

Source material for Hungarian prehistory



The latest volume of the *Hungarian Prehistory Series* (Vol. 16) edited by András Róna-Tas contains a new, critical analysis of some of the written sources essential for the study of Hungarian prehistory. The volume's editor has devoted several studies as well as a new monograph to the study of Hungarian prehistory in the past ten years. Professor Róna-Tas beside offering conceptual clarification as well as a brief survey of the previous materials has come up with several new conceptions. It has at the same time become evident that the old and obsolete publications of the relevant sources prevents us from solving the problems that emerge concerning Hungarian prehistory. Moreover, a considerable number of relevant materials have never been published with a usable Hungarian translation and explanatory notes. This volume intends to meet this long-felt need. In addition to a lengthy editorial introduction there are six considerable sources as well as passages from different sources in bilingual form with philological and historical commentaries. The passages are of various genres (including geographical work, letters and passages from an almanac) and they were written in different languages (Armenian, Latin, Hebrew) in different eras, in different geographical, political, religious and social status.

In the first part of his introductory study, the editor tries to dispel the misconception that there are no written sources of Hungarian relevance preceding the migration to the Carpathian Basin. He also mentions that there are no authentic sources written by Hungarians either in Hungarian or any other languages (for example: Latin or Greek) dating back earlier than the eleventh century. As a result, those who do research on Hungarian prehistory are compelled to be satisfied with the accounts of neighbouring peoples written in foreign languages. However, Hungarian research is behind in the critical publication and analysis of these source materials. Regarding some sources such as Byzantine, Latin or Slavonic ones the situation is not as grave as in the case of Hebrew, Armenian and other sources of minor importance (Syriac and Georgian), where shortcomings are considerable. In the second part of his introduction, Róna-Tas surveys the problems raised by the sources contained by the volume.

The Armenian accounts belong to the unexploited sources of Hungarian prehistory, which is rather surprising since Armenian literature rose quite early and focused not only on Armenian issues but contain information about nomadic steppe peoples migrating to the North of Caucasus. Maybe, the most important of these writings is the *Ašxarhac'oyc'* (*Description of the world*) dating back to the seventh century, which is actually a geographical description of the world in accordance with ancient Greek traditions. In the present volume the passages regarding steppe peoples (earlier attributed to Movses Xorenac'i and Pseudo Movses Xorenac'i but these days to Ananias Širakac'i) were prepared for printing by Ágnes Paulik. In 1992, Hewsen's critical edition allowed us to deal with the text on its merit. The work has a longer and shorter version. After describing the ancient background to its genesis, Paulik discusses the manuscripts, its publications as well as the relevant and most important literature both of the longer and shorter versions. Then she tries to specify the author and the date of origin. Paulik accepts Patkanean, Hewsen and others' opinion about the date of origin (seventh century). (The longer version was finished no later than 636.). After describing the sources, Paulik gives a brief summary of the text and discusses the short and long versions' fundamental differences. Only after this can we go on to read the Armenian texts of the European Sarmatia, Thrace and Asian Sarmatia. The chapters are arranged in two separate columns with the relevant parts of the longer and shorter versions on the even-numbered pages and the Hungarian translation on the odd-numbered pages. While the philological commentaries can be found in footnotes, the historical commentaries are in endnotes. One of the most interesting pieces of information refers to Turks. According to Marquart the Turk name might relate to Hungarians but several historians have refused this opinion. Both Paulik and Róna-Tas leave it as an open question.

Another source, the *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum* – treated by Péter Kiss – is of great importance because it is an essential geographical and ethnic source about the Carpathian Basin in the late ninth century. It includes numerous ancient, Slavonic as well as Bavarian proper-names and place-names, some of which might be of Turkish (Avar) origin. It also mentions Metod's work, as well as principalities of Pribina and Kocel. The new Hungarian translation is based on Fritz Lošek's latest edition which also includes a hitherto unknown manuscript published in 1997. The book consists of 14 chapters and beside a list of the bishops and abbots in Salzburg it describes the clerical and secular history of Carantans' region, the fights between Bavarian and Slavonic people, and the proselytizing work in Pannonia. This latter content might be worthy of our attention. Kiss mentions the date (c. 870), circumstances as well as the importance of the genesis of the text. He gives a full analysis about the textual tradition, some of the manuscripts and how they relate to each other. Among the inserts he also includes the presently known manuscripts' stemma. Kiss, of course, mentions the historic relations of the *Conversio* focusing on the issue of Pannonia's boundaries. Analyzing Pannonia's population of the period, he argues that the territory which according to the *Conversio* was dominated by Avars was actually occupied mainly by southern Slavonic peoples. In the interest of an easy survey and fur-

ther research Kiss has enclosed an individual insert containing Pannonia's place and personal names. The bibliography is followed by the original Latin version of the text (chapters 10 to 14), then by the new Hungarian translation

