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ARCHAEOLOGY OF IDENTITY – ARCHÄOLOGIE DER IDENTITÄT

ÖSTERREICHISCHE AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN
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FORSCHUNGEN ZUR GESCHICHTE DES MITTELALTERS
BAND 17

HERAUSGEGEBEN VOM
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A contribution to research on ethnicity: a view from and on the east

THE STATE OF RESEARCH

The results of modern research on ethnicity have not yet reached specialists of the early medieval Eurasian steppe in Eastern Europe (nor have the results of the latter reached the former). This has many reasons. First the most obvious: many of these publications remain unknown to Central and East European scholars either due to financial reasons or the lack of connections or knowledge of languages. This aspect does not need further elaboration. The other group of obstacles, however, is more complex and less easy to tackle: it is the lack of open-mindedness required to change traditional methods. This has two roots: partly it stems from the approach according to which European and Asian historical processes are completely different and incomparable, partly from the methodological backwardness of Eastern European research.

The first is almost understandable, since these two worlds had completely different foundations and the development of their study had different trajectories as well. The fact of difference was evident and it seemed pointless to go beyond its acknowledgement and look for or establish possible parallels and perhaps analyze them. When such were nonetheless found, they immediately shed light on the differences between the approaches of Eastern and Western European research, for example in connection with the definition of the concept of ‘ethnos’, whose material aspects were emphasized in Soviet research, as opposed to the emphasis on mental aspects in Western European and North American traditions.¹ It would be enlightening to compare Eastern and Western European archaeology in terms of the use of one of their methods in the twentieth century. Western European archaeological research has already thoroughly analyzed the ‘Kossinna-syndrome’, the manifestations of the archaeology of Nazi Germany that was partly based on Kossinna,² but from the same point of view ignored the concepts of another influential scholar, V. G. Childe,³ who dallied with Stalinist Soviet Union and Marxism, and who, in his retrospective “scientific last will” called the early period of his own scientific career ‘childeish’ (“...but not childish”),⁴ and who had almost identical views regarding the ethnic identification of archaeological cultures to Kossinna’s. Although the connection between archaeological cultures and ethnicity has been heavily criticized, this is not because one of its first theoreticians was the German Gustaf Kossinna. This approach was generally accepted until the middle of the twentieth century and its roots can be traced back to the works of G. F. Klemm and E. B. Taylor, F. Boas and L. Frobenius as a consequence of which during the whole nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century culture as such was generally viewed as a historical and ethnospecific phenomenon.⁵ For the same reason it was obvious for everyone in that period that behind archaeological finds and phenomena peoples must be looked for. In order to depoliticize

¹ Ulrich Braukämper, *Migration und ethnischer Wandel* (Stuttgart 1992) 47.

² Sebastian Brather, *Kossinna, Gustaf*, in: *RGA 2. Auflage 17*. (Berlin/New York 2000) 263–267; Ulrich Veit, *Gustaf Kossinna and his concept of national archaeology*, in: *Archaeology, Ideology and Society: The German Experience*, ed. Heinrich Härke (*Gesellschaften und Staaten im Epochenwandel 7*, Frankfurt/M. 2000) 41–66, at 41–44; *Eine hervorragend nationale Wissenschaft: Deutsche Prähistoriker zwischen 1900 und 1995*, ed. Heiko Steuer (*RGA Erg. Bd. 29*, Berlin/New York 2001). For a more balanced view see Leo Klejn, *Kossinna im Abstand von vierzig Jahren*, in: *Jahresschrift Mitteldeutscher Vorgeschichte 58* (1974) 7–55; Florin Curta, *From Kossinna to Bromley: Ethnogenesis in Slavic Archaeology*, in: *On Barbarian Identity. Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Andrew Gillett (*Studies in the Early Middle Ages 4*, Turnhout 2002) 201–218, at 203. Ulrich Veit quoted a sentence by E. McWhite as his motto: “It is almost fashionable to be derogatory about Kossinna’s theories, but his methods were perhaps not as bad as the way he himself misused them”, see Ulrich Veit, *Ethnic concepts in German prehistory: a case Study on the relationship between cultural identity and archaeological objectivity*, in: *Archaeological Approaches to Cultural Identity*, ed. Stephan J. Shennan (*One World Archaeology 10*, London 1989) 35–56, at 35.

³ Leo S. Klejn, *Childe and Soviet archaeology. A romance*, in: *The Archaeology of V. Gordon Childe*, ed. David R. Harris (London 1994) 75–93. (especially: ‘The dangerous Marxist’, at 76–80); Ulrich Veit, [Comment] *Current Anthropology 39* (1998) 39; János Makkay, *V. Gordon Childe i jego prehistoria z perspektywy węgierskiej*, in: *V. Gordon Childe i archeologia w XX wieku*, ed. Christian Lübke (Warszawa 1999) 345–357, at 347–348.

⁴ Jean-Paul Demoule, *Archäologische Kulturen und moderne Nationen*, in: *Archäologien Europas – Archaeologies of Europe*, ed. Peter F. Biehl/Alexander Gramsch/Arkadiusz Marciniak (*Tübinger Archäologische Tachenbücher 3*, Münster/New York/München/Berlin 2002) 133–143, at 137.

⁵ Sebastian Brather, *Ethnic Identities as Constructions of Archaeology: The Case of the Alamanni*, in: *On Barbarian Identity. Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Andrew Gillett (*Studies in the Early Middle Ages 4*, Turnhout 2002) 149–175, at 150.

the assessment of the approach built on Kossinna's views we have to note that Soviet archaeology treaded the same path: e.g. the territory of the early Rus' state was determined by A. A. Spicyn (1899) and V. V. Sedov (1986) with the help of the spatial distribution of the same fibula type (!).⁶ As L. S. Klejn – an experienced witness! – put it, Soviet archaeology can be characterized by a nationalistic-patriotic development from Marxist evolutionism towards Kossinna-type ethnicism.⁷ These parallelisms⁸ – omitting the unscientific views of Nazi archaeologists and ethnographers – show that we are dealing with a phenomenon independent of ideologies, basically a general approach during a long period of the history of research.

The methodological stagnation of Central and Eastern European archaeology had many causes that can be traced back to the dominant political atmosphere of the second half of the twentieth century:

a) Due to the nature of dictatorship, in the 1950ies it was impossible to use philosophies and methods other than Marxism; they could be discussed only from a critical standpoint. At the same time, in 'socialist' countries 'Marxism' existed only in its vulgar form, and for example in archaeology its application was restricted to certain issues (e.g. class society, exploitation, etc.) and the regular use of certain ideological expressions and quotations. This lack of standards also brought about some relief, since in order to ascertain one's everyday existence, it was enough to give the emperor what belonged to the emperor. It was, however, inadvisable to go any further, since for those who were not familiar with *daily* politics it was risky to attempt to use Marxism in archaeology or history. Because of the fight between various Communist political trends one single – perhaps only in retrospect! – wrong expression or quotation could have caused a devastating *ideological* stigma (e.g. Hegelian or Trotskyist), which could frequently have *existential* consequences. Thus, it was more secure to refrain from all forms of theoretical work. After the Stalinist era the ideological pressure eased up in different rhythms in the countries of the Soviet block: it started first in Poland and Hungary, and lasted the longest in the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic. In the Soviet Union of the 1960ies, research on ethnicity was connected by the powerful main ideologist of the issue, J. V. Bromlej, with the study of the 'ětničeskij process' (= 'ethnic process')⁹ – which, however, was nothing else but the Russianization of the peoples and ethnic groups of the country.¹⁰ The emergence of the expression "tjurkizacija" around the beginning of the 1970ies in the Soviet archaeology of the Ural region and in Turkology was probably a reaction to this, since first it was used frequently by the Tartar Alfred Chasanovič Chalikov.¹¹ This term was supposed to express the appearance of early medieval peoples ('tjurkojazičnye narody') in the Kama region, who were assumed to be Turkic *speaking* on the basis of their *archaeological* heritage. As we can see, this view was also built on the identification of archaeological cultures with ethnic groups, and went even further by assuming a – very problematic – equivalence between linguistic groups and the other two concepts. It is needless to expound in detail how – due to the political situation – this approach to ethnicity was taken over by the archaeologists of Eastern Europe in the 1950ies. From the point of view of *contemporary* research, however, it is important that the circumstances of the various historical disciplines, which had formed the 1950ies and 1960ies, were preserved and later political changes had no effect on them, since the new scientific schools were built around persons who had been privileged by the earlier political powers and on the unquestioning acceptance of their work. Consequently, although these schools worked without immediate political aims, methodological development was still rare,¹² and the situation was only exacerbated by the already mentioned financial difficulties.

⁶ Aleksandr A. Spicyn, *Rasselenie drevnerusskich plemën po archeologičeskim dannym*, in: *Žurnal' Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosvěščenija* 8 (1899); Valentin V. Sedov, *Die Ostslawen und die Kiewer Rus*, in: *Die Welt der Slawen*, ed. Joachim Herrmann (Berlin 1986) 184–206, at 194.

⁷ Leo Klejn, *Das Phänomen der sowjetischen Archäologie. Geschichte, Schulen, Protagonisten* (Frankfurt a. M./Berlin/Bern/New York/Paris/Wien 1997) 302.

⁸ Jacek Lech, *Social Functions of Archaeology in the 20th Century*, in: *Whither Archaeology?*, ed. Martin Kuna/Natalia Venclová (Praha 1995) 93–96, at 96.

