

*A New Book on the Early Hungarian History**



Three monographs on Hungary in the Arpadian age have already been published by Zoltan J. Kosztoľnyik, the professor of Texas A & M University. These books in their appearance followed a certain chronological order.¹ As far as the Arpadian age is concerned only the earliest period was missing, so this recent work has focused on the beginnings of Hungarian history. The book covers the history of more than one and a half century. The first characteristic feature of the book is its structure; its chapters follow a chronological order, but each chapter deals with certain subjects from the beginnings till the end of the era. This "double structure" has the advantage of dealing with historical processes thoroughly, though it sometimes results in some repetitiveness. Another specific feature of the volume is that the author seems to present Hungarian history as a continuous process. Another specific feature is, that it deals mainly with political history. The author treats Hungary's relations with other states, mostly with the determining political powers of the contemporary Europe; the Papacy, the German and the Byzantine empires. The administrative structure, legislation and domestic political struggles during the reign of Stephen I and after his death are included as well. The author focused on ecclesiastical issues, such as the conversion of the pagan Hungarians and the establishment of the Hungarian Church. However, mainly the economy and partly the social structure are a bit neglected in this work.

The book consists of twelve chapters with endnotes added to each chapter, an appendix, a bibliography and an index. The first chapter deals with the "Magyar beginnings". The author gives a concise survey of the very early history of the Hungarians from their origins until the start of Prince Géza's reign in the 970s. The author treats the Hungarian prehistory in two other chapters as well. He supposes, that the Finno-Ugrian Magyars (Hungarians) lived in the Volga region

* Z. J. Kosztoľnyik, *Hungary under the Early Árpáds, 890s to 1063*. East European Monographs No. DCV. Columbia University Press, New York 2002. p. 461.

¹ *Five Eleventh Century Hungarian Kings: Their Policies and Their Relations with Rome*. New York 1981; *From Coloman the Learned to Béla III (1095–1196): Hungarian Domestic Policies and the Impact Upon Foreign Affairs*. New York 1987; *Hungary in the Thirteenth Century*. New York 1996.

and were conquered by the Turkish Bulgarian tribes around the fifth century. Later (sixth–ninth centuries) the Hungarians belonged to the Khazar Empire and their leaders (the *kündü* and the *gyula*) were appointed by the khagan. The Hungarians living first in Levedia seceded from the Khazars under the leadership of the Megyer tribe around the mid-ninth century. In 889 the Pechenegs attacked the Hungarians who settled to a new homeland, Etelköz (today Bessarabia and Moldavia), where they elected Árpád as their prince. After a few years due to the combined attacks of the Pechenegs and the Bulgarians, the Hungarians left Etelköz and occupied the Carpathian basin in 896 possessed earlier by the East Franks (Pannonia), the Moravians (north of the Danube) and the Bulgarians (east of the Danube and Transylvania). The views of Zoltán Kosztolnyik regarding the prehistory of the Hungarians are basically traditional and may be compared to that of Bálint Hóman. The author considers the Hungarians as nomads in the ninth and tenth centuries, however he does not deal with disputes about nomadism and “seminomadism” (including agriculture) among the Hungarians. Similarly he pays little attention to the Hungarian raids in the ninth and tenth centuries treated rather briefly in two chapters as well.

The second chapter outlines the most important elements of the Byzantine–Hungarian relations beginning with the ninth century. The author refers to the meeting of Cyril and Method with the Hungarians, the visit of Hungarian leaders to Byzantium in 948, the foundation of a Byzantine missionary bishopric in Hungary, the baptism of important Hungarian persons according to the Byzantine rite (Gyula, Sarolta and Ajtony) and the existence of Greek monasteries (Marosvár, Veszprémvölgy, Pilis-Visegrád etc.). Kosztolnyik rightly underlined the importance of these political-religious connections, although Prince Géza and his son, Stephen I chose the Roman Catholic Church and the West instead of Byzantium.

The third part of the book addresses the problem of choosing between Rome and Byzantium. The author analyzes the competing religious–missionary activities of the East Frankish (German) empire and the Papacy in the Carpathian basin. This rather interesting chapter illuminates the events and the process of the Hungarian conversion, gives an exact picture of the activities of such persons as St. Wolfgang of Einsiedeln, Pilgrim of Passau and Adalbert of Prague in the conversion of the Hungarians.