The next source is a letter written by an archbishop in Salzburg called Theotmar to Pope John IX. András Fejérdy translated and prepared the letter for printing. The letter's authenticity had been disputed for a long time but later it was accepted as genuine both by international and Hungarian scholars. Since the letter was written 30 years after the *Conversio*, it includes the Hungarian conquest thereby increasing the value of Theotmar's letter. It contains several essential direct and indirect pieces of information about the conquest; for example, the Hungarians' military expedition to Italy in 899–900 is mentioned in it. Besides, it describes the nomadic contract making traditions used by the Hungarians. Moreover, we are directly informed about the Hungarian and Moravian relations. The letter deals with the issue of the Church's legal authority in Pannonia and Moravia. The background to the letter is a dispute over diocesan boundaries between the archbishopric in Salzburg and the bishopric in Passau. In this letter Theotmar wanted to prove the privileges of the archbishopric in Salzburg. Besides, Fejérdy mentions the fake documents written by Pilgrim, bishop of Passau, aimed at proving Passau's privileges. Theotmar's letter was also found in a collection of fake documents. Fejérdy takes stock of the surviving documents and gives an outline of the two possible stemmas of the documents' bequeathing. Then he writes about the circumstances of the letter's origin, historical background, its author and addressee, date as well as the issue of authenticity in detail. Fejérdy makes philological, linguistic and historical comments on the Latin and the Hungarian versions.

András Németh analyzed a letter written to Dado, the bishop of Verdun. The letter is actually a commentary on Ezekiel and it is one of the first letters that describes western Christianity's information about a people called '*Hungri*' and about its supposed origin. It relates the Hungarians' '*Hungri*' name used in western Europe with the word '*hunger*', and it outlines the peoples' origin on the basis of this dilettante etymology. The source material is of great importance from the point of view of Hungarians but it is difficult to study it for several reasons. We do not know exactly its author, the addressee or the date of its origin. After taking each source publications as well as two other related letters Németh arranges those manuscripts into stemmas which have been found so far. It is followed by the original Latin text and the Hungarian translation. The importance of the current publication has been increased by the fact that it uses two manuscripts that had not been used in the previous publications (by Heilig and Huygens). Moreover, it had not been translated before into a modern language in its entire length. Németh is certain that the letter's addressee was Dado, the bishop of Verdun, and it must have been written between 917 and 923. The letter's place of origin could have been a monastery of St. Germanus. Most of the monasteries dedicated to St. Germanus are a great distance away from Verdun except for the above mentioned, which is 20 km away from it. Moreover, it is in Montfaucon, and it was also threatened by Hungarians. Consequently, the most probable place

of origin of the letter was Montfaucon. Since the name of the letter's writer is indicated only by an initial letter 'R', in the author's opinion, his identity will never be determined. Németh gives a broad outline of the origin of the letter's quotations and references as well as the history of *Hungros*. The author examines all the names similar to 'Hungri' (originally *Onogur*) from the period before the Hungarian Conquest. He is of the opinion that the name 'Hungri' originally refers to the Avars and its association with the 'famine story' precedes the arrival of the Hungarians into the Carpathian Basin. At the end of the ninth century Hungarians took the Avars' place who had threatened the region of Verdun. Therefore it is no wonder that both the name and the story of origin connected with the name were transferred to the Hungarians.

We can read the so-called Hebrew *Schechter-text* in Hungarian for the first time in László Hunyadi's translation. The text quoted by Hunyadi is part of a longer correspondence between Joseph the Khagan of the Khazars and Hasdai ibn Saprut, who was one of the Jewish notables in the Caliphate of Cordoba. The letter translated by Hunyadi is written by an unknown Jewish person of Khazaria to Hasdai ibn Saprut. It was found in the Cairo Geniza and might have been written before the twelfth century. It was Salamon Schechter (Professor of the Department of Jewish Studies at Cambridge University) who, bought the important manuscripts from the synagogue of Cairo to Cambridge. The letter mentioned above is from these manuscripts and that is why it is called either *Schechter-text* or *Cambridge-document*. The first publication of this text in 1912 opened a heated debate on authenticity. First the Hebrew usage of the manuscript is problematical, there are contradictions between the letter written by Kagan Joseph and the Schechter-text. It became also uncertain whether the Khazars professed Jewish faith. It was Golb and Pritsak, who proved the originality of the text. The source is an official message without any personal tone. The writer asks for donations because of the bad circumstances of the Khazars and gives a summary of the history of the Jewish conversion of the Khazars. According to Hunyadi there is evidence proving that the *Schechter-text* is part of the whole Hasdai-correspondence. In the text one can find a king of Turkiya among the enemies of the Khazars, which, according to Kokovcov, refers to the king of the Hungarians. Although Golb and Pritsak thought that this title refers to the Oguz king, Róna-Tas sides with Kokovcov. A general analysis and the Hungarian translation are followed by the Hebrew text. At the end of the treatise we can find a table with Hebrew signs and their transcriptions.

In the last article of the book István Hermann examines passages of the *Annales Hildesheimenses* concerning Hungarians. He had set himself the task to show the authenticity of the *Annales Hildesheimenses*. The author quotes the passages relating to Hungarians from the ninth and the tenth century. Finally he states that these passages are often inexact, laconic and selective. It is possible that the *Annales* preserved the information of an earlier source. Besides it went through repeated borrowings to obtain its current form. Although the information concerning Hungarians is not very accurate, the data related to the Saxons and the Franks are very important particularly from the mid-tenth century.

It would have been useful if the articles had had more similar form (see the place of the sources and translations inside the articles, the form of the commentaries, footnotes and bibliographies). Some misprints plague the volume. Nevertheless this is a very valuable work. It will be an essential aid not just for research in Hungarian prehistory but on the history of Western and Eastern Europe.

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