⁹ *Soviet Ethnology and Anthropology Today*, ed. Jurij Bromlej (The Hague 1974); Jurij Bromlej, *Ethnos und Ethnographia* (Berlin 1977); id., *Theoretical Ethnography* (Moscow 1984); Tamara Dragadze, *The Place of „ethnos” Theory in Soviet anthropology*, in: *Soviet and Western Anthropology*, ed. Ernest Gellner (London 1980) 161–170.

¹⁰ The absurdity of the concept is even more apparent when it is studied in connection with "primitive societies" in prehistoric periods, see V. F. Gening, *Ėtničeskij process v pervobytnosti* (Sverdlovsk 1970).

¹¹ *Voprosy ėtnogeneza tjurkojazyčnych narodov Srednego Povol'žja*, ed. Alfred Ch. Chalikov (Kazan' 1971). He – immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union – published a book about who was of Tartar origin in Russian history and culture. See Alfred Ch. Chalikov, *500 russkich familij bulgaro-tatarskogo proischozdenija* (Kazan' 1992).

¹² In the German Democratic Republic books published in the German Federal Republic were stored in restricted areas of libraries and access was granted only in possession of special permits.

Consequently, old concepts about the phenomenon of archaeological cultures were transmitted to the next generations in a fundamentally unaltered form. (And only seem to lose their significance among the youngest generation of contemporary scholars.)

- b) The other characteristic approach of Eastern European archaeology, *pan-historicism* based on vulgar Marxism,¹³ emerged and survived for the same reasons. Hundreds of *archaeological* works were published, without any theoretical doubts on the part of the authors and editors, with titles promising to present the ‘*history of X area*’, or – even worse – the ‘*history of Y country in Z period*’.
- c) This situation was, or is, further complicated by *nationalism*, which has had a fundamental impact on the research on the early Middle Ages in this region, and has been especially salient in studies on ethnogeneses. Although nationalism is present in the archaeology of most countries of the world,¹⁴ Eastern and Southeastern Europe stand out, since here nationalism was elevated to official state politics for a longer period.¹⁵

Thus, these are the burdens of research on the history and archaeology of the early medieval Eurasian steppe in our region and in general. Western European and North American research on ethnicity has paid very little attention to the problems of early medieval Central and Eastern Europe and the Eurasian steppe not only because of these problems and the difficulties of access to the publications – mainly due to problems of language and distribution – but also because of a disciplinary isolation of a theoretical nature. The best example is the neglect of the first ever work on the theory of history, which – for the first time in the world – tackles the issues of ethnicity *on a theoretical level*. It is not my task to analyze Ibn Khaldūn’s Muqaddimah written in 1375,¹⁶ it should suffice to cite the title of some of the chapters:

II. 7: Only tribes held together by group feeling can live in the steppe

10: How lineages become confused

11: Leadership over people who share in a given group feeling cannot be vested in those not of the same descent

22: The vanquished always want to imitate the victor in his distinctive marks, his dress, his occupation, and all his other conditions and customs

23: A nation that has been defeated and come under the rule of another nation will quickly perish

III. 9: A dynasty rarely establishes itself firmly in lands with many different tribes and groups

Research on the Eurasian steppe can from time to time contribute to international research on ethnicity with fundamental data. For example, it is well-known in Turkology that seventh-century Inner Asian Turks were very much aware of the changes of the concept of “people” and consequently – we could say: reaching a theoretical depth! – they coined two words for what since the Romantic era has been blended all around the world: *el* meant ‘power created through conquest’, and is basically identical with modern notions of the ‘state’, while *bodun* meant ‘people’, in the sense of ‘the whole of society’; the latter was used for everyone who shared an ethnonym.¹⁷ Even a special study has been dedicated to the problems of ethnogenetic processes taking example of the Central Asian steppe peoples.¹⁸

It is obvious that the lack of disciplinary communication between ‘West’ and ‘East’ is detrimental to both. In this article I would like to draw the attention of scholars of ethnicity to a few data that may contribute to, or elaborate on, the already achieved results.

¹³ Klejn, Phänomen 126.

¹⁴ From the huge literature: p.ex. *Inventing the Pasts in North Central Europe. The National Perception of Early Medieval History and Archaeology*, ed. Matthias Hardt/Christian Lübke/Dittmar Schorkowitz (Gesellschaften und Staaten im Epochenwandel 9, Frankfurt a. M./Berlin/Bern/Bruxelles/New York/Oxford/Wien 2003).

¹⁵ E.g. the “Magna Moravia” exhibition, which was presented in many countries in the 1970s and 1980s, was always opened by the Czechoslovakian Minister of Foreign Affairs, while in Romania, between 1984 and 1986, the work of a Hungarian archaeologist living there was investigated by the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

¹⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History* (ed. Franz Rosenthal, I-III, London 1958); for a critical edition and commentary see Ibn Khaldūn, *History as science and the patrimonial empire*, ed. Simon Robert (Budapest 2002).

¹⁷ István Vásáry, *Nép és ország a türköknél*, in: *Nomád társadalmak és államalakulatok*, ed. Ferenc Tökei (Kőrösi Csoma Kiskönyvtár 18, Budapest 1983) 189–213; István Zimonyi, *Bodun und El im Frühmittelalter*, in: *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 56 (2003) 57–79.

¹⁸ Walter Heissig, *Ethnische Gruppenbildung in Zentralasien im Licht mündlicher und schriftlicher Überlieferung*, in: *Studien zur Ethnogenese (Abhandlungen der Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 72, Opladen 1985) 29–55.*

It is enlightening to see that the assessment of oral traditions by medieval historians was the same in the ‘East’ and the ‘West’. For example, Paul the Deacon¹⁹ in the eighth century and the Hungarian Anonymus²⁰ half a millennium later used almost the same words when expressing their opinions. It is obvious that since the early Middle Ages until the Modern Era, the ‘scientific character’ of a work was often provided not by the traditions and facts known to the historian, but by references to classical authors. Both the chronicle of Fredegar in the 7th century, and the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, written by an unknown author from Neustria in 726/727 – independently, but identically – trace back the origin of the Franks to a son of Priamus, who had escaped after the siege of Troy. (We may add: the story of Troy was part of the curriculum of the Hungarian Anonymus as well, who studied in Paris).²¹ Both authors may have known different oral traditions on the origin and prehistory of the Franks. Still – in a way and for the reason put forward by Paul the Deacon and Anonymus alike – they ignored them and instead regarded only reference to classical sources ‘scientific’. The fact that ‘research’ was based *exclusively* on Antiquity still in the seventeenth century is well illustrated even in the case of one of the greatest minds of his time: when writing about the source of the Danube, the leader of the Hungarian counter-reformation, Péter Pázmány, the Archbishop of Esztergom, analyzed and adopted the obscure ideas of classical authors, although he had a multitude of direct information and experience at his disposal.²² The practice of relying on classical authors can also be explained by the fact that in the period before the emergence of proper scientific inquiry, spatial, temporal and cultural distance and their significance, the possible connections and differences between various clusters of events and phenomena had not been realized. The philosopher Giambattista Vico regarded myth as history still in the 18th century.²³

There is another piece of information from Central Europe that may contribute to international research on ethnicity. A thought in the *Libellus de institutione morum*, known as the Admonitions of St Stephen I, but probably written by the first archbishop of the Hungarians in the 1010s, is almost identical with modern scientific concepts. According to the author, “countries with one language and one set of customs are weak and fallible”²⁴ – that is, he saw exactly that it is not language or customs that make a country what it is. It is clear from the history of research that it was Romanticism that led the concept of ‘people’ astray.

THE RELATIVE VALUE OF ETHNOGENETIC INFORMATION OBTAINABLE THROUGH VARIOUS DISCIPLINES

1) WRITTEN SOURCES

Nowadays very few historians think that the information of written sources on various ethnic groups should be taken at face value. The picture they paint might have been biased by a number of factors, for example by the point of view of the eye witnesses, or the self-perception of the given people transmitted to the author of the source (or their informants).²⁵ This categorization, however, still does not take into consideration the fact that written sources – horrible dictu even those by contemporary and “official” authors – can simply be wrong for various reasons, or be misleading on purpose, and this should be paid more attention to. This would be especially important in the case of research on the Early Middle Ages in Central and Eastern Europe, where written sources are considered unquestionable by many scholars.

¹⁹ Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* 1, 7–9 (ed. Georg Waitz, MGH SS rer. Langob., Hannover 1878) 45–187, 52: ‘ridiculous tales’.

²⁰ *Gesta Hungarorum* Prologue and 42 (ed. Gabriel Silagi, Die “Gesta Hungarorum” des anonymen Notars. Die älteste Darstellung der ungarischen Geschichte, Sigmaringen 1991) at 30f. and 100f.: ‘peasants’ false tales’, ‘bards’ chattering songs’.

²¹ Julius Prelog, *Liber Historiae Francorum*, in: LMA 5 (München 1991) 1944–1945; Helmut Reimitz, Die Konkurrenz der Ursprünge in der fränkischen Historiographie, in: *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen. Von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters*, ed. Walter Pohl (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 8, Wien 2004) 191–209.

²² Miklós Maróth, A szelek, in: *A klasszikus görög-római ókor a magyar művelődésben és tudományban*, ed. Edith Krähling (Budapest 2003) 39–46, at 46.

²³ János Kelemen, *Storia e lingua. Vico nella storia del pensiero linguistico*, in: *Con dottrina e volere insieme*, ed. Antonio Sciacovelli (Szombathely 2006) 319–328, at 324.

