

The Ugri Allies of Heraclius*

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To reconstruct the early history of the Hungarians who conquered the Carpathian basin at the end of the ninth century is a complicated matter in many respects. One of the key problems of the research is the identification of the names applied to the Hungarians in the Latin, Greek, Muslim, and Slavic sources. Instead of *Magyars*, the self-designation of the Hungarians, contemporary or later authors used their own external designations. These external designations (Turk, Onoghur/Hungarus, Bashkir, etc.) were the names of other ethnic groups. Thus the identification of these names with the Hungarians requires a special study of the relevant passage of the sources.¹

* I am grateful to István Ferincz and Ferenc Makk who helped me in clarifying the philological problems of the Slavic and Byzantine sources.

¹ A selection of the literature on the ethnic names assigned to the Hungarians is: J. Darkó, "A magyarokra vonatkozó népnevek a bizánci íróknál." [Ethnonyms referring to *Magyars* in the works of Byzantine authors] *Akadémiai Értesítő a Nyelv- és Széptudományok Köréből* 21 (1910), 283–357; J. Darkó, "Die auf die Ungarn bezüglichen Volksnamen bei den Byzantinern." *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 21 (1912), 472–487; Gy. Miskolczi, "Darkó Jenő: A magyarokra vonatkozó népnevek a bizánczi íróknál." [J. Darkó, Ethnonyms referring to *Magyars* in the works of Byzantine authors (review)] *Történeti Szemle* 3 (1914), 387–396; B. Hóman, "A magyar nép neve a középkori latinságban." [The Hungarian ethnonym in the medieval latinity] *Történeti Szemle* (1917), 129–158, 240–258; Gy. Németh, *A honfoglaló magyarság kialakulása*. [The making of the Conquering *Magyars*] Budapest 1930; L. Ligeti, "A magyar nép mongol kori nevei (magyar, baskír, király)." [Magyar names from the Mongol period (*Magyar*, *Baskhir*, *király*)] *Magyar Nyelv* 60 (1964), 385–404; Gy. Moravcsik, "Byzantinische Humanisten über den Volksnamen Türk," in Gy. Moravcsik, *Studia Byzantina*. Budapest 1967, 383–385; Gy. Moravcsik, "Die archaisierenden Namen der Ungarn in Byzanz," in Gy. Moravcsik *Studia Byzantina*. Budapest 1967, 320–325; T. Lewicki, "Les noms des hongrois et de la Hongrie chez les médiévaux géographes arabes et persans." *Folia Orientalia* 19 (1978), 35–55; T. Olajos, "Felhasználatlan bizánci forrás a magyarság korai történetéhez." [Unappropriated Byzantine sources to the early history of the *Magyars*] *Antik Tanulmányok* 33 (1987–88), 24–27; Gy. Németh, *A honfoglaló magyarság kialakulása*. [The ethnogenesis of the conquering *Magyars*] Budapest 1991. 2nd rev. edn; I. Elter, "A magyar kalandó-

The first monument of the Russian chronicles, the *Russian Primary Chronicle* (*Povesty vremennih let*),² written at the beginning of the twelfth century, contains a description of the early Hungarians. Recently Gyula Kristó and Imre H. Tóth have published an article on the passages on the Hungarians before the conquest (895–896).³ According to the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, Oleg captured Kiev in 882 and killed Askold and Dir. The place names of Ugorskoje and the castle of Ol'ma are mentioned in the description of the events. The latter name was linked with the Hungarians ruler Álmos. Kristó and H. Tóth proved that Ol'ma cannot be identified with Álmos because the names cannot be connected and Ol'ma was a Christian. The place name Ugorskoje, can refer not only to the Hungarians of the second half of the ninth century, but also to a merchant colony in the vicinity of Kiev in the eleventh century. Kristó and H. Tóth studied the passages on the Black and White Hungarians (*Ugri*) and analyzed the account of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* on the *Ugri*,⁴ who appeared in the seventh century on the fringe of the Byzantine Empire. The aim of this study is to identify the name *Ugri* on the basis of its historical and philological background. The relevant passage of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* is quoted first:

