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The migration of the Hungarians and their settlement in the Carpathian Basin¹

In 1996 Hungarians celebrate the 1100th anniversary of their settlement in the Carpathian Basin.² In the following lecture, I shall first present the most important milestones leading up to the “*landtaking*” (“*Landnahme*” in German, “*honfoglalás*” in Hungarian), mention the research problems involved, and point to connections with the Altaic world. In the second part, I shall offer a rough typology of the ethnogenetic processes of nomadic tribal societies in Europe and venture to determine the place of the Hungarian settlement in the history of mediaeval Europe. In the third part of my lecture, I shall remark on changes in the manner in which the Hungarian settlement is celebrated.

1. *The migration and homelands of the Hungarians*

The origins of the Hungarians and their migration has been a passionately debated question since mediaeval times and not only among Hungarians. In the last century it became generally accepted that the language of the Hungarians belongs to the Uralic language family. Together with Vogul and Ostyak they formed the Ugric branch of the Finno-Ugric languages, a fact disputed only by dilettantes. On the other hand, when the Hungarians made their way into written sources, they were featured and expressly labelled as Turks. In 1074 almost two hundred years after the settlement, Byzantine Emperor Michael VII, Ducas, bestowed a crown on the newly invested Hungarian King Géza I. The crown, now kept in the National Museum in

¹ A slightly revised version of the address held at the opening session of the 39th Meeting of PIAC, Szeged, Hungary. The materials and conclusions presented are discussed in detail in my book *A honfoglaló magyar nép*, which appeared in 1996.

² In fact the event which is celebrated was in 895. Because of the delay in the preparations the Hungarian Parliament postponed the millenary celebrations from 1895 to 1896 and thus 1996 became the 1100th anniversary.

Budapest, bears the Greek inscription *Jeuuitsa the faithful king of the Turks*.³ The Hungarians are called Turks in several other Byzantine and Arabic sources of the 9th century. In other sources they are called *Ungri, Hungar, Ugri, Bashkir* or even *Huns, Avars* or *Scythians*.⁴ None of the many names resembles the Hungarians' own name. We have data on the Hungarians calling themselves *Magyars* at least since the 8th century, but the name had undoubtedly been used much earlier. The term *magyar* is of Finno-Ugric origin. It consists of two parts. The first part, *magy-*, goes back to an earlier form, *manš*, which is identical to the name of the Voguls, now living in western Siberia, and to that of one of the two main groups of Ostyaks.⁵ The second part, which comes from an earlier word, *er*, is an ethnic name meaning 'man, creature' and was also the name of another Ugric group. The name of the Hungarians *manš+er* > *magy+er* > *magyer* > *magyar*⁶ was formed from the names of these two groups of Finno-Ugric origin. (The form lacking vowel harmony was recorded until the 13th century). In a lecture at the Academy of North Rhine-Westphalia⁷ I concluded that at the time of the settlement the Hungarians were a people who spoke a Finno-Ugric language but conducted a Turkic way of life.

Without going into the deeper past we can summarize the early history of the Hungarians as follows:

The ancestors of the Hungarians separated from the other Ugric-speaking peoples about 5-800 years before Christ. They lived for a brief period in the vicinity of the ancestors of the Proto-Permian people, as reflected in a few interesting loanwords from the early language common to present-day Zuryen and Votyak. At the time the Hungarians were already a distinct people who cultivated the land and bred animals, but also hunted on horseback and fished. For a period of about a thousand years they had close

³ On the Hungarian crown and its inscriptions see *Studien zur Machtsymbolik* (1983), the history of the research by Th. von Bogyay (1983) and Róna-Tas (1988).

⁴ The various names of the Hungarians in the different sources are dealt with in Róna-Tas (1988).

⁵ On the FU word see Lakó – Rédei 1971:415-417.

⁶ Earlier the composition *manš+er* was interpreted as 'the *manš* man'. I contend that these kinds of name never become ethnonyms. First the word *er* became an ethnic name and then after the union of the two groups the two names were united as that of the *varχonitai* (*var+xyon*). I supposed that both group spoke an Ugric type of language (Róna-Tas 1993).

⁷ See Róna-Tas (1988).

contacts with Iranian peoples as reflected in the vocabulary of the Hungarian language. Some elements of agriculture and animal husbandry were taken from these Iranian groups on the western side of the Ural Mountains.