²⁴ S. Stephanus I rex Hungariae, *De institutione morum ad Emericum ducem filium suum*, in: *Catalogus fontium historiae Hungariae aevo ducum et regum ex stirpe Arpad descendendum ab anno Christi DCCC usque ad annum MCCCII, III, collegit Albinus Franciscus Gombos* (Budapest 1937–1938) 2170.

²⁵ Sebastian Brather, *Ethnische Interpretationen in der frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie. Geschichte, Grundlagen und Alternativen*, ed. Heinrich Beck/Dieter Geuenich/Heiko Steuer (RGA Erg. Bd. 42, Berlin/New York 2004).

The best (and most well-known) example of deliberate misstatement in the Early Middle Ages is provided by Procopius' *Secret History*. The outstanding historian depicted Justinian I (and Theodora) in such a negative way that is irreconcilable with the historical fact that this emperor was undoubtedly one of the greatest rulers of the Byzantine Empire – in terms of politics, the military, legislation and cultural life alike.²⁶ It is worth to think this over: had we no other sources about Justinian – which is an obvious possibility in world history – we could consider him the worst, weakest, most uncultured and in terms of warfare the most untalented emperor of Byzantium! This harsh contradiction is especially important, since the author was a contemporary, an eye-witness, who had access to the royal palace, that is a person who otherwise would be considered an undoubtedly authentic source! This case was by no means an unusual exception: the same bias, if not even hatred, lead the pen of another famous Byzantine historian, when he depicted the emperor of his time (see *Chronicon Monembasiae*).²⁷ The well known lesson – which is, however, not always followed – is that written sources always have to be handled with criticism.

Although it might sound extremely trivial, it has to be said because of the approach (and sometimes practice!) of certain Central and Eastern European historians: written sources should not be granted absolute value, and we have to remember that a lot more happened than what has been handed down to us in written sources.²⁸ (Another factor that is often ignored by some Eastern and Central European scholars is that the various sources are not always necessarily coherent!) Here we not only have to think of lost or not yet found sources,²⁹ but the fact that it could happen – for numerous reasons – even in regions rich in written sources that certain events and processes were not recorded. A good example to illustrate this is the Romanization of the peoples living north of Rome. This was a centuries long, complex process influencing the lives, social organization and culture of many countries, and still no sources describe it either in detail or in general, not even indirectly!³⁰ This is especially remarkable, since otherwise Western European sources provide abundant information about numerous events, political, ecclesiastical and trade relations, or cultural issues (in a detail envied by scholars of Northern, Central and Eastern Europe!), which created – and still creates – the impression in many historians that history and everyday life is more or less completely reconstructible on their basis. Similarly, the otherwise extremely rich Muslim geographical literature, invaluable for the history of Eastern Europe and Asia, was rarely based on direct, personal experience, rather on the collection of information from various sources. These two examples demonstrate that an even greater care is required when studying the history of those regions, about which we have no or only sparse written data. Special caution is needed with contemporary sources on, or in connection with, early medieval ethnogeneses in the Eurasian steppe and Central and Eastern Europe. The fact that in ethnogenetic research not only those sources need to be handled with great criticism, which were written centuries after the given events – these make up the majority of sources – but some care is required also in connection with the contemporary ones (which are usually taken at face value outside the narrow circle of specialists) is demonstrated by the example of the *Secret History*.

A number of possibilities regarding the behaviour of early medieval 'scholars' – in reality: a rather diverse group of authors with varied personal characteristics and skills – are reflected in a letter to Dado, Bishop of Verdun by an unknown author, in which he provides information on the known 'theories' on the origin of the Hungarians. According to the latter, some consider them as descendants of Gog and Magog (which the author himself considers unfounded – it has to be noted that the same concept can also be found in the Hungarian Anonymus' *Gesta* written 300 years later!), while "Jews and other people thinking like them" consider them of Scythian origin (which the author does not agree with either). According to the third version – proposed by the author – the 'Hungri' are the descendants of the population of Pannonia, Histria and Illyria, who had escaped from famine (German 'Hunger').³¹

²⁶ The possible reasons of this ambiguous picture were studied in an unfortunately posthumous work by István Kapitánffy, see István Kapitánffy, *Iustinianus képe a kortárs történetíróknál*, in: *Antik Tanulmányok* 43 (1999) 265–273.

²⁷ Stanislav Turlej, *The Chronicle of Monemvasia (Byzantina et Slavica Cracoviensia* 4, Cracow 2001) 144–145.

²⁸ Arnold Esch, *Zeitalter und Menschenalter* (München 1994) 39–69.

²⁹ In this respect Collingwood's book – Robin G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford 1946) – is very enlightening. For example he pointed out that the otherwise extremely civilized Sumerians had no historiography, and that we know only a biased Greek history through the eyes of the Athenians, and know nothing about how these things were seen by the Spartans!

³⁰ Walter Pohl, *Telling the difference – signs of ethnic identity*, in: *Strategies of Distinction. The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800*, ed. Walter Pohl/Helmut Reimitz (*The Transformation of the Roman World* 2, Leiden/Boston/Köln 1998) 17–69, at 63.

³¹ Konrad Josef Heilig, *Der Brief des Remigius von Auxerre um 990 über die Ungarn*, in: *A gróf Klebelsberg Kunó Bécsi Magyar Történetkutató Intézet Évkönyve* 3 (Budapest 1933) 7–30.

2) LINGUISTIC DATA

a) *Language*

Hungarian historical linguists adopted one of the main ideas of Romanticism immediately after the birth of their discipline and identified – until the second half of the twentieth century – the history of languages with the history of peoples, and have been convinced until recently that the prehistory of the Hungarians can be written on the basis of the history of the language, the ethnonyms, the names of various titles, personal names and place names.³² The fact that István Zichy's warning remained unheard has wider implications, and can be considered as one of the characteristics of Hungarian research. It is already remarkable that this historian (and painter!), the director of the Hungarian National Museum, read a significant work by one of the greatest figures of modern linguistics around the beginning of the twentieth century, Antoine Meillet. The quote from this work – “there is hardly any people that has not changed its language at least once, if not more often”³³ – should have drawn attention in itself, not to mention István Zichy's own ideas. They were, however, ignored by Hungarian scholars except for A. Róna-Tas.³⁴

Since Hungarian belongs to the Finno-Ugrian family of languages, until the last decades most linguists considered it evident that Hungarian ethnogenesis has one thread, which leads from the Finno-Ugrian, indeed Uralic, homeland to the present, and every influence on, contact with, or even ethnic mixing of the ‘Proto-Hungarians’ can be explained by the category of ‘loan words’. They considered Hungarian ethnogenesis a solely temporal process without a spatial aspect, and hoped to define this process through the phases of linguistic development, the absolute chronology of which was based entirely on deduction. In the various homeland theories the Proto-Hungarians were made to ‘wander around’ in huge areas (Western Siberia, North Caucasus) so that they could ‘take up’ the loanwords of the given period (Old Turkic, Alanian, Bulgar Turkic, etc.) from the supposed ‘donor languages’.³⁵ The same approach is reflected by the widespread use in research of the term ‘the prehistory of the Hungarians’, instead of which the ‘formation of the conquering Hungarians’ would be much more appropriate and would indicate the heterogeneity of the people conquering its present homeland in 895.³⁶ The ethnogenesis of early medieval peoples of steppe origin, namely, cannot be conceived of in a *single linear* fashion due to their great and constant mobility, which would start at an assumed ‘ethnogenetic point zero’, with a theoretical ‘proto-people’, the hypothetical nature of whose language is indicated by asterisks before the reconstructed words, and whose ‘formation’ lasts until a – arbitrarily defined – point in time (even until today). Thus, it is not necessary to suppose that all the loanwords of various origins were taken up into Hungarian through some ‘contact’ with the given people, localized in a given area; they can be the remnants of peoples who merged with the Hungarians. (This might be especially relevant in connection with Bulgar Turkic loanwords in Hungarian. These are not only the largest group of pre-conquest loanwords in Hungarian, but also represent almost *all* spheres of life: economy and social life, nature, religion.) Consequently – especially in the case of the latter – it is conceivable, for example, that these loanwords are not evidence for the various homelands and/or the contacts of the wandering Proto-Hungarians with the languages of other peoples (as thought until the 1950ies, following the linguists), but rather indicate the merging of these groups of peoples into the conquering Hungarians. The formation of the Hungarians before the conquest consisted of a *series* of ethnic mixing and merging. Ethnogenesis has numerous, extremely complex threads, of which science can grasp only one aspect in a given historical period, and never the fact which thread ends where.³⁷

³² It was Péter Hajdú, a leading expert of international Uralic Studies, who recognized the significance of this issue. Péter Hajdú, *Bevezetés az uráli nyelvtudományba* (Budapest 1966) and id., *Másodlagos egyezések. Kivezetés az uráli nyelvészetbe*, in: *Magyar Nyelv* 91 (1995) 129–140, pointed out that a completely new approach and methodology is needed in Uralic linguistics.

³³ Quoted by Count István Zichy, *Magyar őstörténet* (Budapest 1939) 5.

³⁴ András Róna-Tas, *A nyelvrokonság. Kalandozások a történeti nyelvtudományban* (Budapest 1978).

³⁵ It can only make us wonder that another field, the history of music, tries to solve one of its own problems – the chronological classification of the repertoire of Hungarian melodies – through the dates (!) of linguistics, obtained the above-mentioned way.

³⁶ Gyula Kristó, *Magyarországi írott források és a magyar őstörténet*, in: *Magyar Tudomány* 25 (1980) 362–367, at 363; István Vásáry, *Thoughts on the prehistory of the Hungarians*, in: *Research on the Prehistory of the Hungarians: a Review*, ed. Balázs G. Mende (*Varia Archaeologica Hungarica* 18, 2006) 103–109, at 103–105.

