

The Migration and Landtaking of the Magyars

The origins and the migration of the Hungarians has been, since medieval times, a passionately debated question and not only among Hungarians. In the last century it became generally accepted that the language of the Hungarians pertains to the Uralic linguistic family. It formed, together with Vogul and Ostyak, the Ugric branch of the Finno-Ugric languages. This is disputed only by dilettantes. On the other hand, when the Hungarians appear in written sources they not only feature as Turks, but are expressly called so. Almost two hundred years after the landtaking, in 1074 the Byzantine Emperor Michael VII Dukas sent a crown to the then new Hungarian King Géza I. The crown, the lower part of the Holy Crown, now in the National Museum, bears the Greek inscription *Jeuvitsa the faithful king of the Turks*. The Hungarians are called Turks in several other Byzantine and Arabic sources from the 9th century

on. In other sources they are called Ungri, Hungar, Ugri, Bashkir or even Huns, Avars or Scythians. This great variety of names is in contrast with how the Hungarians named themselves. We have data on the fact that the Hungarians called themselves Magyars at least since the 8th century, but this has undoubtedly been their self denotation since much earlier times. The self-nomination *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 with *Manysi*, the name of the Voguls, now living in Western Siberia, and with *Mos*, the name of one of the two main groups of their relatives, the Ostyaks. The second part, which sounded earlier *er*, is also an ethnic name, with the meaning "man, creature" and was the name of another Ugric group. From the two groups with Finno-Ugric names and languages was formed the name of the Hungarians *manš+er* > *magy+er* > *magyer* (this form, lacking the vowel harmony, is recorded until the 13th century) > *magyar*. In a lecture given in 1984 at the Academy of Rhein-Westfalen, I concluded that at the time of the landtaking the Hungarians were a people who spoke a Finno-Ugric language, but had a Turkic way of life.

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

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The ancestors of the Hungarians separated from the other Ugric speaking people about 800-500 B.C. They lived for a shorter period in the vicinity of the ancestors of the Proto-Permian people, which is reflected in a few but interesting borrowings from the early language common to present Zuryen and Votyak. At those times they were already a people which cultivated the land and bred animals, while they also engaged in mounted hunting, and fishing. In a period of about thousand years they had close contacts with Iranians, which is reflected in the vocabulary of the Hungarian language. Some elements of agriculture and animal husbandry were learnt 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 people in West Siberia. This claim was based on a small number of etymologies which admittedly were borrowed into Proto-Ugrian from Turkic. If these etymologies would be acceptable, they could have been borrowed only in the neighborhood of the original homeland of the Turks, that is in West Siberia. A thorough checking of these etymologies shows they do not support these claims. Some of these etymologies are simply wrong, as H(ungarian) *hód* "beaver" ~ T(urkic) *kunduz*, H *hattyú* "swan" ~ T *kotang*, H *nyereg* "saddle" ~ T *eger*. Others are valid but the borrowings were made much later by the Hungarians on the coast of the Black Sea, as H *homok* "sand" ~ T *kumaki*, H *hajó* "boat" ~ T *kayik*. There are also words which entered separately into the Ob Ugric and the Hungarian languages as H *ló* "horse" ~ T *ulag*, H *szó* "word" ~ T *sab*, etc. Thus these reasons for supposing a West Siberian homeland for the Hungarians disappeared.

The change from a simple agricultural economy to a nomadic one took place

within determined geographical limits. Taking into account the latest results in historical climatology and botany, this could not occur more to the North than the 50-52nd latitude. Weighing all data at our present disposal, the changeover of the Hungarians to nomadism occurred in the 5th-6th century A.D. and at the southern end of the Urals, at 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, as H *ökör* "ox" ~ T *öküz*, Chuvash *văgăr*. The change lasted more than hundred years and several groups remained in the wooded steppe as agriculturists for even longer. The adaptation to the new way of life was gradual, otherwise the Hungarians would have disappeared in the ocean of Turkic speaking people.

The next events were connected 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 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 had its centre near the Dnieper.