“Now while the Slavs dwelt along the Danube, as we have said, there came from among the Scythians, that is, from the Khazars, a people called Bulgars who settled on the Danube and oppressed the Slavs. Afterwards came the White Ugrians, who inherited the Slavic country. *These Ugrians appeared under the Emperor Heraclius, warring on Chosroes, King of Persia.* The Avars, who attacked Heraclius the Emperor, nearly capturing him, also lived at this time.”⁵

zaskor arab forrásai.” [Arabic sources of the period of Magyar Raids] in *A honfoglaláskor írott forrásai*. eds. L. Kovács and L. Veszprémy, *A honfoglalásról sok szemmel*, Vol. 2. Budapest 1996, 173–180; T. Olajos, “Contingent hongrois au service de Byzance en Italie.” in *Les Hongrois et l’Europe. Conquête et intégration*. Textes réunis par S. Csernus et K. Korompay, Paris 1999, 223–229; A. Róna-Tas, *Hungarians and Europe in the Early Middle Ages. An Introduction to Early Hungarian History*. Budapest 1999, 271–313; I. Zimonyi, “Why were the Hungarians Referred to as Turks in the Early Muslim Sources?” in *Néptörténet–Nyelvtörténet. A 70 éves Róna-Tas András köszöntése*. eds. L. Károly and É. Kincses Nagy, Szeged 2001, 201–212.

² Cf. L. Müller, *Handbuch zur Nestorchronik*. I/1–4. München 1977–1986; M. Font, “Az óorosz évkönyvek első szerkesztése és forrásai.” [The first compilation and sources of the Russian Chronicles] in *A honfoglaláskor írott forrásai*. eds. L. Kovács and L. Veszprémy, *A honfoglalásról sok szemmel*, Vol. 2. Budapest 1996, 119–129.

³ Gy. Kristó and I. H. Tóth, “Az orosz évkönyvek néhány magyar vonatkozásáról.” [On some Hungarian references of the Russian Annals] *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József nominatae. Acta Historica* 103 (1996), 21–29.

⁴ I use the form ‘Ugri’ as the name assigned to the Hungarians in Slavic sources.

⁵ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*. Trans. and ed. S. H. Cross and O. P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Cambridge 1953, 55; Edition: Полное собрание русских летописей. I. Лаврентьевская летопись. вып. 1. Повесть временных лет. Ленинград 1926, 11; Hungarian translation by I. Ferincz, *A honfoglalás korának írott forrásai*. [Written sources of the Conquest period] ed. Gy. Kristó, Szegedi Középkortörténeti Könyvtár 7. Szeged 1995, 171–172.

The interpretation and translation of the italicized sentence was of crucial importance. According to Hodinka, Kniezsa and Golden the *Ugri* appeared in the days of Heraclius, and the emperor waged war against the Persians.⁶ Ferincz called attention to the fact that the text must be translated as follows: "These Ugri appeared in the time of Heraclius, who (they=Ugrians) attacked Chosroes, the Persian emperor."⁷

There is a long debate on the identification of the *Ugri*, who attacked the Persian king Chosroes. Are the *Ugri* really Hungarians or did the Russian author identify the people mentioned in his source with the Hungarians?

According to Kristó and H. Tóth the name *Ugri* referred to the Onoghurs, a Turkic people mentioned in Eastern Europe in the fifth through the seventh century. They suggest that the author of the Russian chronicle identified the Onoghurs with the *Ugri*, which is the external designation of Hungarians in the Russian sources. To complicate the matter the ethnic name *Ugri* derived from the Turkic Onoghur. This is corroborated by the fact that the ruler of the Onoghur-Bulgars, Kuvrat, who revolted against the Avars and founded an empire in the East European steppe, was a contemporary of Heraclius.⁸

Bartha provided three different solutions. Firstly, he regarded the White *Ugri* as the Russian translation of Turkic ethnic name, the Saraghurs, "White Oghurs."

⁶ "Ezek az ugorok pedig Heraklius császár idejében kezdének hírre kapni, a ki hadat viselt Chosroessel, a perzsák királyával." [These Ugri became famous in the days of Heraclius, who waged war against Chosroes, the king of the Persian.] *A magyar honfoglalás kútfoi*. [Sources of the Hungarian Conquest period] eds. Gy. Pauler and S. Szilágyi Budapest 1900, 367; "Ezek az ugorok pedig Iraklij császár idejében tünnek fel a ki Chozroj persi császár ellen hadakozott." [These Ugri appeared in the days of Heraclius, who waged war against Chosroes, the king of the Persian.] A. Hodinka *Az orosz évkönyvek magyar vonatkozásai*. [Hungarian references of the Russian Annals] Budapest 1916, 33; "Ezek a magyarok ugyanis Herakleiosz császár korában jelentek meg, aki megtámadta Hozdroj perzsa császárt." [These Hungarians appeared in the days of Heraclius, who attacked Chosroes, the king of the Persian] *A magyarok elődeiről és a honfoglalásról*. [On the ancestors of the Magyars and the Conquest] ed. Gy. Györffy, 3rd edn. Budapest 1986, 126; Cf. Golden: "...for it was these Ugrians who began to be present during the time of the Emperor Heraclius while he was at war with the Persian Emperor, Khusraw." P. B. Golden, "Nomads in the Sedentary World: The Case of Pre-Chinggisid Rus' and Georgia." in *Nomads in the Sedentary World*. eds. A. M. Khazanov and A. Wink Richmond 2001, 25.