³⁷ According to Geary's apposite simile, see Patrick J. Geary, *Europäische Völker im frühen Mittelalter. Zur Legende vom Werden der Nationen* (Frankfurt am Main 2002) 195; ethnogenesis is not a river, which leads from a source to the ocean. Although its name might be the same through many countries, due to its tributaries the composition of the water itself is very different at the source and the estuary.

Despite unequivocal statements,³⁸ it is apparently hard to get rid of the popular notion that language is an ethnospecific feature. The disappearance of languages is by no means an exclusively modern phenomenon, as far as I know in Europe it was first described by Herodotus.³⁹ Nowadays it has certainly accelerated worldwide, but at the same time opposite tendencies can be observed as well: while for a Jew or a Swiss language is neutral,⁴⁰ the national identity of the English-speaking Irish is unwavering. Hungarian research has constantly investigated without much success Constantine Porphyrogenitus' report that in the middle of the tenth century the Hungarians were bilingual.⁴¹ It did not count with the fact that this phenomenon is by no means unique, and was frequent not only in the kingdoms of Western Europe a few centuries earlier, but is so even today: according to scholars studying bilingualism, it is actually monolingualism, which is an anomaly.⁴² Thus, bilingualism *eo ipso* is unsuitable to support ethnogenetic conclusions. The fact that the merging of various peoples into the Hungarians of the Árpád Period did not cause some form of crisis in ethnic identity could be easily explained away by the scarcity of sources and the lack of data on this specific issue. However, the same can be seen in the case of peoples whose ethnogenesis is described in much more detail: we know, for example, that a few centuries earlier the Visigoths, the Franks and the Langobards gave up their original language without any problems and later lamentation.⁴³ (This analogy is another indicator that the nature of ethnogenetic processes among eastern peoples did not differ significantly from those of Europe. Thus the comparison of these data is not only acceptable, but may also be useful.) Consequently, language does not have a (direct) connection to ethnic identity.⁴⁴

b) Ethnonyms

It is a commonplace that ethnonyms on the one hand – in an ethnogenetic sense – are usually collective names and designate political formations, on the other hand not all of them are original self-denominations, but are of foreign origin. (On those used as *topoi* see below.) Most of the latter were created in the Middle Ages and were coined to help scientific classification – as it was conceived in those times – although many of them became popular in everyday⁴⁵ and modern scientific use as well.

In the sources on steppe peoples they are rare and – more importantly – the ethnic correctness of their use is untestable. Usually the same ethnonyms were used for many centuries; consequently their correctness in terms of ethnicity must be investigated in each and every case.⁴⁶

It is known since the beginnings of European historiography that it could happen that two different peoples living beside each other assumed the same ethnonym (e.g. Thukydides: *The Peloponnesian War* I. 3). It is obvious for historians, and specialists of Oriental, Byzantine, Caucasian, etc. studies investigating the peoples of the Eurasian steppe in early medieval sources that a series of ethnonyms ('Scythians', 'Huns', 'Turks', etc.) appear as *topoi*. There is an excellent example for this from another period and region: the 'Scythians'⁴⁷ in Paul's first epistle to the Colossians (3,11), written in the middle of the first century A.D., are – of course – not identical to the Scythians of the Eastern European steppe in the 6th to 4th century B.C., but according to the

³⁸ Jürgen Untermann, *Ursprache und historische Realität, der Beitrag der Indogermanistik zu Fragen der Ethnogenese* (Studien zur Ethnogenese I., Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften Abhandlungen 72, Opladen 1985) 134–164; András Róna-Tas, *Ethnogenese und Staatsgründung. Die türkische Komponente in der Ethnogenese des Ungartums. Studien zur Ethnogenese 2. Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften Abhandlungen 78* (Opladen 1988) 107–142, at 116; Pohl, *Telling the Difference* 22–27.

³⁹ Herodotus I, 57, trans. Rowlinson 12.

⁴⁰ Róna-Tas, *Ethnogenese* 133.

⁴¹ Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio* 39 (ed. Gyula Moravcsik, trans. R. J. H. Jenkins, Budapest 1949) 174f.; Gyula Moravcsik, *Az Árpád-kori magyar történet bizánci forrásai* (Budapest 1988) 46 (note 33).

⁴² Joseph Aitchison, *Language change: Progress or decay?* (Cambridge/New York/Melbourne 2001); László Cseresnyési, *Nyelvek és stratégiák avagy a nyelv antropológiája* (Budapest 2004) 157.

⁴³ Pohl, *Telling the Difference* 25.

⁴⁴ See e.g. Róna-Tas, *Néppé válás* 24–25; Pohl, *Telling the Difference* 22–27. On language shift in general see note 41.

⁴⁵ A typical example: the Alemann tribal name became French 'allemand' (German), Slavic 'nemets' (German).

⁴⁶ Walter Pohl, *Die Namen der Barbaren: Fremdbeziehungen und Identität in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter*, in: *Zentrum und Peripherie. Gesellschaftliche Phänomene in der Frühgeschichte*, ed. Herwig Friesinger/Alois Stuppner (Mitteilungen der Prähistorischen Kommission 57, Wien 2004) 95–104, at 96–97.

⁴⁷ "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."

unequivocal opinion of Biblical scholars mean ‘foreigners’ or ‘prisoners of war from north of the Caucasus’.⁴⁸ (The same is true for the capital of the Byzantine province of Palaestina Secunda, Scythopolis.)

Specialists consider one of their primary tasks to investigate whether a given ethnonym does in fact denote the people in question, or was taken over from other authors for certain reasons (ignorance, erroneously archaizing historical concepts, [misleading] similarities⁴⁹), or given by others. A modern example: until the creation of the short-lived Kurdistan, formed as a consequence of the political struggles of the great powers after World War II, the Indo-European Kurds, living in the neighbourhood of Semitic peoples, had never used this ethnonym, they had identified themselves with the help of tribal names and names of dialect groups.⁵⁰ Two further, opposite, examples: in 1946 a South Slavic group, and in 1922 the Turkic speaking population of the Uyghur Autonomous Province of the People’s Republic of China, assumed the names ‘Macedonian’ and ‘Uyghur’⁵¹ respectively for purely political reasons, although they themselves are not the descendents of these antique and eighth-ninth-century peoples.⁵² Similarly, the name of the modern Turkish people and country is quite recent as well. Its use was first suggested in 1874 and was rejected by the Turkish intelligentsia, since until then this name was used to denote either the Turkmens or the rural population of the Ottoman empire,⁵³ while the modern Turkish state is a direct continuation of the Ottoman Empire and its name is Türkiye. Italy is also a ‘young’, and to an extent artificial, country,⁵⁴ within which differences in dialect may cause sometimes funny, sometimes serious misunderstandings. We also have to see that state formation is not a necessary requisite for the formation or survival of an ethnic group: today the Basks live in two countries, the Saami in three, the Azeri in four, and the Kurd in five, and never had a country of their own, and the Jewish state was created with international support around the middle of the twentieth century.

The steppe societies, the “peoples” in the sources, which are of primary importance for the prehistory of the Hungarians, were based on tribal alliances, as reflected by a number of ethnonyms as well: ‘Onogur’ (= ‘ten arrows’), ‘Toquz Oghuz’ (= ‘nine Oghuz’), ‘Hétmagyar’ (= ‘seven Hungarians’). Within these tribal alliances tribal identity was the most important, as clearly stated in *De administrando imperio* (cap. 40) in connection with the Hungarians: “These eight clans of the Turks do not obey their own particular princes, but have a joint agreement to fight together with all earnestness and zeal upon rivers, wheresoever war breaks out.”⁵⁵ (Suggesting that the conquering Hungarians formed a loose alliance connected through common foreign affairs?) Consequently, when we see that in the case of ethnonyms in Western European sources it cannot be clearly determined whether they denote 1) a political and territorial unit,⁵⁶ or 2) an ethnic group, then we have no reason to doubt that the same is true in the case of the peoples of Eastern Europe and the Eurasian steppe. Just like ‘Frank’ in the *Liber Historiae Francorum* was based on a territorial, and not a biological, category,⁵⁷ so should all Eastern European scholars know that for example the ‘Slavic’, ‘Khazar’ and ‘Rus’ ethnonyms of the Muslim sources can be used as trustworthy historical-ethnographic-cultural categories only with great reservations. It is a well-known fact among Orientalists that although eastern travellers and geographers created sources of immense value for modern science, they gave a description of the life style and cultural phenomena of a given region only in order to serve the political and commercial aims of their own worlds, and did not fulfil the methodological requirements of modern science and ethnography. A good example is Maurikios’

⁴⁸ Martin Tray, *The Scythian Perspective in Col 3:11*, in: *Novum Testamentum* 37 (1995) 248–261; Douglas A. Campbell, *Unravelling Col 3:11/b*, in: *New Testament Studies* 42 (1996) 120–132. I would like to thank János Bolyki who drew my attention to this work.

⁴⁹ As in Homer, it was known to some through experience in the Middle Ages that an ethnonym – even if it is ancient – can be transferred to others, see Geary, *Völker* 135.

⁵⁰ Mehmet Özdoğan, *Ideology and archaeology in Turkey*, ed. Lynn Meskell (*Archaeology under Fire. Nationalism, Politics and Heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East*, ed. Lynn Meskell (London 1998) 111–123 at 122. More relevant to us regarding space and time is Pohl, *Die Namen der Barbaren* 95–104.