The area vacated 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 Azov Sea i.e. the Meotis. The Alan contacts are reflected by such loan-words as H *asszony* "noble woman", originally: "princess" ~ Old Osetian *axsin* "princess". Here the Hungarians came into close contact not only with the Alans but also with the Khazars, who were, already in the 720s, dominant in the region. After the Khazars

freed themselves from the rule of the Eastern Turks, they attacked and defeated the Bulgars. Four sets of Bulgarians moved to the West. The first founded the Danubian Bulgarian Empire around 678, the second joined the Avars in the Carpathian Basin, a third migrated to Italy and is mentioned around Ravenna. The fourth appeared on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea. A not unimportant section of the Bulgars, however, accepted Khazar rule and remained within the realm of the Khazar khagan. Many of the early Turkic loan-words of Hungarian borrowed at this time, e.g. the name of the "ash tree" H *kóris* ~ West Old Turkic *keürič* or Hungarian were terms in horticulture, and viticulture, 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 Western Bulgars lived. The relationship between the Hungarians and the Bulgars, both dependent from 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 Porphyrogennitos or his clerks noted their story. The name was *Etelküzü*. This Hungarian name had the meaning "the region within the rivers, Mesopotamia", where *Etel* is the Western 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 Greek *mezo*.

The Hungarians lived in *Etelküzü* until the landtaking. We can not exactly say when they moved to *Etelküzü*, but their stay must have lasted longer than was supposed earlier. A very large number of loan-words were borrowed here, as e.g. H *szőlő* "wine grape" ~ T *yedlig*. The Bulgars, trying to loosen their ties with the

Khazars, slowly moved northwards. After a serious defeat of the Khazars by the Arabs in 737, the migration of the Bulgars towards the Volga and further north accelerated. Some of the Hungarians moved with them. Both the Volga Bulgars and the Volga Hungarians reached the line of the Kama river around 900 A.D. 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 met by the Hungarian Friar Julian in 1235. In the following year both the Volga Bulgars and the Volga Hungarians were seriously defeated and destroyed by the Mongols.

The greater mass of the Hungarians remained in *Etelküzü*. The Hungarian tribal federation was ruled by a chieftain, appointed by the Khazars. In the middle of the 9th century his name was *Levedi*, and his tribal pasture lands were called *Levedia* in Greek sources. According to Arabic sources around 870, he bore the title *kündü* and, though he was the legitimate ruler, he had no real power. The power of the military commanders, the members of the *Almish-Árpád* clan grew considerably. According to Muslim sources, they bore the title *žula* or *žila*. They controlled the army and the administration. The claim, however, that the Hungarians had a sacral kingship similar to that of the Khazars is unfounded and lacks any evidence.

From the year 862 on, written sources relate that the Hungarians living in *Etelküzü* took part in the fighting and wars in 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 alongside the *Kabars* (*cum cowaris*) against the Franks. The importance and power of the *Almish-Árpád* clan can be seen in the successful western raids but also in the fact of the three *Kabar* tribes leaving the Khazars

and joining the Hungarians. A few years before the landtaking, the Árpád clan dethroned the Levedi clan and concentrated power in its own hands.

In 894 they fought in alliance with the Moravian ruler Svatopluk against the Franks and in alliance with the Byzantine Empire against the Danube Bulgars. Both military expeditions were very successful. In fact in 894 the Hungarians joined the Moravian-Byzantine coalition against the Danube Bulgarian-Frank alliance.

The spring of 895 began with the campaign of the Hungarian host under Árpád, who wanted to attack the Danube Bulgars by moving down the Tisza river. A smaller Hungarian host attacked the Bulgars at the Lower Danube. However, the Byzantines did not keep their promise to attack the Bulgars from the south, and the Bulgars defeated the smaller Hungarian host attacking from Etelközü.

At the same time, a Pecheneg army appeared in the East. They were pushed by an alliance of the Oghuz, Kimeks and Kharluks, who themselves were defeated by the Samanid ruler. The Pechenegs could not enter the Khazar Empire proper and, most probably on the prompting of the Danube Bulgar ruler Boris, attacked the Hungarians left behind in Etelközü. After the disastrous defeat of the Hungarians in Etelközü by the Pechenegs and Danube Bulgarians, they could only flee to the army of Árpád who was slowly moving to the south along the Tisza. In 895 the Hungarians occupied only the eastern part of the Carpathian basin and did not cross the Danube. This happened in 899 when, on the invitation of the Frankish ruler Arnulf, they raided Northern Italy. The Hungarian host returned in 900, and on their way back they learned of the death of Arnulf in December 899. The Hungarians occupied Transdanubia and moved westwards. They were stopped only in 902 with

a temporary truce between the Franks and the Hungarians.

