

New Research on the Prehistory of the Hungarians¹

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The eighteenth volume of the series *Varia Archaeologica Hungarica* is based on the papers which were presented at the meetings organized by the Institute of Archaeology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) in 2003-2004.² The reason for the meetings was to inform the general public about the new archaeogenetic project of the HAS focused on the ethnogenesis of the Hungarians.³ Before the publication of results, the director of the Institute of Archaeology of the HAS, Csanád Bálint asked specialists of various disciplines to outline a general survey of their own branch of learning. The reports were compiled by preliminary questions or headings: 1. Historiography, the history of the research, 2. New results and 3. Perspectives of the investigations. The volume contains 15 essays (reports, comments or remarks) arranged according to the various fields of research: anthropology (Gyula Farkas, *Biological anthropology/human biology and the prehistory of Hungarians* [pp. 9-32], Gyula Gyenis, *Comment*

¹ The review was originally written around 2008 and was planned to be published in the next volume of the *Chronica*. Between 2011 and 2016 the publishing of the *Chronica* was intermittent, but will resume from this year.

² *Research on the Prehistory of the Hungarians: a Review. Papers presented at the meetings of the Institute of Archaeology of the HAS, 2003-2004*. Ed. by B. G. Mende, *Varia Archaeologica Hungarica* XVIII. Budapest 2005.

³ The results of the archaeogenetic project (Institute of Archaeology of the HAS with the Institute of Biology of the HAS in Szeged) are not included in this volume. After the publication of the book, in the last few years important new results on this project were published. E. g. *Genetika és (magyar) őstörténet: a közös kutatás kezdeténél*, *Magyar Tudomány* 169 (2008)/10. (authors: Csanád Bálint, Balázs Gusztáv Mende, István Raskó, Erika Bogácsi-Szabó, Bernadett Csányi, Gyöngyvér Tömöry, Péter Blazsó, Aranka Csósz, Dóra Kiss, Péter Langó, Kitti Köhler et al.); I. Raskó, *Honfoglaló gének*, Budapest 2010; B. Csányi – Gy. Tömöry – I. Raskó et al., *Comparison of Maternal Lineage and Biogeographic Analyses of Ancient and Modern Hungarian Population*, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 2007, 254-368.

on Gyula Farkas' study [pp. 33-38], Erzsébet Fóthi, *Comment on Gyula Farkas' study* [pp. 39-43]), history/written sources (Sándor László Tóth, *The past and present of the research on the prehistory of the Hungarians. Historiography* [pp. 45-86], István Zimonyi, *The state of the research on the prehistory of the Hungarians. Historiography/Oriental sources, history of the steppe* [pp. 87-102], István Vásáry, *Thoughts on the prehistory of the Hungarians* [pp. 103-109], Ferenc Makk, *Comment on the presentations about the written records of the prehistory of the Hungarians* [pp. 111-114]), linguistics (Enikő Szíj, *Research on the prehistory of the Hungarians and the Finno-Ugric studies* [pp. 115-156], László Honti, *Research on the prehistory of the Hungarian language* [pp. 157-169], Károly Rédei, *Comments on Enikő Szíj's study* [pp. 171-173]), archaeology (Péter Langó, *Archaeological research on the conquering Hungarians: A review* [pp. 175-340], László Révész, *Remarks on the evaluation of the 10th-11th century cemeteries of the Carpathian basin* [pp. 341-350], László Kovács, *Remarks on the archaeological remains of the 9th-10th century Hungarians* [pp. 351-368], János Makkay, *The secondary homeland of the Proto-Hungarians in Western Siberia* [pp. 369-391]). The epilogue is a general summary by András Róna-Tas (*Remarks on the research on the prehistory of the Hungarians* [pp. 393-399]), whereas the foreword is written by Csanád Bálint.

The volume was published in English, reflecting the aim of the editors to bring the questions of the Hungarian ethnogenesis and prehistory into the international or global context and to draw attention to these questions. There are many works on the prehistory of the Hungarians in Hungarian, but only a few publications have been translated into foreign languages.

As for the various branches of science, the first chapter is the anthropology. In Hungary, anthropological research began in the 1870s, and has considerably extended the knowledge on the population of the Carpathian basin in the period of the conquest. The population of this period was anthropologically mixed and heterogenous. There are various analyses and theories on the main question: is there any continuity between the population of the Avar period (6-9th c.) and the population of the period of the conquest (10th c.) and the Arpadian age (11-13th c.) and how could the differences be explained, by territorial and taxonomical changes? How numerous were the conquerors (Hungarians) and the local (autochthonous) population? Gyula Farkas cited the works of Pál Lipták, Tibor Tóth, Lajos Bartucz, Kinga Éry and János Makkay) and he drew attention to the limits of the research: the number of finds (skelets) is extremely small compared to the estimated size of the population at the period of the conquest.

