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## The Slavs in the Hungarian Chronicles\*

**Słowa kluczowe:** kroniki węgierskie; Słowianie; węgierska tradycja historyczna

**Keywords:** Hungarian chronicles; the Slavs; Hungarian historical tradition

**Abstract:** The article describes the way of presentation of the Slavs in the Hungarian medieval chronicles. They were only a background for the Hungarians as the subjugated population, therefore the Slavic tradition was generally uninteresting for the Hungarians. The *Sclavi* were one of the Slavic tribes only, identical to the Pannonian Slavs.

The scholars studying the medieval history of Central and Eastern Europe mention that it were the Slavs whose settlements dominated in the region.<sup>1</sup> They created their own political structures, which were originally dominated by foreign states, but they have striven for independency.<sup>2</sup> We think in the categories of the eighteenth century when we reflect about the Slavic people. The contemporary denotation of the Slavs is based on the results of modern Indo-European philology, ethnology, history and archaeology. Earlier there were no systematic philological research, nevertheless the

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<sup>1</sup> J. Kłoczowski, *Europa słowiańska w XIV–XV wieku*, Warszawa 1984; idem, *Młodsza Europa. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w kręgu cywilizacji chrześcijańskiej średniowiecza*, Warszawa 1998; R. Grzesik, *Hungaria – Slavia – Europa Centralis. Studia z dziejów środkowoeuropejskiej kultury we wczesnym średniowieczu*, Warszawa 2014, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> The history of Great Moravia, Pannonian Princedoms, and Bulgaria illustrated this thesis.

consciousness of language affinity was alive.<sup>3</sup> The chronicles of some Slavic countries testify it. Gallus Anonymus, descending from a Romanesque country, France or Venetia, described Poland as a part of a wider Slavdom.<sup>4</sup> The author of the so-called Slavic Interpolation of the Great-Polish Chronicle knew the relativity of the inhabitants of Pannonia, Serbia, and Dalmatia and interpreted it as Pannonia would be a cradle of the Slavs.<sup>5</sup> He probably knew the testimony of the Ruthenian annals, where Pannonia also was presented as an origin land of the Slavs. One may suspect that it was the tradition of the Pannonian Slavs, which were transferred to Bulgaria, and then to Rus' by the disciples of the Thessalonikan Brothers and their descendants, and inspired also the Polish chronicle writers after the incorporation of West Ruthenian territories to Poland in the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The letter of Polish Jesuit Teofil Krzystek to the Chief of the Jesuit missions, Spanish monk Alfonso Carillo from 27<sup>th</sup> September 1599 shows his great philological knowledge of the relativity of several Slavic languages. According to him, the "Illyric" language is the oldest Slavic language because of the Glagolitic alphabet and should be the teaching tongue of Jesuit colleges devoted to the Slavic students. Cf. M. Homza, N. Rácová, *K vývinu slovenskej myšlienky do polovice 18. storočia*, Bratislava 2010, pp. 126–134.

<sup>4</sup> *Gesta principum Polonorum. The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles*, ed. by P. W. Knoll and F. Schaer, with a preface by Th. N. Bisson, Budapest–New York 2003, pp. 12–15 (bilingual, Latin-English edition). Studies on the Chronicle cf. D. Bagi, *Gallus Anonymus és Magyarország. A Geszta magyar adatai, forrásai, mintái, valamint a szerző történetészemlélete a latin Kélet-Közép-Európa 12. századi eleji latin nyelvű történetírásának tükrében*, Budapest 2005; idem, *Królowie węgierscy w kronice Galla Anonima*, Kraków 2008; T. Jasiński, *O pochodzeniu Galla Anonima*, Kraków 2008; idem, *Gall Anonim – poeta i mistrz prozy. Studia nad rytmiką prozy i poezji w okresie antycznym i średniowiecznym*, Kraków 2016; E. Skibiński, *Przemiany władzy. Narracyjna koncepcja Anonima tzw. Galla i jej podstawy*, Poznań 2009; D. von Guttner-Sporzyński, *Gallus Anonymus*, [In:] *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*, ed. by G. Dunphy, Leiden–Boston 2010 [henceforth: EMC], vol. 1, pp. 659–660; *Handbuch Chroniken des Mittelalters*, hrsg. v. G. Wolf, N.H. Ott, Berlin–Boston 2016, pp. 786–788 (R. Grzesik).