Hungarian scholars such as Németh, Bárczi and Ligeti claimed that the Hungarians lived together with the other Ugrian peoples in western Siberia. This claim was based on a small number of etymologies which admittedly were borrowed by Proto-Ugrian from Turkic. These words could have been borrowed only in the area of the Turkic people's original homeland, that is in western Siberia. A thorough investigation of these etymologies clearly fails to support these claims. Some of these etymologies are simply wrong, such as H *hód* 'beaver' ~ Turkic *kunduz*, H *hattyú* 'swan' ~ T *kotang* and H *nyereg* 'saddle' ~ T *eger*. Others are valid but were adopted by the Hungarians much later on the coast of the Black Sea, e.g. H *homok* 'sand' ~ T *kumaki* and H *hajó* 'boat' ~ T *kayik*. There are also words which entered separately into the Ob Ugric and the Hungarian language, such as H *ló* 'horse' ~ T *ulag*, H *szó* 'word' ~ T *sab* etc. Ultimately the sole reason for supposing a western Siberian homeland for the Hungarians was unsubstantiated.⁸

The change in lifestyle from a simple agricultural economy to a nomadic one had its environmental limitations. Taking into account the latest results of historical climatology and botany this could not have occurred further to the north than 50-52 degrees latitude.⁹ Weighing all data presently at our disposal the Hungarians' change to a nomadic way of life occurred in the 5th-6th century A.D. and in the southern part of the Urals, by the River Yayik, or Ural. This change is marked by a strong influence of western Turkic languages predominantly, if not exclusively, of the Chuvash type, e.g. H *ökör* 'ox' ~ T *öküz*, Chuv *văgăr*. The transformation in their way of life lasted more than a hundred years, and several groups remained as agriculturists on the wooded steppe even longer. They adapted to the new way of life only gradually, otherwise the Hungarians would have disappeared in the ocean of Turkic-speaking peoples.

The events to come were linked to the migration of the Bulgar Turks from the Kuban-Don region to the Dnieper. This occurred about 600 A.D. Earlier it was supposed that the Empire founded by Khuvrat in 630 was at the Kuban River. However after having identified the tomb of Khuvrat in Malaya

⁸ I have dealt with the earlier opinions and with the relevant material in Róna-Tas (1988b).

⁹ See Györffy – Zólyomi (1994).

Pereshchepina near Poltava on the Dnieper River other sources also had to be revised. We can now claim that the Old Bulgarian Empire lasted until 670-675 and was centered around the Dnieper.¹⁰

The area left by the majority of the Bulgars about 600 was soon occupied by the Hungarians. They lived north of the Alans whose location is well documented. The Hungarians lived in the region between the Kuban, the Don, and the Sea of Azov (last also being called the Meotis). Alan contacts are demonstrated by such loanwords as *H asszony* 'noble woman, earlier princess' ~ Old Osetian *axsin* 'princess'. Here the Hungarians came into close contact not only with the Alans but also with the Khazars, who by the 620s were the dominant group in the region. After the Khazars freed themselves from East Turkic rule, they attacked and defeated the Bulgars. Four Bulgarian groups moved westwards. The first founded the Danubian Bulgarian Empire around 678, the second joined the Avars in the Carpathian Basin, and a third group migrated to Italy and is mentioned as living around Ravenna. The fourth group appeared on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea. A not insignificant Bulgar group, however, accepted Khazar rule and remained within the realm of the Khazar khagan. Many of the early Turkic loanwords came into Hungarian at this time, e.g. the name of the 'ash tree' *H kőrís* ~ West Old Turkic *keürič* or Hungarian terms used in horticulture and viticulture, such as *H gyümölcs* 'fruit' ~ OT *yemiš*.

Around the end of the 7th century the Hungarians moved westwards and occupied the territory between the Dnieper and the Lower Danube where the earlier West Bulgars lived. The relationship between the Hungarians and the Bulgars, both subjects of the Khazars, improved. We know what the Hungarians called this territory because two Hungarian noblemen visited the Byzantine capital around 948 and the Emperor Constantinos Porphyrogenitos or his scribes noted their story. They called the region *Etelküzü*. This Hungarian name meant 'the region between the rivers, Mesopotamia', where *Etel* is the West Turkic generic name for 'river' (Turkic *etil*) and *küzü* is the Hungarian name for a region 'which is in between', i.e. the Hungarian equivalent of the Greek *mezo*.¹¹

¹⁰ On the tomb of Khuvrat see Werner (1984) and Bálint (1984), on the migration of the Bulgars and Hungarians see Róna-Tas (1996).