⁵¹ Siâm Jones/Paul Graves-Brown, *Introduction. Archaeology and Cultural Identity in Europe*, in: *Cultural Identity and Archaeology*, ed. Paul Graves-Brown/Siâm Jones/Clive Gambes (London/New York 1996) 1–24, at 3.

⁵² István Vásáry, *A régi Belső-Ázsia története*, in: *Magyar Östörténeti Könyvtár* 19 (Budapest 2003) 97.

⁵³ Niyazi Berkes, *Türk Düşüncesinde Bati Sorunu* (Istanbul 1975) 64; Özdoğan, *Ideology and archaeology* 122, note 5.

⁵⁴ Bernard Guenée, *État et nation en France au Moyen Âge*, in: *Revue Historique* 237 (1967) 30.

⁵⁵ Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio* 40, ed. Moravcsik, trans. Jenkins 178f.

⁵⁶ Hans-Werner Goetz, *Zur Wandlung des Frankennamens im Frühmittelalter*, in: *Integration und Herrschaft. Ethnische Identitäten und soziale Organisation im Frühmittelalter*, ed. Walter Pohl/Max Diesenberger (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 3, Wien 2002) 133–150, at 133, 139.

⁵⁷ Ian N. Wood, *Defining the Franks: Frankish origins in early medieval historiography*, in: *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Simon Forde/Lesley Johnson/Alan V. Murray (*Leeds Texts and Monographs* n.s. 14, Leeds 1995) 47–57, at 47.

Strategikon from the end of the sixth century AD, whose description of (1) the Turks and (2) the Avars were built into Leo the Wise's *Taktika*, written after 904, where they were applied to (3) the Hungarians!

Since the last quarter of the twentieth century, modern historiography does not consider it evident to interpret the 'peoples', 'tribes' and 'tribal alliances' of the sources⁵⁸ as ethnically based formations. (The case of empires in this respect was so evident that it has never been suggested that they had been ethnically homogenous.) Among early medieval ethnogeneses, it is that of the Goths, which is the best understood, and their material remains are easily distinguished in Europe. This provides a possibly universal lesson, and for a few decades historians studying them have not taken ethnonyms in the written records at face value any more. Jordanes, Auxentius and Isidore of Seville all wrote about "Goths", whether they lived around the estuary of the Vistula, on the northern shores of the Black Sea, in the Carpathian Basin, Italy or the Iberian Peninsula. It is evident for researchers that the composition of the Gothic people could not have been – not even approximately – identical in the fourth century under Ermanaric, around the beginning of the fifth century under Alaric, or the beginning of the sixth century under Theoderic the Great. The term *rex Gothorum*⁵⁹ (or *rex Francorum* and *rex Langobardorum*,⁶⁰ for that matter) was meant not so much to indicate ethnic identity, but to emphasize the royal title.⁶¹ There is an example for the same phenomenon from the circle of steppe peoples as well: despite the identity of the ethnonym, the "Bulgars" appearing in the Balkans in 483 were by no means identical with the Bulgars settling in the same area in 682!

The authors of sources with ethnonyms based on incorrect or untrustworthy information were probably influenced by various concepts of history and the analysis of the state of affairs.

- 1) One group – who did have certain historical knowledge – probably knew that the majority of peoples constantly blended with other peoples, consequently their names could be transferred from one to the other; an example described below is the evidence from Agathias.
- 2) The other group includes authors who had more direct, or even correct, information on the disintegration and dispersal of tribal alliances. The case of the European Slavs is a well-known example: many Slavic peoples (earlier tribes?) had the same ethnonyms, for examples the Moravians in the northwestern corner of the Carpathian Basin and along the River Morava, the Croatians northeast of the Carpathian Basin and along the Adriatic, or the Serbians/Sorbians in the Balkans and around the River Elbe. Thus, they had the same ethnonyms, but were by no means the same people! Similarly, ever since the information of Theophylact Simocatta – debated for 200 years – has been compared to the data from the Orkhon inscriptions, scholars agree that after the Turkic conquest (552–556) some of the defeated Avars moved to the west, some of them to the east, towards China. Both groups were 'Avars', but they had a very different fate. Similarly, it is widely accepted that the real core of the tales in Patriarch Nicephorus' and Theophanes the Confessor's chronicles was the dispersion of the various Onogur Bulgar tribes after Kuvrat's death (middle of the seventh century), although one of them stayed in the old settlement area. The two latter examples are especially significant for us.

The Avars who escaped to the east in the sixth century became Chinese, while those Onogur groups that stayed in their original area were absorbed by the peoples of the Khazar Khaganate, and the 'peoples' (rather: tribe or army⁶²) of Kuvrat's sons, who moved to Italy, to the Carpathian Basin and the Balkans disappeared without a trace. If, however, we consider the Avars of the Carpathian Basin (who also ceased to exist as an autonomous people after 800) and the Volga and Danube Bulgars, who were evidently 'real peoples', then we have two important conclusions to draw:

⁵⁸ See *phyles*, *laos* and *ethnos*, or *tribus*, *populus* and *natio*: Book of Revelations 5,9,10.

⁵⁹ Barbara Sasse, *Die Westgoten in Südfrankreich und Spanien. Zum Problem der archäologischen Identifikation einer wandernden „gens“*. *Archäologische Informationen* 20/1 (1997) 29–48.

⁶⁰ Andrew Gillett, *Was ethnicity politicized in the earliest medieval kingdoms?*, in: *On Barbarian Identity. Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Andrew Gillett (Studies in the Early Middle Ages 4, Turnhout 2002) 85–121, at 85, 89–90.

⁶¹ One of the pioneers and leading experts of research on early medieval ethnogenesis is Herwig Wolfram, for his synthesis see Herwig Wolfram, *Geschichte der Goten von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts. Entwurf einer historischen Ethnographie* (Munich 2001). The 'Vienna school' is strongly criticized by the 'Toronto school', see the discussion of the matter Florin Curta, *Some remarks on ethnicity in medieval archaeology*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 15/2 (2007) 159–185.

⁶² In the case of Kuber we have exact information: according to (the source of) Theophanes, he moved to the Avar Khaganate with his 'army' ('dynamis') and not 'people' ('laos'), see Csanád Bálint, *A középvár kor kezdete és Kuber bevándorlása*, in: *Archaeologiai Értesítő* 129 (2004) 35–65, at 41–42.

- a) It is obvious that the ethnogenesis of the peoples we can study can be traced back in the written records only to a specific historical period, and not further – although ethnogenetic processes existed before that time as well! From this it follows that the peoples we can study were not eternal.
- b) It is already incidental, the ethnogenesis of which people can be studied, and which not. This, namely, depends not only on the quantity, quality and detail of the available written sources, but in every case the success, that is the survival, of the given people is an important factor as well.

On the one hand it is obvious that we cannot describe the ethnogenesis of peoples that merged with other ones, since they ‘disappeared’, ceased to exist as an autonomous people, consequently their study is only possible with regard to the absorbing people. (This, however, rarely happens.) On the other hand, the aspect of success (that is, survival) in the case of related peoples necessarily leads back to a point of juncture, from where we cannot talk about the people under study, only about their ancestors, who are the ancestors of other peoples as well. This ‘success’, namely, is true only when looked at from a certain point in time, and for a certain period in history. For example, the ethnogenesis of the tenth-century Volga Bulgars can be traced back to Kuvrat’s seventh-century empire, from where it can be followed further to the Onogurs, and then to the fifth-century European history of the Ogur peoples – we could say that these Bulgar peoples were autonomous for a thousand years. When looking at them from a modern perspective, however, it is a simple fact that the Volga Bulgars disappeared – at least as an autonomous group – around the thirteenth century (We will not discuss here who and to what extent were their descendants, and how one should evaluate the rather heated debate around the Chuvash and Tatar ethnogeneses). From this point of view, the ethnogenesis of the Danube Bulgars is also definitely connected to “Magna Bulgaria” in Eastern Europe, although 200 years after their conquest – and after blending with the descendants of the autochthonous Thracian population, on their way to become linguistically Slavic,⁶³ and with a completely new material culture – they were already very different from those Bulgars, whose ancestors moved to the Balkans under Asparuch’s leadership.⁶⁴ This argument only covers about 200–300 years, and not the whole Middle Ages and the Modern Era, which witnessed almost untraceable ethnic mixing in the Balkans.

These examples demonstrate that should someone study the aspect of success, that would be relevant only regarding the Modern Era, and not historical times. Earlier peoples – independent of the fact how long they had been autonomous on the stage of history – can only be examined from a historical point of view, in their own temporal horizon. Consequently, success – that is, which peoples have survived, and which have not – is an unscientific category and should not be used by the scholars of ethnogeneses.

It follows that the possibility of studying ethnogenesis is contingent and only applicable to a certain period in time, that is, the origin of peoples can never be deciphered completely.

- 3) The characteristic trait of the third group of sources has been present – as is well-known thanks to E. Norden’s monograph on Tacitus – since Antiquity.⁶⁵ This approach is characteristic for authors who did not have at all direct or complete knowledge of the given peoples, and as a consequence – partly due to lack of information, but also partly due to the general occurrence of the situations described above (thus not without good reason!) – disputed the reality of the given ethnonym from the beginning.