<sup>5</sup> *Kronika wielkopolska*, ed. by B. Kürbis, Warszawa 1970 (*Monumenta Poloniae historica, series nova*, t. 8), p. 4–7. Studies on the Chronicle: B. Kürbisówna, *Studia nad Kroniką wielkopolską*, Poznań 1952; eadem, *Dziejopisarstwo wielkopolskie XIII i XIV wieku*, Warszawa 1959; E. Skibiński, *Dzierzwa i kronikarz wielkopolski. Powrót problemu*, [In:] *Scriptura custos memoriae. Prace historyczne*, red. D. Zydorek, Poznań 2001, pp. 225–232; J. Bieniak, *Jan (Janek) von Czarnków. Unvollendete polnische Chronik aus dem 14. Jahrhundert*, *Quaestiones Mediaevi Novae* 14 (2009), pp. 123–183; M. Derwich, *Chronica Poloniae maioris*, EMC, vol. 1, p. 394; *Handbuch Chroniken*, pp. 791–792 (R. Grzesik).

<sup>6</sup> *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian Text*, transl. and ed. by S. Hazzard Cross and O.P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Cambridge, Mass. [1953], p. 52–53. According to M. Font (*Handbuch*

However, this unified landscape of the Slavic unity was interrupted at the turn of the tenth century by the Hungarians. According to the present-day criterion, the Hungarians belong to the Ugrian branch of the Ugro-Finn language family and represent nowadays the greatest Ugro-Finn nation. They met several Turkic tribes during their nomadic history, when they lived in *Magna Hungaria*, which is identified with the region of Bashkiria and on the Black-Sea steppes. They began also contacts with the Eastern Slavs, the Ruthenians, whose they robbed and took slaves. The Hungarians also collected tribute from the local political structures in the name of the Khazarian rulers.<sup>7</sup> The Primary Chronicle noted that “The Magyars passed by Kiev over the hill now called Hungarian, and on arriving at the Dnieper, they pitched camp. They were nomads like the Polovcians. Coming out of the east, they struggled across the great mountains, and began to fight against the neighboring Vlakhs and Slavs.”<sup>8</sup> One can mention only as a curiosity that the future Apostle of the Slavs, Constantine, later called Cyril, met the Hungarian troops on the Crimea, when he went with his brother Methodius to the Khazars as an envoy. Methodius as an archbishop met a Hungarian ‘king’ on the lower Danube some years later.<sup>9</sup> The Hungarians wandering in the Carpathian Basin met on the edge of Great Hungarian Plain Slavic people and structures: Great Moravia, the Pannonian principedom, Great Carantania, and Bulgaria, which was originated by the Turkic Onogurs – Protobulgarians, who were fast Slavicized in the ninth century.<sup>10</sup>

It is without doubt that the Slavic population accounted almost half of the pop-

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*Chroniken*, p. 824–825) tradition of Cyril and Methodius activity was the source of this fragment of the Primary Chronicle. Cf. R. Grzesik, *Great Moravia as the Basis of the Central European Medieval Historical Tradition*, [In:] *Slovensko a Chorvátsko. Historické paralely a vzťahy (do roku 1780). Slovačka i Hrvatska. Povijesne paralele i veze (do godine 1780)*, red. M. Homza, J. Lukačka, N. Budak, Bratislava 2012, pp. 66–71 and idem, *Wielkomorawsko-panońskie Opowiadanie o przełożeniu ksiąg*, [In:] *Słowiańszczyzna wielowyznaniowa w dawnych wiekach*, red. J. Stradomski, M. Kuczyńska, (Krakowsko-Wileńskie Studia Sławistyczne, t. 16), Kraków 2019, pp. 9–19.