¹¹ The problems connected with Levedia and *Etelküzü* have been recently dealt with by Györfy (1985), Benkő (1985), Király (1985), Harmatta (1985), Ligeti (1985) and

The Hungarians lived in Etelküzü until the settlement. We cannot say exactly when they moved to Etelküzü but their stay must have lasted longer than it was earlier supposed.¹² A greater group of loanwords were borrowed here, e.g. H *szőlő* 'wine grape' ~ T *yedlig*. The Bulgars, attempting to loosen their ties with the Khazars, slowly moved northwards. After a serious Khazar defeat by the Arabs in 737 the Bulgar migration towards the Volga and northwards accelerated. A group of Hungarians moved with them. Both the Volga Bulgars and the Volga Hungarians reached the Kama River around 900 A.D.¹³ The Volga Hungarians, or as they used to be called "the inhabitants of Magna Hungaria", were visited by Ibn Fadlan, mentioned by other sources and lastly met by the Hungarian Friar Julian in 1235. In the following year both the Volga Bulgars and the Volga Hungarians were devastated by the Mongols.

The majority of the Hungarians remained in Etelküzü. The Hungarian tribal federation was ruled by the chieftain installed by the Khazars. In the middle of the 9th century he was designated as Levedi, and his tribal pasture lands were called Levedia by the Greek sources. According to Arabic sources he bore the title *kündü* around 870 and, though he was the legitimate ruler, he had no real power. The power of the generals, members of the Almish-Árpád clan grew considerably. According to Muslim sources they bore the title *ĵula* or *ĵila*. They controlled the army and public administration. The claim, however, that the Hungarians had a sacral kingship similar to that of the Khazars is unfounded.¹⁴

According to written sources, as of the year 862 the Hungarians living in Etelküzü took part in the battles and wars of central Europe. In 862 they fought in alliance with the Moravian ruler Rastislav against the Franks, in 881 they appear at Vienna, where they fought together with the Kabars (*cum*

Vékony (1986). Conclusion from the new researches and discussions is that Levedia was a part of Etelküzü and not a former place of the migration.

¹² According to earlier opinions the Hungarians' stay in Levedia and Etelküzü lasted a few generations only.

¹³ According to some Hungarian scholars the Hungarians first went south from the Volga-Kama region in the 9th century. I argued against this claim in Róna-Tas (1988b).

¹⁴ The idea of the sacral kingship among the Hungarians was launched by Czeglédy (1966, 1974, 1975) and accepted by most Hungarian scholars. Whether Árpád or Kursan was the sacral ruler after the settlement in 895 has been a bone of contention between Györffy (1993) and Kristó (1993). Major arguments against the existence of the sacral kingship among the Hungarians have been put forward independently of me by Keszi (1995).

cowaris) against the Franks. The importance and power of the Almish – Árpád clan grew with the success of western raids and was also strengthened by the three Kabar tribes seceding from the Khazars to join the Hungarians. Several years before the settlement the Árpád clan dethroned the Levedi clan and concentrated power in its own hands.

In 894 the Hungarians fought in alliance with the Moravian ruler Svatopluk against the Franks and with the Byzantine Empire against the Danube Bulgars. Both military expeditions were highly successful. In fact, in 894 the Hungarians joined the Moravian – Byzantine coalition against the Danube Bulgarian – Frankish coalition.

The spring of 895 began with a Hungarian military expedition under Árpád, who wanted to attack the Danube Bulgars moving down along the Tisza River. At the same time a smaller Hungarian unit attacked the Bulgars at the Lower Danube. However, the Byzantine army went back on their promise to attack the Bulgars from the south, who were able to defeat the smaller Hungarian army attacking from Etelküzü.

At the same time from the east a Pecheneg army appeared. They were pushed by the Oghuz – Kimek – Kharluk coalition who in turn were defeated by the Samanid ruler. The Pechenegs could not enter the Khazar Empire proper and, most probably persuaded by the Danube Bulgar ruler Simeon, attacked the Hungarians left behind in Etelküzü. After the disastrous Hungarian defeat in Etelküzü by the Pecheneg and Danube Bulgarian armies they could but flee to the army of Árpád who was slowly moving south along the Tisza. In 895 the Hungarians occupied only the eastern part of the Carpathian Basin and did not cross the Danube. That happened only in 899 when, upon being invited by the Frank ruler Arnulf, they raided northern Italy. The Hungarian army returned in 900, and as they were returning they learned of the death of Arnulf in December 899. The Hungarian army occupied Transdanubia and moved westwards. They were stopped briefly in 902 when a temporary cease-fire between the Franks and the Hungarians deferred hostilities. However, the settlement of the Hungarians was complete.

