter-house in Karicsa, situated outside the town gates at Szombathely. He was granted his own coat of arms by

Ferdinand III in 1644, and his descendants gained titles and - through marriage - large estates around Érsekújvár [today Nove Zamky, Slovakia] and at Kolta. It was Gáspár János Szombat-hely, grandfather of Marino, who established the Italian branch of the family. He was born at Temesvár [today Timisoara, Romania] in 1811, where his father had been posted by the army, but the son, also a soldier, had settled in northern Italy. According to his army discharge papers he was fluent in both Hungarian and German, but spoke some Italian and Wallachian. The family, after short intervals in various towns, first moved to Padova and later settled in Trieste. Both Marino de Szombathely (1890-1972) translator and literary historian, and his son, Gabrio, the now 85 year-old lawyer and historian were eminent and well-respected members of the Trieste community. The Szombathely (Szombathelyi) family have, over the centuries, established a number of branches (Győr, Békés, Komárom, etc.). The branch which remained in Szombathely gave a number of mayors to the town in the late 1600's and the early part of the 18th century. However, after the great plague of 1710-11 their name disappears from the records, possibly becoming victims of the pestilence and the family died out. The Italian branch originates from the Szombathelys of Kolta in Upper Hungary. In the 19th century the branch had taken the noble title of 'szemereharaszi' and they have consistently wrote their name as Szombathely and not ending with the letter 'i' - as Szombathelyi. In the village, with mainly Slovakian inhabitants, the older residents still remember the "öreg naccságára" or 'old lady'. When Mrs. Szombathely, nee Katinka Várady died in 1968, at the age of 91, their 'kúria' became derelict and was demolished. According to local people, their descendants now live somewhere in France. Today only a stone cross between Kolta and Szemere [today Semerovo, Slovakia] marks the spot where once the manor-house stood. However, the area to this day is referred to as 'Szombathely'.

For Joyce not only the Szombathely family represented the Hungarians. Before the First World War there had been a Hungarian club in Trieste; under the guidance, for a number of years, of Rácalmási Adolf Frigyessy, chairman of one of the local insurance companies (RAS). Judging from his name, one could assume that he came from an ancient Hungarian noble family, however, the family's tomb in Trieste can be found in the Jewish cemetery. The annals of the Trieste Hungarian club record the

names of its office-holders, at least two-third being Jewish, while the premises were located in the near vicinity of the synagogue.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries a great number of Jewish families moved to Trieste, which was a major port and centre of commerce, from all parts of the Monarchy. Western Hungary and Szombathely were no exceptions. It was mainly through their efforts and sacrifice that Trieste's new synagogue was built in the early years of the 20th century. The Jews of Trieste, some of whose family originated from Nagykanizsa, Szombathely, Rohonc and Székesfehérvár not only saw great opportunities in trade, industry and commerce, but also in insurance, whose agents - like Leopold Bloom - were familiar sights in the city and had been immortalised by Joyce. According to the novel, his father lived in Szombathely and his uncle in Székesfehérvár.