This latter is actually a crucial problem of the research on the origin of the Avars: did Theophylact Simocatta report about a real event in the case of the European Avars when he wrote that this ethnonym was only assigned to these people arriving to Europe from the East by others, or did the author of the Byzantine source – continuing a tradition of classical historians – doubt *a priori* that the Avars were really Avars? The assessment of the issue is further complicated by the fact that he considered the ethnonyms *Uar* and *Chuni* the personal names of eponymous rulers – thus, he did not in fact know whether he was dealing with ethnonyms or personal names.⁶⁶ The huge debate about the Central or Inner Asian origin of the Avars since Joseph de Guignes (1748)

⁶³ This example also shows that ethnic identity and language do not necessarily correlate.

⁶⁴ It is interesting, although mostly unstudied, how and why the preference for eastern, Slavic or Thracian origin changed in the various periods of archaeological research on Bulgarian ethnogenesis.

⁶⁵ Emil Norden, *Die germanische Urgeschichte in Tacitus’ Germania* (Stuttgart 1920); Dieter Timpe, *Ethnologische Begriffsbildung in der Antike*, in: *Germanenprobleme in heutiger Sicht*, ed. Hans Beck (RGA Erg. Bd. 1, Berlin/New York 1986) 22–40; Stefan Zimmer, *Germani und die Benennungsmotive für Völkernamen in der Antike*, in: *Zur Geschichte der Gleichung „germanisch-deutsch“*, ed. Heinrich Beck/Dieter Geuenich/Heiko Steuer/Dietrich Hakelberg (RGA Erg. Bd. 34, Berlin/New York 2004) 1–24.

⁶⁶ András Mohay, *Priskos’ Fragment über die Wanderungen der Steppenvölker*, in: *Studies in the sources on the history of pre-Islamic Central Asia*, ed. János Harmatta (Collection of the sources on the history of pre-Islamic Central Asia, 2, Budapest 1979)

should not concern us here, the only thing we need to bear in mind is that Theophylact Simocatta could have followed with the same probability either behaviour. He could know Agathias' work written half a century earlier and draw upon it, or he simply knew about similar data collected in Byzantine historiography and based on that became a member of the camp of those who questioned the originality of ethnonyms. In his historical work the simultaneous use of two ancient historical topoi can be identified: the featuring of eponymous heroes and the scenario of changing ethnonyms out of fear. In any case, we can find an outstanding and reliable illustration of the – for us untraceable – ethnogenetic processes of the sixth-century peoples of the European steppe by Agathias in the chapter where he describes the (ethnic) annihilation of the Kutrigurs and the Utrigurs: “On some occasions they would confine themselves to predatory incursions, on others they would resort to open warfare until they have lost their national identity. The scattered remnant of these Hunnic tribes has in fact been reduced to servitude in the lands of other peoples whose name they have assumed; so severe has been the penalty which they have paid for their earliest misdeeds.”⁶⁷

The history of the Asian steppe shows that this happened on numerous other occasions as well: peoples – often obviously tribes called peoples – assumed new ethnonyms, were annihilated or (sometimes forcefully) absorbed. We may read about similar instances on the Turkic inscriptions: “The Turkic beys abandoned their Turkic titles. After having assumed the Tabgach titles of the Tabgach beys, they (allegedly) obeyed the Tabgach Khagan.”⁶⁸ We also find here examples for how small peoples disappeared: such is the story of Bars bey, who, after having revolted, was executed, while his people “became slaves”⁶⁹. Another example: “I routed the Tangut people”,⁷⁰ “the Türgesh commoners completely moved in (to our empire)”,⁷¹ the Chik people’s “army I annihilated. This small people I conquered (lit. took away) ... built them in(to the empire),⁷² “... the Karluk started hostilities. I dispersed and destroyed [them]. The Nine Oghuz became my own people”,⁷³ “... I completely annihilated them”⁷⁴ (that is, the Three Karluk people), “I smashed the Tangut people”⁷⁵

There are of course abundant examples for the absorption of smaller or larger groups of peoples. One from the early history of the Hungarians: the question of the Savard Hungarians is a long debated and still unsolved problem of the prehistory of the Hungarians.⁷⁶ According to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, a group of Hungarians settled down near Persarmenia and had regular contact with their brethren in the Carpathian Basin.⁷⁷ This people – just like the Hungarians found by Julianus in Magna Hungaria – disappeared completely after the Mongol invasion, just like ‘Csaba’s Hungarians’, who – according to medieval tradition – moved out in the tenth century.⁷⁸ The latter settled down in the Peloponnese, and are usually identified with the ‘Vardariote Turks’ appearing in the records until the fourteenth century.⁷⁹

Obviously, the same process – the absorption of those who migrated away – happened in the neighbourhood of the steppe peoples as well, among non-steppe groups. The next example is from the region close to the Savards; here we have a glimpse at the process of losing ethnic identity. When the Armenian Smbat Bagratuni became the Marzban of Hyrcania in 599/600, there he found some of his fellow-countrymen who had been settled there during Maurikios’ reign (582–602), and who by that time had forgotten their language, writing

129–144, at 143. This seems to be a rather frequent phenomenon in the steppe, see István Vásáry, *Népnév és néptörténet (kun/kuman, kipszak, kangli, tatár)* in: *A Kárpát-medence és a steppe*, ed. Alfréd Márton (Magyar Őstörténeti Könyvtár 14) Budapest 2001) 186–195, at 192–193.

⁶⁷ Agathias, *Historiarum libri quinque* V, 25, 4–5 (ed. and trans. Joseph D. Frendo, *The Histories*. Translated with an introduction and short explanatory notes by Joseph D. Frendo, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* IIA, Berlin/New York 1975) 161–162.

⁶⁸ Kül Tegin’s inscription, eastern side 7., 8., see Árpád Berta, *Szavaimat jól halljátok... A türk és ujjur rovásírásos emlékek kritikai kiadása* (Szeged 2004) 194. (The restorations in parentheses are by Á. Berta.)

⁶⁹ Kül Tegin’s Inscription, eastern side 20, Berta, *Szavaimat jól halljátok* 195.

⁷⁰ Bilgä Khagan’s Inscription, eastern side 24, Berta, *Szavaimat jól halljátok* 198.

⁷¹ Kül Tegin’s Inscription, eastern side 38, Berta, *Szavaimat jól halljátok* 198.

⁷² Bilgä Khagan’s Inscription, eastern side 26, Berta, *Szavaimat jól halljátok* 198–199.

⁷³ Bilgä Khagan’s Inscription, eastern side 29, Berta, *Szavaimat jól halljátok* 199.

⁷⁴ Sine-usu Inscription, southern side, Berta, *Szavaimat jól halljátok* 310.

⁷⁵ Berta, *Szavaimat jól halljátok* 198.

⁷⁶ Gyula Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica II* (Berliner Byzantinische Arbeiten 11, Berlin 1983) 261–262; Róna-Tas, *Honfoglaló magyarság* 221–223, 324–325.

⁷⁷ *Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, De administrando imperio* 40, ed. Moravcsik, trans. Jenkins 174–179.

⁷⁸ *Gesta Hungarorum* 45, ed. Silagi 108f.; Zoltán Kordé, *Csaba magyarja*, in: *Korai Magyar Történeti Lexikon* (9–14. század), ed. Gyula Kristó/Pál Engel/Ferenc Makk (Budapest 1994) 143.

⁷⁹ Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica II* 322.

system and religion and had become like their environment in terms of their lifestyle.⁸⁰ We should note here the temporal length of the process: a complete change came by within two decades – in a traditional society that is usually considered to be conservative!

Because of the widespread dichotomy of internal and external names, a preliminary examination of ethnonyms is required in those cases, where they are to be used in research on ethnogenesis. An important issue in the question of the origin of the Khazars – which otherwise does not concern us here – is Masudi's debated information that 'Khazar' was their Persian name, while in Turkic they were called *Savir*.⁸¹ What is important from our actual point of view is that 'Khazar' might have been an ethnonym assumed or assigned – in the sense of Theophylact. (When studying the origin of the Khazars, specialists of Oriental Studies focus to not a small extent on the semantic analysis of the ethnonym and its variations in the various sources, as if it were the only proof of their ethnic origin.) Another basic historical problem is posed by the fact that in the case of the Hungarians (Magyars) – for unknown reasons and under unknown circumstances – the name of one of the tribes, according to the sequence given in the Byzantine source, of the second (actually, according to the list in the *De administrando imperio* the third, if we count the Kabars as well), became the self-designation of the whole people.⁸² (According to the tradition preserved in medieval chronicles, the conquering tribes were called 'Hétmagyar' = Seven Hungarians.⁸³) The – probably not insignificant – historical background of this vowel shift is unknown: what is the relationship between the internal ethnonym "Magyar" and the tribal name *Megyer*?⁸⁴ Did the members of the Megyer tribe speak another dialect than the other 'Magyars'? We also have to bear in mind that many of the peoples of the Eastern European steppe were only mentioned once or twice in the written records (e.g. Tarniakh, Zabender, Sabir, Barsi).⁸⁵ The rare occurrence of these ethnonyms warns us that there might be an *infinite* number of peoples about whom – again: for infinite reasons – we have no written sources at all. They probably also merged with other peoples who played a longer role on the stage of history, and thus participated in various ethnogenetic processes.