<sup>7</sup> I. Fodor, *Die große Wanderung der Ungarn vom Ural nach Pannonien*, Budapest 1975; Gy. Kristó, *Hungarian History in the Ninth Century*, Szeged 1996.

<sup>8</sup> *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, s. a. 6396–6406 (888–898), p. 62.

<sup>9</sup> J. Leśny, *Konstantyn i Metody apostołowie Słowian. Dzieło i jego losy*, Poznań 1987. This biography is still a very precious reflection on the life and work of Brothers of Thessalonika.

<sup>10</sup> T. Wasilewski, *Bizancjum i Słowianie w IX wieku. Studia z dziejów stosunków politycznych i kulturalnych*, Warszawa 1972 analysed mainly the Bulgarian-Byzantine relationship and showed the process of Slavicization of Bulgarian state.

ulation of Hungary.<sup>11</sup> The Slovak medievalist Martin Homza thinks even that the language of the Pannonian Slavs played the role of the *lingua franca* of the Early Arpadian Monarchy.<sup>12</sup> The Hungarians were conscious of that. The *Libellus de institutione morum*, written for Emeric, the Hungarian dauphin, stated that the state of one language and one custom is weak.<sup>13</sup> Thus, one can tell that the Hungarian Monarchy belonged to the Slavic Europe as a semi-Slavic country.<sup>14</sup> However, the historical tradition of the ruling elite was non-Slavic, but pure Hungarian.

The tradition of origin of the people and the state is reflected in the Hungarian chronicles. We should have to remind only that all known works originated in the High and Late Middle Ages. The oldest chronicle in the type of *Gesta nationis* was written after 1200 by a notary of a late king Béla. After a long discussion, there is no doubt that it was a notary of Béla III, whose name could originate from the letter P. Unfortunately, we know several persons with names originating in P from that time, whom we can suspect that they could write a chronicle. This work is essential for us, because it describes the process of conquering of the land. The next chronicles are based on a lost *Gesta* written about 1270 by master Ákos. This lost work was rewritten and supplemented by master Simon of Kéza in the years 1282–1285. The author added an extensive *Historia Hunnorum*, creating a popular, although false, idea of the Hunnic-Hungarian relationship. The main stem of the text was rewritten by an anonymous Franciscan of Buda at the beginning of the fourteenth century and became the basis of two chronicle families: of the *Chronica Budense* and of the Illuminated Chronicle. Especially the later one is interesting for the researcher, because it contains interpolations about the civil wars of the mid-eleventh century, which bear the traces of contemporary redactions. Therefore, the common opinion is that the lost original stood behind all present-day known chronicles. This chronicle in the type of *gesta*, conventionally entitled as *Gesta Ungarorum*, could be composed in the mid-eleventh century, the second half of the eleventh century, or at the beginning of the twelfth century.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Gy. Kristó, *Magyarország népei Szent István korában*, Századok 134 (2000), pp. 27–35; R. Grzesik, *Hungaria*, p. 102.

<sup>12</sup> *Monumenta linguae Slovacae*, vol. 1: *Documenta Iuridico-Administrativa Formulae Iuramentorum saeculi XVI.–XVIII.*, t. 1, red. P. Benka, M. Homza, P. Žigo, Bratislava 2018, p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> *Libellus de institutione morum*, ed. by I. Balogh, [In:] *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum*, ed. E. Szentpétery, t. 2, Budapestini 1938, p. 625 v. 5–6: *Nam unius linguae uniusque moris regnum imbecille et fragile est.*

<sup>14</sup> It was also my conclusion, cf. R. Grzesik, *Hungaria*, pp. 125–134.

<sup>15</sup> The extensive description of the Hungarian chronicle writing cf. N. Kersken, *Geschichts-*

Our main aim is to answer who were the Slavs, who occurred on the charts of the chronicles. How they were presented and which role did they play. Was the general Slavic idea of an affinity of the Slavs alive or unknown to the Hungarian chroniclers?