Research on the written sources of the conquest dates back to the 17th century, to the beginnings of modern historiography (historical science). In the 17th-18th centuries the most important Byzantine and Latin sources were discovered, and in the 19th century the Oriental sources. Sándor László Tóth surveyed the historiography from the middle of the 19th century and divided it into four parts: 1. 1850-1918 (national-romantic and positivist schools), 2. 1918-1945 (dominance of phenomenology), 3. 1945-1990 (period of communist regime) and 4. 1990-2005 (contemporary research). In respect of the publication of the primary sources, it

could be said that there are up-to date editions but there are also gaps. István Zimonyi reviewed in detail the research into Oriental sources of the prehistory of the Hungarians. There are new works in the research of Muslim sources.⁴ There are new results not only in the investigation of sources, but in the theory and approach. The model of ethnogenesis ('gentilism') which goes back to the German-Austrian school, was adopted in the research of the Hungarian prehistory. A further important guideline is the investigation of the history of the Eurasian steppe as background and scene of the early Hungarian ethnogenesis. István Vásáry drew attention to the ideological aspects and the dilettantism: the question of the prehistory (or early history) of the Hungarians were for a long time linked to political purposes, and attracted many amateurs from the pseudo-scientific sphere. After the end of the communist regime, non-professional research flourished. As for the perspectives, Vásáry emphasises that it is necessary to bring together international research on the early medieval history of Western Eurasia and the Carpathian basin, and to abandon the ethnocentrism that sees the earliest history and the ethnogenesis of the Hungarians as a special 'Hungarian' topic, in order to make it part of the general history of Western Eurasia.

The authors of the chapter on linguistics are all specialists of Uralic (Finno-Ugric) studies. The historiography of Finno-Ugric studies in Hungary was summarized in detail by Enikő Szűj. The beginnings of the Finno-Ugric research date back to the 18th century, but the acceptance of the Finno-Ugric affinity of the Hungarian language was realized only at the end of the 19th - early 20th centuries. However, the contribution of Finno-Ugric studies on the Hungarian ethnogenesis is limited because it can contribute to the history of the language and to the ethnic history only indirectly. Moreover, some of the Proto-Hungarians, the 'Hétmagyar' did not speak Pre-Hungarian. A very important field of research examines the contacts of the Pre-Hungarian with the Iranian and Turkic languages.⁵

⁴ After the publication of the book Zimonyi's dissertation was published in German (*Muslimische Quellen über die Ungarn vor der Landnahme. Das ungarische Kapitel der Ġaiḥānī-Tradition.* Herne 2006) and in English (*Muslim Sources on the Magyars in the Second Half of the 9th Century. The Magyar Chapter of the Jayḥānī Tradition.* East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages 450-1450, vol. 35. Leiden - Boston 2016); I. Elter, *Ibn Ḥayyān a kalandozó magyarokról*, Szegedi Középkortörténeti Könyvtár 24. Szeged 2009.

⁵ New publication: Á. Berta - A. Róna-Tas, with the assistance of L. Károly: *West Old Turkic. Turkic Loanwords in Hungarian I-II.* Turcologica Bd. 84. Wiesbaden 2011.

In the section on archaeology, Péter Langó's study is a thorough and detailed summary of the historiography of archaeological research on the period of the 10th-11th centuries in the Carpathian basin. It is the longest study of the volume and an extended version has been published in Hungarian in a single book.⁶ The history of the archaeological research on the period of the Hungarian conquest began in 1834 when the first finds were found and published. Langó focuses on the turning-points and the changes in approaches. The archaeological research of the period of the conquest has from time to time come under the influence of various ideologies, politics and nationalism. The author emphasizes the necessity of the new methods, such as archaeogenetics, paleoenvironmental reconstructions and archaeometric analyses on the one hand, and the postmodern archaeological theories and the approach of the 'Hungarian' topic in the international context on the other. It is necessary to abandon the traditional interpretation of the archaeological finds of the 9th-10th centuries as they are 'alien', isolated and local. The material culture of the 10th century Hungarians reflects a segment of the cultural transformation of Central Europe in the 10th-11th centuries.

László Révész pointed to the problems of the research of the 10th-11th century cemeteries. He focuses on two main problems: 1. The question of the social structure and social groups of 10th century society; 2. The geographical position and regional groups. He pointed out that there is a new path in the research: to investigate and comparative analyse - to evaluate the micro-regions of the Carpathian basin.

A very interesting and unsolved problem is to find the archaeological traces of the Proto-Hungarians before the conquest in Eastern Europe (that is in the territory of modern Moldavia, Ukraine and Russia). The number of the finds which could be connected with the Proto-Hungarians before the conquest (ca. 895-907) is small, and there are no characteristic 'Hungarian' archaeological cultures or groups in Eastern Europe. The finds of 'Hungarian-type' appeared mostly in the forest-steppe zone from the Volga-Ural region to the Dnieper-Dniester regions.

János Makkay has devoted his essay to the question of the hypothetic Western Siberian homeland of the Proto-Hungarians. He emphasizes that this region could have been an earlier homeland of the Finno-Ugric population occupied later by Proto-Iranians, „but not a Hungarian homeland around and before 1000 BC.”

To sum up, despite the limitations of the historical and linguistics research (the small number of written sources, the problems of the reconstruction of the linguistic material) there are new results and perspectives in the research of the prehistory of the Hungarians. The various branches of science have different

⁶ P. Langó, *Amit elrejt a föld... A 10. századi magyarság anyagi kultúrájának régészeti kutatása a Kárpát-medencében*. Budapest 2007.

perspectives. It seems that the greatest leap forward could be expected from archaeology (with the archaeometry, anthropology and archaeogenetics) in the Carpathian basin and Eastern Europe. In the linguistic research, the contacts of the Pre-Hungarian language with the Iranian and Old-Turkic languages could be analysed (analyse the Iranian and Old-Turkic elements of the Hungarian language). As for the written sources and historical background of the Hungarian ethnogenesis, it is necessary to include the 'Hungarian' problems in the history of 5th-10th century Western Eurasia. Finally, as several authors (e. g. András Róna-Tas, István Vásáry, Péter Langó) wrote, it is necessary to leave 'provincialism' behind.



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