⁷ *A honfoglalás korának írott forrásai*, 172, note 532. Cf. *A magyar honfoglalás kútfoi*, 367. (Latin translation); K. Szabó, *A magyar vezérek kora. Árpádtól Szent Istvánig*. [The ages of the Magyar princes. From Árpád to Saint Stephen] Pest 1869, 31, note 1.

⁸ Kristó-H. Tóth, "Az orosz évkönyvek," 26; Gy. Kristó-F. Makk, *A kilencedik és a tizedik század története*. [A history of the ninth and the tenth centuries] Budapest 2001, 20–21, (the relevant part was written by Gy. Kristó). The background and chronology of the formation of Kuvrat's empire are debated: P. B. Golden, "The peoples of the south Russian steppes." in *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*. ed. D. Sinor, Cambridge 1990, 261–262; A. Róna-Tas "Where was Khuvrat's Bulgharia?" *Acta Orientalia Hungarica* 53 (2000), 1–22.

These people were recorded in Byzantine sources in the fifth century. Secondly, the Oghurs of the seventh century were differentiated with the attribute white in contrast to the Black *Ugri*, who were the contemporary Hungarians. In this case the Russian chronicler connected the *Ugri* mentioned during the rule of Heraclius with the Hungarians.⁹ Thirdly, Bartha accepted the authenticity of the Russian record and suggested that the Hungarians took part in the war against Persia as auxiliaries of the Khazar army, which was the ally of Heraclius.¹⁰

It was also supposed that the annalist used the term *Ugri* for those Hungarians who moved to the steppe region of Eastern Europe after the fall of the Onoghur-Bulghar Empire.¹¹ According to László, the *Ugri* were one of the tribal confederations among the Onoghur-Bulghars and they were a Hungarian-speaking ethnic group.¹² Szabó and his followers were of the opinion that the *Ugri* must have been the Khazars,¹³ while Horváth regarded the *Ugri* rather as Huns.¹⁴

The above-mentioned identifications were based on linguistic arguments or interpretations of the historical background. The source of the quoted passage in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* is not the theme of this investigation, although there are some hints as to the source of information if the sentences before and after the quoted passage are taken into consideration. There are two well-attested events in Byzantine sources: Asparuch crossed the Danube with his Bulgars and settled in the Balkans around 680,¹⁵ and the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius, had peace talks with the Khagan of the Avars in 623, who almost captured the emperor during the talks.¹⁶ Thus, this passage was copied and translated from a Byzantine chronicle.

The author of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* mentions the *Chronicle* of Georgius Monachus as a source of information in connection with the written law and customs of the nations. The relevant passage was attributed to the Slavic transla-

⁹ A. Bartha, *A magyar nép őstörténete*. [The ancient history of the Magyar people] Budapest 1988, 366. Cf. *A magyarok elődeiről*, 7.

¹⁰ A. Bartha, *A IX–X. századi magyar társadalom*. [The ninth–tenth-century Hungarian society] Budapest 1968, 82–83, 103, note 1.

¹¹ *A magyarok elődeiről*, 284, note 249.

¹² Gy. László, *A 'kettős honfoglalás'*. [The "double conquest"] Budapest 1978, 139–140, 146.

¹³ Szabó, *A magyar vezérek kora*, 30, 31, note 1; G. Kuun, *Relationum Hungarorum cum oriente gentibusque orientalis originis. Historia antiquissima*. I. Claudiopolis 1892, 122; J. Thury, "A magyarok eredete, őshazája és vándorlásai." [The origin, homeland and wandering of the Magyars] *Századok* 30 (1896), 691.

¹⁴ Ifj. J. Horváth, "Székesfehérvár korai történetének néhány kérdése az írásos források alapján." [Some problems of the early history of Székesfehérvár on the basis of written sources] in *Székesfehérvár évszázadai. I. Az államalapítás kora*. ed. A. Kralovánszky, Székesfehérvár 1967, 101.

¹⁵ V. Beševliev, *Die protobulgarische Periode der bulgarischen Geschichte*. Amsterdam 1981, 173–182; J. V. A. Jr. Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*. Ann Arbor 1989, 66–69.