One finds the greater part of the information about the people which are the Slavs for us, in the work of the anonymous notary. The Slavs occurred just in the second chapter of the chronicle. The chronicler explained why the Hungarians were called *Hungari* and mentioned that the seven leading persons were named from the castle Hungu, present-day Užhorod/Ungvár, because they stood there for a time having subjugated the Slavs.<sup>16</sup> Then we are informed that the Hungarians descending from Scythia reached Rus', which is called Suzdal. They crossed the river Dnieper close to Kyiv. The princes of Rus' feared the newcomers greatly because they had heard that prince Álmos was a descendant of Attila. They asked the Cumans for help and took an armed fight against the Hungarians, who won the battle and started to besiege the capital of Rus'. The princes of Rus' asked for peace. They had to give their sons as hostages, pay a yearly tribute of 10.000 marks and give permanently food and cloth to the Hungarians. However, the Ruthenians informed the Hungarians that there is a wealth land behind the Snowy wood (*silva Houos*), which calls Pannonia and was a property of king Attila. The Slavs (*Sclavi*), Bulgarians, Vlachs and the shepherds of the Romans lived there.<sup>17</sup>

Next fragments of the notary's story are repetitive. We hear about the great fear of the natives, who heard that Arpad was the descendant of king Attila. If somebody wanted to oppose to the Hungarians, he was rapidly defeated and most often lost his life like the prince of Nitra Zobor, who commanded the Bohemian and Slavic troops, and was hanged by the Hungarians.<sup>18</sup> The armed conquest was however, not the only possibility of capture of new territories. One can buy a land, which is interesting to him. We read in an anonymous notary's narration and in the chronicle

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*schreibung im Europa der "nationes". Nationalgeschichtliche Gesamtdarstellungen im Mittelalter*, Köln–Weimar–Wien 1995, pp. 652–732 and in prefaces to the recent editions in the series *Central European Medieval Texts*, quoted below.

<sup>16</sup> *Anonymus and Master Roger. Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum. Anonymus Notary of King Béla, The Deeds of the Hungarians*, ed., transl. and annotated by M. Rady and L. Veszprémy. *Magistri Rogerii Epistola in miserabile Carmen super destructione regni Hungarie per Tartaros facta. Master Roger's Epistle to the Sorrowful Lament upon the Destruction of the Kingdom of Hungary by the Tatars*, transl. and annotated by J.M. Bak and M. Rady, Budapest–New York 2010 [henceforth: An.], ch. 2, pp. 12–13.

<sup>17</sup> An., ch. 8–9, pp. 20–29.

<sup>18</sup> An., ch. 35–37, pp. 76–79.

composition such a story. Anonymous notary made a prince of the Slavs and the Bulgarians Salan, the grandson of Great Kean, who ruled in the Tisza land from Titel until the border with Poland and Rus' the main hero of this story. He accepted the Hungarians believing that they are peaceful farmers and shepherds. He gave them the gifts they asked: two bottles of water from the Danube and a bag of grass from the sand of Alpár. He received also very rich gifts from Arpad. He was not conscious that he sold his land.<sup>19</sup> The story of the chronicle composition is much modest and probably based on the archetype of the Hungarian chronicle writing. Prince Zuatapolug (Svatopluk) is its hero and he received for his land a splendid white horse with a golden saddle and a golden bridle.<sup>20</sup> Simon of Kéza did not know this story, but he knew that Svatopluk was a prince of Poland. The chroniclers did not mention the name Moravia in the Great-Moravian context, but some aspects show that the existence of Moravian state gave the origin of some heroes or narrations. Svatopluk's father's name was Marót, as Simon informed us. There is a tradition that it was not Svatopluk, but Marót, who was defeated by the Hungarians. It was not truth. "The basis for this story seems to be that Marót was the better known name, but being old and weak, he was resting in his castle called Veszprém, and when he heard of the disaster which had overwhelmed his son, he was so grief-stricken that he forthwith ended his life."<sup>21</sup>

According to the last editors of the Chronicle of Simon, there was a polemic with anonymous notary's story, where we find Marót.<sup>22</sup> It was a prince, who occupied the territory eastwards from that of Salan, between Tisza and the Wood Igyfon on the Transylvanian border. His grandson was called Menumorout and he ruled over Bihar region. He refused to hand over his land and condemned Salan for it. Then

<sup>19</sup> An., ch. 14, pp. 38–41; ch. 16, pp. 44–47.