These processes are most certainly much more complicated than what we can find out from ethnonyms and generally from written sources. Consequently, however trivial they might sound, we have to write down the following in order to see more clearly:

- 1) Even in prehistory there were much more peoples than those who appear in the written sources.
- 2) Not only historians used various topoi, but often defeated or conquered peoples or their remnants themselves – freely or under duress – assumed another ethnonym.
- 3) The sources at our disposal report in fact only about a phase of temporally infinite processes of ethnogenesis with more or less reliability, and not only the temporal horizon of the sources we analyze may be rather far from each other, but also the context of the information. In other words, these ethnonyms may denote different peoples in different times, and consequently cannot be ordered into a linear chronological scheme of ethnogenesis.

c) *Personal names*

Most specialists of Hungarian historical linguistics are aware of the dangers of inferring a person's origin on the basis of the etymology of their personal names.⁸⁶ Some of the names in the sources were dependent upon the historical knowledge or political aims of the chronicler,⁸⁷ and even in medieval Buda a first name

⁸⁰ Sebeos, *Historia Armeniae* 24; English translation: *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*. Translated, with notes by Robert W. Thomson (Translated texts for historians 31, Liverpool 1999) 44. I would like to thank Ágnes Paulik for helping me find the source.

⁸¹ *Tanbih* 83, 16.

⁸² It is well known that most of the European languages have a different name for them (Hungarians, Hongrois, venger, etc.), which comes from the ethnonym *Onogur*.

⁸³ Németh, *Kialakulás* 39–40; Zoltán Kordé, *Hétmagyar*, in: *Korai Magyar Történeti Lexikon* 262.

⁸⁴ Lajos Ligeti, *A magyar nyelv török kapcsolatai a honfoglalás előtt és az Árpád-korban* (Budapest 1986) 400; Róna-Tas, *Honfoglaló magyarság* 230–238.

⁸⁵ Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II 300, 262–263, 87.

⁸⁶ On the origin of old Hungarian names see Dezső Pais, *Régi személyneveink jelentéstana*, in: *Magyar Nyelv* 18. (1922) 27; on the issue most recently see Vilmos Tóth, *Névrendszertani vizsgálatok a korai ómagyar korban* (Debrecen 2001).

⁸⁷ György Székely, *A személynevek és a történettudomány*. (Nyelvtudományi Értekezések 70 Budapest 1970) 204–205; Martin Homza, *The System of Proper Personal Names in the Hungarian–Polish Chronicle*, in: *Acta Historica Posoniensia* 2 (Bratislava 2002) 49–69.

or surname did not provide any information on the ethnic identity (occupation, physical characteristics) of its bearer.⁸⁸ In the case of the much fewer early medieval examples at our disposal – if the origin of the bearer of the name is known at all – this is again impossible to decide. An outstanding example is Attila the Hun, the origin of whose name could not yet be cleared. A widely shared opinion is that it was Gothic, another connects it – disputably⁸⁹ – with the name of the River Atil,⁹⁰ but presently the most probable solution is that the form we know is a German version of the original Hunnic form.⁹¹ In the case of a German etymology one could suggest that it was a nickname given by his subjects, but then in any other case how can it be decided whether that was the person's original name or a nickname given by someone else? Similarly, it cannot be decided whether chief Bogát, the leader of the Hungarian incursion into Italy in 921, was a Slavic chief who had joined the Hungarians (his name means 'rich' in Slavic),⁹² or was a Hungarian chief who received this name from a Slavic environment. (That is why we have to handle with care calculations, which, for example, draw historical conclusions from the large number of Slavic names in Árpád period diplomas,⁹³ not to mention the fact that many of the personal names under study have an unclear or disputed origin.⁹⁴)

It is unknown whether Edica, Attila's general, was of Germanic or Hunnic origin.⁹⁵ Odoacer, who appears in the sources alternatingly as (1) a Scirian, (2) a Rugian, (3) a Goth, or (4) a Thuringian, had a Scirian mother and a Hunnic father,⁹⁶ although the history of his life shows that the ethnic identity of his parents did not matter much for him. Mixed marriages have been frequent among the elite in every period, since they served political aims. It is only our modern attitude that makes us feel bewildered by the point of the last will of the Roman comes Bonifatius, in which he ordered his supporters to join his archenemy, Aëtius, and his wife to marry him.⁹⁷ In the same period it happened that a Vandal warrior had a Suebian wife,⁹⁸ and it was not surprising for anyone, that – just like Balamber, the king of the Huns around 370, had a Gothic wife – Attila's last wife was also of Germanic origin.⁹⁹

The best example for the dangers of using onomastic data to draw ethnogenetic conclusions is provided by the fact that Paul the Deacon had a Latin name while his brother had a Germanic name (Arechis).¹⁰⁰ Historians, linguists and archaeologists studying early medieval Central and Eastern Europe should pay much more attention to the results of Western European specialists, which indicate that personal names should not be used directly to determine the origin of their bearers.¹⁰¹

⁸⁸ András Kubinyi, Családnévadás a középkori Magyarországon, in: *In virtute spiritus. Szent István Akadémia Emlékkönyve Paskai László bíboros tiszteletére*, ed. József Stirling (Budapest 2003) 108–112.

⁸⁹ Otto J. Maenchen-Helfen, *Die Welt der Hunnen* (Wiesbaden 1997) 262.

⁹⁰ See Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II 79–80.

⁹¹ Hans Beck, Attila, in: *RGA* I (Berlin/New York 1973) 467–473, at 470.

⁹² Zoltán Kordé, Bogát, in: *Korai Magyar Történeti Lexikon* 116.

⁹³ Gyula Kristó, Magyarország népei Szent István korában, in: *Századok* 134 (2000) 3–44, at 33–35. For a basic study of Turkic personal names see Zoltán Gombocz, *Árpád-kori török személynveink* (Magyar Nyelvtudományi Társaság Kiadványai 16, Budapest 1915).

⁹⁴ Katalin Fehértói, Eltérő nézetek legrégebb személynveink eredetéről, in: *Honfoglalás és nyelvészet*, ed. László Kovács/László Veszprémy (A honfoglalásról sok szemmel 3, Budapest 1997) 235–246.

⁹⁵ Robert Reynolds/Robert S. Lopez, Edica: German or Hun?, in: *American Historical Review* 52 (1946) 36–53; Walter Pohl, Edika, in: *RGA* 6 (Berlin/New York 1986) 446–447.

⁹⁶ Patrick Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489–554* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought 4/33, Cambridge 1977) 282.

⁹⁷ Pohl, *Ethnicity* 234.

⁹⁸ Peter Brown, *Szent Ágoston élete* (Budapest 2003) 510.

⁹⁹ Iordanes, *Getica* 249, 254 (ed. Theodor Mommsen, *Iordanis Romana et Getica*, MGH AA 5, 1, Berlin 1882) 54–138, at 122f.

¹⁰⁰ Pohl, *Telling the Difference* 25.

¹⁰¹ Patrick Amory, Names, Ethnic Identity, and Community in Fifth- and Sixth-Century Burgundy, in: *Viator* 25 (1994) 2–28; Nomen et gens: Zur historischen Aussagekraft frühmittelalterlicher Personennamen, ed. Dieter Geuenich/Wolfgang Haubrichs/Jörg Jarnut (*RGA Erg. Bd. 16*, Berlin/New York 1997); Jörg Jarnut, Nomen et gens: Political and Linguistic Aspects of Personal Names between the third and eighth Century, in: *Strategies of Distinction. The Construction of Ethnic Communities*, 300–800, ed. Walter Pohl/Helmut Reimitz (*The Transformation of the Roman World 2*, Leiden/Boston/Köln 1998) 113–116; Wolfgang Haubrichs, Identität und Name. Akkulturationsvorgänge in Namen und die Traditionsgesellschaften des frühen Mittelalters, in: *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen. Von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters* (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 8, Wien 2004) 85–105 (with further literature).

d) *Place names*

In modern historiography it has always been clear that place names – because of their nature – are not suitable to decide ethnogenetic issues. At most they can be helpful in discussing – in the best case, solving – historical problems. Their fundamental characteristic is the contingent nature of their survival, since newly arriving populations often rename the various localities in their new home – consequently they cannot be used as direct historical sources. It is worth to quote here the Livere de Reis de Engletere: “Because of the several acts of great destruction brought about by foreign peoples who time and time again captured, occupied, and abandoned the land, all the towns and regions now have different names from those which our forebears who first founded them gave them.”¹⁰² Relatively few place names of the peoples of the steppe have been handed down to us. (This may have significant implications regarding their social organization and economy, but this is not the place to discuss these.) This is especially remarkable in the case of the Avars who inhabited the Carpathian Basin for 250 years,¹⁰³ a fact which had a great role in the connection with the theory of the ‘double conquest’ through the use of eleventh to fourteenth-century place names to demonstrate the survival of seventh to eighth-century Avars with the help of a rather unique method.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, how could one use early Hungarian place names as *direct* historical evidence (which was quite general in Hungarian research in the 70s and 80s),¹⁰⁵ when – beside hypotheses¹⁰⁶ – we know nothing about resettlements and internal migrations in the period of the foundation of the state and the eleventh century?!¹⁰⁷ The relevance of place names for political history is thus minimal.

3) MATERIAL CULTURE

a) *Archaeological remains*

Already the first known ‘excavation’ in European history was motivated by questions of ethnogenesis. In 425 BC the Athenians ‘identified’ the ethnicity of those buried in the ancient graves on the island of Delos: “During the purification of Delos by Athens in this war all the graves in the island were taken up, and it was found that above half their inmates were Carians: they were identified by the fashion of the arms buried with them, and by the method of interment, which was the same as the Carians still follow.”¹⁰⁸ As S. Brather pointed it out, from the very beginning of archaeological research there was a trend whose main aim was the ethnic identification of the finds.¹⁰⁹ This trend is still present all around the world, but is not in itself a manifestation of nationalism – the use of the conclusions, however, may be. Ethnic identification is one of the major aims of the archaeology of the early Middle Ages in many Central and Eastern European countries, and plays a fundamental role in the study of the Eurasian steppe and the prehistory of the Hungarians as well.