The pacification of the people living in the Carpathian basin was easy. The Avars, most of whom converted to Christianity in the first half of the 9th century, had lost their power. The Danube Bulgars and the Franks crushed the Kaghanate and only small, petty rulers functioned. The Turkic speaking Avars had step by step been Slavized. Some of them were still bilingual when the Hungarians arrived. There are loan-words in Hungarian which clearly show the bilingualism of the Avars. Such a word is e.g. *H terem* "great room, palace" (also in the well known Hungarian word *étterem* "restaurant") ~ Avar *term*, West Turkic *terem*.

In the Middle Ages older peoples or ethnic groups disappeared and new ones emerged. In Europe roughly three types of ethnogenesis can be distinguished. They can all be studied as to how they adapted themselves to the "civilized" Roman Empire and how they formed their new feudal state organization with its personal and territorial bonds. The three main types were the Germanic type, the Slavic type and the Turkic type. In the Turkic type, tribal confederations tried to change into a centralized Empire. The Turkic type had three subtypes, the Avar, the Khazar and the Danube Bulgar. The Khazar and the Avar processes proved to be dead ends, both people disappeared. The Danube Bulgars, although they long kept their ethnic consciousness, were slowly absorbed by the Slav majority.

The Hungarians lived also in a Turkic type of tribal confederation: their name was the Seven Magyars (*H Hetümagyer*) on the model of the Ten Ogurs, the Three Karluks, the Thirty Tatars, etc. We know that in 895 this tribal federation 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 why and how the Hungarians managed to continue to exist, keeping 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. The reasons were multiple and there is no single cause which can be selected as the main one. I have no space here to discuss this process and can only point to such external factors as the role of the Khazar institutions, the small local organizations of the Slavs under Avar and Bulgar rule in the Carpathian basin, and Frankish military and Christian missionary activity. Among the internal factors, the rapid dissolution of the tribal organization with the temporary strengthening of the clan system, the mixed economy with a temporary equilibrium between nomadic pastoral and relatively strong agricultural components have to be mentioned. Within a historically extremely short time, the Hungarians, who finished their landtaking about 902, founded under Saint Stephen in 1000 A.D. a Christian state which succeeded in becoming part of the medieval European community.

Finally, a few words about the long line of celebrations of the landtaking, or conquest. The landtaking, the *ingressus ex oriente* has always been at the centre of the Hungarian historical tradition. We meet it already in the middle of the 10th century, and later in the Hungarian chronicles written in Latin. It was always a glorifying of the heroic past, mostly contrasting it with the bad and decadent times of the author of the chronicle, be it the 12th, 13th or 15th century. Though all Hungarian chronicles of the Middle Ages dealt with the landtaking, the historically verifiable data in them are very scanty. In 1896 the Hungarian Kingdom was a member of the

Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, under the Habsburg Franz Joseph, who had crushed the Hungarian revolution of 1848/49, but with whom the Hungarian elite reached a historical compromise in 1867. In this situation the political message of the celebrations was more or less clear. The celebrations should have been held in 1895, but because of organizational problems they were postponed by a year. They took place amid an unprecedented economic and social boom. Many of the famous sights of Budapest, Heroes Square, many of the museums and other public buildings were erected in 1896. A typical product of the Millennium was the panorama on the landtaking by Árpád Feszty, now in Ópusztaszer. The celebrations were marked by a romantic nationalism, but did not attack or discriminate against the national minorities. Of the 24 peasant houses and courtyards in the Skanzen-type ethnographic exhibition of 1896 twelve demonstrated the life of the minorities. In 1895, they accounted for just half of the total population of Hungary. Many books and scholarly works were published, a plethora of paintings, sculptures and musical compositions celebrated the event. But the romantically painted and sometimes pompous curtains could only temporarily hide the great social and ethnic tensions which soon resulted in two world wars. Some of the ethnic tensions continue.

The celebration of the landtaking remained a political issue even in most recent times. Hungarian scholars, however, concentrate on new data, on new sources and on historical reconstruction. In 1996, exhibitions, books, papers, public lectures, several television and radio programmes celebrated the event. All in all the balance is positive. Most of what was said and done was kept within the solid framework of scholarly knowledge. ■