<sup>20</sup> *Chronica de gestis Hungarorum e Codice Picto saec. XIV. Chronicle of the Deeds of the Hungarians from the Fourteenth-Century Illuminated Codex*, ed. by J. M. Bak, L. Veszprémy with a Preface by N. Kersken, Budapest–New York 2018 [henceforth: Chron.], ch. 28, pp. 66–73.

<sup>21</sup> Simonis de Kéza, *Gesta Hungarorum*. Simon of Kéza, *The Deeds of the Hungarians*, ed. by L. Veszprémy and F. Schaer with a study by J. Szűcs, Budapest 1999 [henceforth: Kézai], ch. 23, p. 77 (English translation). In Latin p. 76: "Hoc idcirco esse habetur, quia Morot pater eius nomine maior erat, sed confectus senio repausabat in castro, quod Bezprem nominatur. Audito infortunio, quod filio acciderat, morte subita ob dolorem finivit vitam suam".

<sup>22</sup> Kézai, p. 76, n. 1. By the way, it is an example of the medieval methods of polemics and criticism. Anonymous notary mentioned Marót only once in ch. 11, pp. 32–33 with information that Menumorout was his grandson.

the struggle began, in which Menumorout was defeated.<sup>23</sup> When we started to forget about him, Anonymous returned to him in the final part of his *Gesta*. We recognize him still as a prince of Bihar, whom the Hungarians had defeated again. And we surprised read about his proposal of the political alliance with the Hungarians sealed by the marriage of his daughter with a Hungarian dauphine. The proposal was accepted and the region Bihar was inherited by the Hungarian ruler after his death.<sup>24</sup>

We see that several Slavic tribes and nations occurred on the charts of Hungarian chronicles. The Ruthenians, Poles, Bohemians, Bulgarians were named separately without any reflection of their ethnical relativeness. This reflection was impossible at that time. However, the name *Sclavi* occurred also in the chronicles. There are only two mentions in the Simon's Chronicle and three in the chronicle composition. The chroniclers mention the Slavs among the people subjugated to Attila, who remained in Pannonia after Attila's death and evacuation of the Huns. The rest of the mentions present the Slavs as the people of Kean, together with the Bulgarians and reflect the situation of the early stages of the Bulgarian State.<sup>25</sup>

The greatest number of mentions are to be seen in the *Gesta Hungarorum* by the anonymous notary. I have just mentioned about the subjugation of the Slavs by the Hungarians in the region Užhorod/Ungvár<sup>26</sup> and about the Slavs inhabiting Pannonia.<sup>27</sup> The Slavs were a people of Kean and Salan together with the Bulgarians.<sup>28</sup> They built, under the Hungarian control, the castle Surungrad, that is, Csongrád.<sup>29</sup> They lived between the Danube and Tisza, also on Upper Tisza. They subordinated to the Hungarians from the fear against them. The Slavs lived also eastwards of Tisza, on the edge of Transylvania, together with the Vlachs of the prince Gelou. "The inhabitants of that land were the basest of the whole world, because they were Vlachs and Slavs, and because they had nothing else for arms than bows and arrows."<sup>30</sup> The Slavs

<sup>23</sup> An., ch. 20, pp. 50–55; ch. 22, pp. 56–59; ch. 28, pp. 64–67.

<sup>24</sup> An., ch. 50–52, pp. 106–115.

<sup>25</sup> Kézai, ch. 23, pp. 72–73; ch. 43, pp. 102–103; Chron., ch. 23, pp. 56–57; ch. 66, pp. 116–117; ch. 67, pp. 120–121.

<sup>26</sup> An., ch. 2, pp. 12–13.

<sup>27</sup> An., ch. 9, pp. 26–27.

<sup>28</sup> An., ch. 11–12, pp. 32–37; ch. 33, pp. 72–73.

<sup>29</sup> An., ch. 40, pp. 86–87. This name means 'Blackborough'.