The pacification of the people living in the Carpathian Basin went almost automatically. The Avars, most of whom had converted to Christianity in the first half of the 9th century, lost their power. The Danube Bulgars and the Franks crushed the Khaganate and only small, petty rulers remained. The Turkic-speaking Avars were gradually Slavicized. Some of them were still bilingual when the Hungarians arrived. There is a group of loanwords in

Hungarian which clearly show the bilingualism of the Avars. Such a word is *H terem* 'great room, palace' (also in the well-known Hungarian word *étterem* 'restaurant') ~ Avar *term*, West Turkic *terem*.¹⁵

2. *Ethnogenetic processes and the Hungarian case*

In the Middle Ages old people or ethnic groups disappeared and new ones emerged. In Europe roughly three types of these ethnogenetic processes can be distinguished. All of them can be investigated from the point of view of how they adapted to the "civilized" Roman Empire and how they succeeded in forming their new feudal organization through personal and territorial bonds. Each process can be broken down into several subtypes. The three main types were: the German type, the Slavic type and the Turkic type. In the Turkic case tribal confederations tended toward a centralized Empire. The Turkic type, in turn, can be broken down into three subtypes, the Avar, the Khazar and the Danube Bulgar. The Khazar and the Avar processes proved to be dead ends, and both peoples disappeared. The Danube Bulgars, though retaining their ethnic identity for some time, were slowly absorbed by the Slavic majority.¹⁶

The Hungarians also lived in a Turkic type of tribal confederation; their name was the Seven Magyars (H *Hetümagyer*) on the model of the Ten Ogurs, the Three Kharluks, the Thirty Tatars etc. We know that this tribal federation in 895 consisted of at least eleven tribes, three of them of Khazar origin. One of the most interesting questions in the history of central Europe is how and why did the Hungarians continue to exist and retain their language and ethnic identity while all other tribal confederations of the Turkic type disappeared, as the Avars or the Khazars did, or were absorbed as the Danube Bulgars were. There are multiple reasons and no single cause can be selected as the main one. The scope of this lecture does not permit me to analyze this process. I can only point to such external factors as the role of Khazar institutions, small local Slav organizations under Avar and Bulgar rule in the Carpathian Basin, and the Frank military and Christian missionary

¹⁵ On the word and its history see Róna-Tas (1996a).

¹⁶ On the mediaeval ethnogenetic processes, its three main types and their subtypes, see Róna-Tas (1996c), in which the earlier opinions of Wenskus, Wolfram, Pohl, Szűcs and others are also covered.

operations. Among the internal factors, the rapid dissolution of the tribal organization with the temporary strengthening of the clan system and the mixed economy with a temporarily balanced equilibrium among nomadic pastoral and relatively strong agricultural components have to be mentioned. Within the historically extremely short time the Hungarians, who completed the settlement in about 902, founded under Saint Stephen in 1000 a Christian state which succeeded in joining the mediaeval European community.

3. The celebrations of the settlement

Finally, a few words about the long series of celebrations of the settlement, also called "Landnahme" or "the conquest" in some publications. The settlement, the "ingressus ex oriente" has always been in the focus of Hungarian historical tradition. It appeared as early as the middle of the 10th century, and later in the Hungarian chronicles written in Latin. It was always a glorification of the heroic past mostly contrasted with the bad and decadent times of the author of the chronicle, be that the 12th, 13th, or 15th century. Though all Hungarian chronicles of the Middle Ages dealt with the settlement, the historically verifiable data in them are very scanty. In 1896 the Hungarian Kingdom was a member-state of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy with Franz Joseph of the Habsburg Dynasty as its king. Though he crushed the Hungarian revolution of 1848/49, the Hungarian elite reached an historic compromise with him in 1867. Under such conditions the political message of the celebrations was more or less clear. The celebration was planned for 1895 but because of problems in organization it was postponed until the following year. The celebrations took place during a period of unprecedented economic and social prosperity. Many famous places which can be seen in Budapest today, Heroes' Square, many of the museums and other buildings, were erected in 1896. A typical product of the Millennium was the panoramic painting of the settlement by Árpád Feszty, now on display in Ópusztaszer. The celebrations were marked by a romantic sense of nationalism without, however, attacking or discriminating against minorities. Out of the 24 peasant houses and yards in the living museum-type ethnographic exhibition organized in 1896 twelve demonstrated the life of the minorities. The number of inhabitants belonging to a minority in 1895 was just half of the total population of Greater Hungary. Many books and scholarly works were

published and a profusion of paintings, sculptures and musical compositions celebrated the event. But the Romantic paintings and sometimes pompous facades succeeded only temporarily in hiding the great social and ethnic tensions that resulted in two world wars, and some of these tensions have still not disappeared.

The celebration of the settlement remains a political issue even today. Hungarian scholars, however, do their best to keep out of these debates and concentrate on new data, on new sources and on historical reconstruction:

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