The next chapter deals with the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian basin, their tribal system and nomadic way of life and the marauding ventures in the tenth century. The events of the Hungarian conversion to Christianity are also addressed, such as the baptism of Prince Géza. It is an interesting, though a debatable hypothesis that references to white and black/brown colours in connection with the Hungarians or some rulers (Andrew and Béla) may refer to their Christian and pagan religion.

In the next five chapters (V–X) the author focused mainly on the personality and reign of Stephen I. In the fifth chapter first the parents of the first Hungarian king, Géza and Sarolta, then Vajk-Stephen and his wife, Gisela are described with the help of contemporary sources. The problem of the date of Stephen’s baptism

(in 974 or much later) is treated, as well as the historical circumstances of the request of crown in 1000 and persons connected to it (Astric-Anastasius, Pope Sylvester II) and the coronation insignia themselves.

The next two chapters treat the legislation and laws of Stephen I. Together with chapter VIII on the administrative policy of the king, these parts may be regarded the best sections of the work offering careful analysis of the laws of King Stephen and later kings of the eleventh century as well. The author stresses the role of the king as a lawgiver, who with the members of the Royal Council made laws to ensure domestic peace and to protect property rights and security. Kosztolnyik compares the articles of Stephen's laws to earlier and contemporary ecclesiastical (e.g. 847 Synod of Mainz; *Decretum* by Bishop Burchard of Worms) and other laws (e.g. the Bavarian laws), stresses the similarities among them and rightfully concludes, that a strong impact of the Latin Church decrees prevailed in the legislation of Stephen I, Ladislas I and Coloman the Learned. Kosztolnyik makes comparisons between King Stephen's Admonitions addressed to his son, Prince Emeric and earlier works (e.g. *Liber Manualis of Dhouda*; *De institutione regia of Bishop Jonas of Orleans*) expressing similar concepts and ideas. In Chapter VIII based upon the laws as primary sources the author illuminates not only the administrative policy of King Stephen, but gives a clear insight to the social structure of Hungary in the early eleventh century. This chapter also deals with the different office-holders and their functions in the "ambulatory court" of the king.

Chapter IX concentrates on the centralizing policy of King Stephen. This part is dedicated mostly to the king's struggles against his domestic enemies (Kopány, Gyula and Ajtony). At the same time the author carefully analyzes the contemporary sources (the Chronicles, the Gesta of Anonymus, the legends of Saint Stephen and Bishop Gerard etc.) and their credibility.

The last part (Chapter X) deals with the last years of King Stephen's reign. This section contains a full analysis of the Admonitions and a description of the life and death of Prince Emeric and the consequent struggles for the inheritance of the Hungarian throne including the abortive assassination plot of Vazul against the old king and his blinding. The author also analyzes the unsuccessful war of emperor Conrad II against Stephen I in 1030.

The two closing chapters (XI and XII) and the appendix are dedicated to the description of events after the death of Stephen I. The title of Chapter XI, "Time of Troubles" indicates that the main problem of this era was the struggle for the throne between a "newcomer", Orseolo of Venice (the king's nephew) and a Hungarian of noble origin, Samuel Aba (brother-in-law of the king). Chapter XII outlines the main events of the reign of Andrew I and Béla I of the "Vazul-line" including their domestic and foreign policies. The appendix dealing with the same period of these two chapters has already been published.² The volume closes with a rich bibliography of primary sources, books and studies and an index.

² The study appearing here as appendix has been published in *Chronica* I. (pp. 30-44.) with the same title and with only minor differences in content.

This present volume of Zoltán J. Kosztolnyik can be regarded as a good continuation of his series concerning the history of Hungary in the Arpadian age. The author referred abundantly to the antecedents and aftermaths of the period indicated in the title. He placed Hungarian policy and institutions in the framework of European history, and its comparative aspect may be regarded the greatest merit of this volume. Zoltán Kosztolnyik made an important contribution to the Hungarian historiography, which still badly needs books in foreign languages.

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