<sup>30</sup> An., ch. 25, p. 61.

lived also together with the Bohemians in the region of Nitra<sup>31</sup> and in the western part of Pannonia close to Rába and Rábca rivers.<sup>32</sup>

I think that the Slavs of the Hungarian chronicles are one of the tribes only. The name denotes the people living in the territory of Carpathian Basin from present-day Trans-Carpathia and Slovakia until the western borders of Hungary. The research polemics, whether they were the ancestors of the Slovaks, Bulgarians, or the Slovenians, are without any value.<sup>33</sup> I think that this population could be identified as the Pannonian Slavs and were part of Slavic settlement continuum from the contemporary point of view.

The Slavs (*Sclavi*) and other people, who belong to the Slavic population, were described as the subjugated people. I think this social fact determined the chroniclers' attitude toward them. They belonged to the background, on which the acts of the Hungarians shone bright light. This explains also why the historical tradition of the Hungarians generally (although not without exceptions<sup>34</sup>) did not incorporate the Slavic historical tradition. The subordinated people had to serve to their lords and had no right to own past. Therefore, I think the Hungarian Monarchy could not be identified as a Slavic state from an ideological point of view, despite the Slavs were a great part of its population, and the language of Pannonian Slavs could be a common language of the multinational Hungarian state.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> An., ch. 35–37, pp. 76–81.

<sup>32</sup> An., ch. 50, pp. 106–107.

<sup>33</sup> I. Kniezsa, *Ungarns Völkerschaften im XI. Jahrhundert*, Archivum Europae Centro-Orientalis 4 (1938), pp. 241–412 (South Slavs of the Bulgarian and Croato-Slovenian group); idem, *Die Sprache der alten Slawen*, Studia Slavica Academiae Scientiarum Hungarorum 1 (1955), pp. 29–47; E. Moór, *Die Ausbildung der Betriebsformen der ungarischen Landwirtschaft im Lichte der slawischen Lehnwörter*, Studia Slavica Academiae Scientiarum Hungarorum 2 (1956), pp. 31–117 (East Slavs, Bulgarians, Slovenians); J. Stanislav, *Slovenský júb v stredoveku*, vol. 1–2, Turčiansky Sv. Martin 1948 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. of the vol. 1, Bratislava 1999) – Slovaks.

<sup>34</sup> R. Grzesik, *Blasi and Pastores Romanorum in the Gesta Hungarorum by an Anonymous Notary*, Res Historica 41 (2016), pp. 25–34 – I tried to show that a story about the shepherds of the Romans in An. ch. 9, pp. 26–27 was a part of the Pannonian Slavic tradition of fights against the “Romans”, i.e., the (East) Franks and their church organization represented by the Archbishopric of Salzburg (‘shepherds of the Romans’, priests of the Salzburg Church). I used the remarks of Gy. Kristó, *Rómaiak és vlahok Nyesztornál és Anonymusnál*, [In:] idem, *Tanulmányok az Árpád-korról*, Budapest 1983, pp. 132–190.

<sup>35</sup> However, Hungary belonged to *Europa Slavica* from the point of view of geography, ethnography, politics, and partly culture. Cf. R. Grzesik, *Hungaria*, p. 133–134.



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## Résumé

### The Slavs in the Hungarian Chronicles

The Slavs in the contemporary notion (as a branch of the Indo-Europeans) inhabited wide regions of Eastern Europe and of the Carpathian Basin. In both territories, the Slavic population met the Hungarians, who changed their location from *Magna Hungaria* (probably Bashkiria) through the Black-Sea steppes to the former Roman Pannonia. The article analyses in which way were the Slavs characterized in the Hungarian chronicles. Three high medieval chronicles were analysed: The *Gesta Hungarorum* by an Anonymous Notary of King Béla (III), by Simon of Kéza and the so-called Chronicle composition of the fourteenth century. It seems that all people, who are perceived as Slavs by us (Ruthenians, Poles, Bohemians, Bulgarians, *Sclavi*, identical with the Pannonian Slavs), were presented as a subjugated population. I think that this low social status of the Slavic population made the wider incorporation of the local historical tradition to the Hungarian almost impossible.

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