¹⁶ S. Szádeczky-Kardoss, *Az avar történelem forrásai 557-től 806-ig*. [Sources of history of the Avars from 557 to 806] *Magyar Őstörténeti Könyvtár* 12. Budapest 1998, 164–169.

tion¹⁷ of the Greek *Chronicle* of Georgius Monachus¹⁸ (Georgius Hamartolus) in the notes to the critical edition of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* and its translations. Senga called attention to the fact that the name of the people that waged war against the Persians was Türk in the corresponding Greek text. He supposed that the Russian translator had no doubt about the identifying the ethnic names 'Ugri' and 'Türk' with the Hungarians in the Byzantine sources in the tenth through twelfth centuries. In this case, it seems to be a change of names; the ethnic name 'Türk' of the original Greek text was replaced by *Ugri*, both referring to Hungarians.¹⁹ Thus Senga explained the change of names with the confusion of two external names for the Hungarians but he neglected the historical dimension of the problem. The translator did not take into consideration that the name 'Türk' designated other peoples before it was used for the Hungarians in Byzantine sources.

The author of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* took the relevant sentence²⁰ from the Slavic translation of Georgius Monachus, which can be dated to the tenth or eleventh century. This text contains the following passage: "After Chosroes, Persian emperor had sent his general against the Byzantines, Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor started a counter-attack calling the help of the *Ugri*."²¹

The Slavic translation can be checked because the Greek original of Georgius Monachus has come down to us. The Greek text contains the same description of the events; the only difference is that Heraclius' allies were called Türks and not *Ugri*.²² Georgius Monachus compiled his work in the ninth century using earlier Byzantine chronicles for the history of the seventh century. The source of the relevant part²³ of Georgius Monachus was the *Breviarium* of Patriarch Nicepho-

¹⁷ Gy. Moravcsik, *A magyar történet bizánci forrásai*. [Byzantine sources of the Hungarian history in the Arpadian period] Budapest 1934, 106–107; J. Karayannopoulos-G. Weiss, *Quellenkunde zur Geschichte von Byzanz (324–1453)*. Zweiter Halbband, Vierter Hauptteil Wiesbaden 1982, 342–343.

¹⁸ *A magyar honfoglalás kútfeje*, 367, note 3, 369, note 2; *Повесть временных лет*. II. Примечания статьи и комментарии Д. Ш. Лихачева Под редакцией В. П. Адриановой-Перетц, Москва–Ленинград 1950, 224; *A honfoglalás korának írott forrásai*, 172, note 522.

¹⁹ T. Senga, "Some Problems of Magyar–East Slavic Relations in the Ninth Century." *Uralica* 2 (1974), 52–53.

²⁰ "си бо Оугри почаша быти пр-Ираклии цари иже находиша Хоздрою царя Перьскаго..." ПСРЛ 11.

²¹ "паки Хоздрою нечестивыи посла етера князя на Греки ... Царь же Ираклии ... на Персы исполчися, еще же призвавъ Оугры на помощь..." The edition of the text: В. М. Истринь Хроника Георгія Амартола въ древнемъ славянорусскомъ переводѣ. I. Петроградъ 1920 (reprint 1972), 434. cf. ПВЛ 224.

²² "Ἐἶτα πάλιν Χοσρόης ὁ δυσσεβῆς ἀποστείλας ἕτερον ἄρχοντα κατὰ Ῥωμαίων ὀνόματι Σάρβαρον μετὰ πλείστης δυνάμεως... ὁ δὲ γε βασιλεὺς Ἡράκλειος... κατὰ Περσῶν ἐστράτευσεν. καὶ οἱ προσκαλεσάμενος τὸν Τοῦρκον εἰς συμμαχίαν κατὰ πάροδον, ἐξ οὗ καὶ φύλαρχον καὶ πλῆθος Τοῦρκων ἄρας, ἐξώρμησε κατὰ Περσῶν ἐν δυνάμει βαρεῖα σφόδρα διὰ τοῦ Εὐξείνου πόντου." A. C. Boor, *Georgii monachi chronicon*. II. Lipsiae 1904, 670.

²³ Gy. Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*. II. Zweite durchgearbeitete Auflage 1958, 321; Moravcsik, *A magyar történet bizánci forrásai*, 107.

rus, who gave a detailed description on the Türks waging war against the Persians as allies of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius.²⁴

After exploring the affiliation of the relevant texts, it can be concluded that the original version was recorded by Patriarch Nicephorus. Finally, two questions need further investigation: the historical background of the relevant fragments and the explanation of the Russian translator's replacement of the ethnic name 'Türk' with 'Ugri'.

In 627 the Byzantine emperor Heraclius made an alliance with the ruler of the Western Türk Khaganate, T'ung Yabghu, against the Persian ruler Chosroes II. In accordance with the treaty the nomadic ruler sent Khazar auxiliaries to the army of Heraclius. These troops are called either Türks or Khazars in the sources. Patriarch Nicephorus used the term Türks as the allies of Heraclius to mean the military strength of the Western Türk Khaganate, which consisted of Khazar auxiliaries.²⁵

As for the change of the names in the Russian sources, its explanation can be found in the Slavic translations of Greek sources. The Slavic translators of the Greek texts replaced the name 'Türk' assigned to the Hungarians with its Slavic equivalent, 'Ugri'.²⁶ Following this principle, the translators replaced the original

²⁴ Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople, *Short History*. Text, translation, and commentary by C. Mango, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 13. Washington 1990, 54–57.

²⁵ K. Czeglédy "Herakleios török szövetségesei," [The Turkish allies of Heracleios] *Magyar Nyelv* 49 (1953), 319–323; D. M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars*. Princeton 1954, 28–33; P. B. Golden, *Khazar Studies. An Historico-Philological Inquiry into the Origins of the Khazars*. I. *Bibliotheca Orientalis Hungarica* 25/1. Budapest 1980, 51, 218–219; M. Bíró, "Georgian Sources on the Caucasian Campaign of Heracleios." *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungariae* 33 (1981), 127–132; D. Sinor, "The establishment and dissolution of the Türk empire," in *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, ed. D. Sinor, Cambridge 1990, 308–309; M. Dobrovits, "The nomadic ally of Heraclius." *Chronica* 3 (2003), 3–8.

²⁶ *Georgius Monachus Continuatus* recorded that Emperor Leo the Wise sent an embassy to the Türks ('Hungarians'; Τοῦρκοις; Sl. Vøgrom, Ugri) in order to hire them to attack the Bulgars. The Türks (Τοῦρκοι; Sl. Vøgre, Ugri, Ugy) penetrated Bulgharia and obtained tremendous booty. Then the Türks (Τοῦρκοι; Sl. Turci že iže i Vøgre, Ugri) asked the emperor to ransom the Bulghar prisoners of war. He fulfilled it. Simeon, the Bulghar ruler, smote the retreating Türks (Τοῦρκοι; Sl. Ugy). Later, when the Türks ('Hungarians'; Τοῦρκοι; Sl. Ugri) learnt the death of Simeon, they planned to attack the Bulgars. The Türks ('Hungarians'; Τοῦρκοι; Sl. Ugrskaa) waged war against Byzantium and plundered Thrace. Then the Türks ('Hungarians'; Τοῦρκοι; Sl. Ugri) again penetrated the Byzantine Empire (Moravcsik, *Az Árpád-kori magyar történet bizánci forrásai*, 59–60. Ioannes Zonaras mentioned that the Türks ('Hungarians'; Τοῦρκοι; Sl. Vøgro) sheathed the sword for a short time against the Byzantine Empire, when Bulču, one of their chiefs, was baptized. Afterwards Svjatoslav, a Russian prince, attacked Byzantium with an army strengthened by Bulgars, Pechenegs and Türks ('Hungarians'; Τοῦρκοι; Sl. Vøgry) (Moravcsik, *Az Árpád-kori magyar történet*, 100–101). In spite of these examples, Király took it for granted that the Slavic translators did not change the ethnic names during their works. P. Király, *A magyarok említése a 811. évi események*

Türk with *Ugri* in cases when Türk was not used for the Hungarians, but for the genuine Türks or other Turkic speaking peoples. In this particular case such a misinterpretation is probable. The Slavic translator of Georgius Monachus translated the name 'Türk' as 'Ugri' from the Greek original. By his time the Türks and their empire had disappeared more than three hundred years earlier. He had no idea of the fact that the contemporary Türks of the Byzantine sources were not identical with the Türks mentioned as the allies of Heraclius. Accordingly, when translating the Greek source, he identified the Greek Türks referring to the Hungarians in the tenth and eleventh century and gave the equivalent Slavic term 'Ugri'. The author of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* used this Slavic translation and copied the name from it. The relevant fragment of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* belongs to a later Slavic translation of Greek chronicles, which preserved a piece of information on the military strength of the Western Türk Khaganate and that cannot be connected with Hungarian history.

óbolgár leírásában. [The mention of Magyars in the description of ancient Bulghar events in 811] A Magyar Nyelvtudományi Társaság Kiadványai 148. Budapest 1977, 38.