Archaeology reached a position around the beginning of the 20th century where it could believe that it may attempt according to modern scientific standards to answer historical questions, including ethnogenetic ones as well; before that the influence of Romanticism and the lack of a proper methodology were the determining factors. It became clear only by the end of the century that archaeological finds are not really suitable to play such a role, but this fact has not yet gained wide acceptance in Central and Eastern Europe. Another

¹⁰² Translated by Leslie Johnson, *Etymologies, Genealogies, and Nationalities (Again)*, in: *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Simon Forde/Lesley Johnson/Alan V. Murray (Leeds Texts and Monographs N.S. 14, Leeds 1995) 125–136, at 130.

¹⁰³ Only in a few cases has an Avar etymology been suggested (p.ex. “Bécs” [= Vienna]), but none of them has been confirmed by Turkologists, see István Kniezsa, *Ungarns Völkerschaften im 11. Jahrhundert*, in: *Archivum Europae Centro-Orientalis* 4 (1938) 241–412, at 396, see also Gyula Kristó, *A Kárpát-medencei helynévanyag kontinuitásának kérdéséhez*, in: *Név és névkutatás*, ed. Békési István (Budapest 1985) 15–22; Szabolcs Felföldi, *Avar kori helynévi nyomok a Kárpát-medencében (Várkony)*, in: *A Kárpát-medence és a steppe*, ed. Alfréd Márton (*Magyar Őstörténeti Könyvtár* 14, Budapest 2001) 28–39.

¹⁰⁴ The lack of place names of Avar origin were explained by Gyula László by suggesting that they were actually there, mixed with the Hungarian place names of the medieval sources, consequently the Avars spoke Hungarian, see Gyula László, *A „kettős honfoglalás”-ról*, in: *Archaeologiai Értesítő* 97 (1970) 164–171.

¹⁰⁵ See Gyula Kristó, *A magyar állam megszületése (Szegedi Középkortörténeti Könyvtár* 8, Szeged 1995) 255–275.

¹⁰⁶ E.g. Attila Kiss, *A magyar államalapítás telepítéseinek tükröződése dunántúli köznépi temetőekben*, in: *Archaeologiai Értesítő* 95 (1968) 243–256.

¹⁰⁷ Gyula Kristó, *Üzbég és tolvaj*, in: *Magyar Nyelv* 71 (1975) 62–66, id., *Írások Szent Istvánról és koráról* (Szeged 2000).

¹⁰⁸ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* I, 8 (trans. Richard Crawley, *The History of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides*, London/New York 1910) 349–593, at 350f.

¹⁰⁹ Sebastian Brather, *Ethnische Identitäten als Konstrukte der frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie*, in: *Germania* 78 (2000) 139–177.

– historically determined – factor in the widespread support of ethnic identification in Eastern and Central European archaeology was that here the typo-chronological trend of German archaeology became dominant, and – again for deep historical and cultural reasons – the critique of this approach came from non-German (Anglo-American) research.

Today many researchers congruously deny the competence of archaeology and more generally the relevance of material culture in studying ethnic issues.¹¹⁰ In Germany one of the main proponents of the connection between archaeology and ethnicity was Joachim Werner.¹¹¹ Around the middle of the twentieth century, archaeology in Central and Eastern Europe earned the right to write history. This was partly caused by the pan-historicism of Marxism (see above),¹¹² partly by a general aspiration to make up for the lack of detailed and reliable written sources, and partly by an increasing social (political) demand for historical reconstructions – based entirely on the assumption of the direct ethnic relevance of archaeological finds.

Of course we have to admit that in the early phase of research, in the first half of the twentieth century, the combination of historical and archaeological data was not only understandable, but sometimes even useful, since it was necessary for the basic chronological and (ethno)cultural classification of material groups with large cemeteries (e.g. the remains of the Late Avar Period) and of peoples who played an outstanding role in history (e.g. the Huns). It is, however, impossible to proceed – at least in a methodologically sound way – with the help of this approach, as shown by a closer study of Hun (period or type) material. This also draws our attention to an alarming phenomenon, which might be of general interest. When János Harmatta in 1955 wrote about the necessity of the identification of Hun archaeological material,¹¹³ a quarter of a century after the pioneering works of András Alföldi and Joachim Werner, the only thing that could be considered a real result was the identification of the archaeological remains of the Huns within the huge material from Eurasia. We have to add that since then, after another quarter of a century, the situation has not improved much. In fact we still do not know which finds within the Hun *Period* material can actually be connected to the Huns themselves. (That is why the excavator of one of the most valuable remains of the Hun Period in Eastern Europe, the cemetery of Kerč, was correct when she gave the manuscript the title “Das hunnenzeitliche Gräberfeld...”.¹¹⁴) Answering this question is made even more difficult by the small number of Hun Period finds from the Carpathian Basin, which also questions the ethnospecific nature of the archaeological record. If we take a look at the description of the battle of Nedao,¹¹⁵ it reveals such a huge diversity of peoples living in Attila’s empire, that we may seriously doubt whether their archaeological remains can ever be isolated! The finding spot of the recently recovered Hunnic bronze cauldron from Balatonlelle¹¹⁶ – first time ever from a proper excavation! – draws even more attention to the contradiction that the main distribution area of this object type, which is usually considered to be specifically Hun, is in eastern Transdanubia, and from the Great Hungarian Plain, which was probably the centre of the settlement area of the Huns, we know only one specimen!¹¹⁷ It is conceivable that we will have to accept that all we can do is study the remains of the Hun *Empire* in the Carpathian Basin, and not that of the peoples inhabiting it. This is not incidental, nor is it caused by the deficiencies of research: we witness the same situation in the cases of the archaeology of the so-called Avar Khaganate, Khazaria and tenth-century Hungary.

¹¹⁰ For a full international bibliography – unknown in Central and Eastern Europe – and the history of ideas strongly influencing the issue, see Brather, *Ethnische Identitäten*. On the same, in Hungary for the first time, see Róna-Tas, *Nyelvrokonság* 406–426.

¹¹¹ Hubert Fehr/Hans Zeiss, Joachim Werner und die archäologischen Forschungen zur Merowingerzeit, in: *Eine hervorragend nationale Wissenschaft: Deutsche Prähistoriker zwischen 1900 und 1995*, ed. Heiko Steuer (RGA Erg. Bd. 29, Berlin 2001) 311–415, at 359–363, 390–411.

¹¹² Klejn, *Phänomen* 126.

¹¹³ János Harmatta, *Problème de la détermination et de l’appréciation historique du matériel archéologique hunnique*, in: *Conférence archéologique de l’Académie Hongroise des Sciences*, ed. László Vértes (Budapest 1955) 222–238.

¹¹⁴ Irina P. Zaseckaja, *Das hunnenzeitliche Gräberfeld von Kerč* (*Varia Archaeologica Hungarica*, ed. Tivadar Vida (in preparation)).

¹¹⁵ Jordanes, *Getica* 261, ed. Mommsen, 125: *Contis pugnantes Gothum, ense furentem Gepida, in vulnere suo Rugum tela frangentem, Suavum pede, Hunnum sagitta praesumere, Alanum gravi, Herulum levi armatura aciem strui*.

¹¹⁶ Unpublished, from P. G. Németh’s excavation, press conference in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 30th May 2006.

¹¹⁷ The Eurasian distribution area of these Hun (type) cauldrons also raises doubts about their direct connection with the Huns. They have been found in the Transcarpathian zone of Rumania and in the northern Ural region in larger numbers than in Hungary, and beside their frequent occurrence in Central and Inner Asia, the greatest density of their find spots can be observed in Inner Mongolia. See Miklós Érdy, *Hun and Xiongnu Type Cauldron Finds Throughout Eurasia*, in: *Eurasian Studies Yearbook* 67 (1995) 59, fig. 2.

When we look today at the large amount and rather homogeneous remains of the Avars, a significantly more complex picture is revealed than before. At first it seems that the cultural diversity observable in the seventh-century material may reflect the ethnic diversity of the Khaganate,¹¹⁸ but that is only partly true. Thanks to the research and excavations of the last two decades, it is not only the significance and material of the Keszthely group – which has always been connected to a different (provincial Byzantine) population – that has increased within the undoubtedly and *par excellence* eastern Early Avar Period material. First of all, since István Bóna's pioneering review 37 years ago,¹¹⁹ the number of cemeteries indicating a romanized culture has increased, but we still do not know whether they are the remains of a surviving Romanized population, of prisoners of war from the Balkans, or were simply manufactured by non-Avar craftsmen. Second, there is an increasing number of – typologically and stylistically clearly distinguishable – Germanic (type) groups in Transdanubia (Zamárdi type graves), the Hungarian Plain (Egerlövő, Tiszagyenda) and Transylvania (Mezőbánd type). Finally, since the publication of the cemetery of Pókaszepetk, the presence of a group with a culture different from the above ones in the seventh century is undeniable. It still needs to be analyzed to what extent these phenomena in material culture may be correlated with ethnic differences. Similarly, the fact that we now know that objects previously regarded as characteristically Avar had not been brought here from the eastern steppes, inspires further research and analysis.¹²⁰

Unsuccessful attempts at the identification of the sixth-seventh-century remains of the Kutigurs are also worth mentioning and should not be considered only an insignificant incident of the history of research.¹²¹ This is especially remarkable, since – as we have seen – it is possible to identify various cultural groups of European origin or type in the material of the Avar Khaganate, at the same time one of the steppe components of the Avars is impossible to identify archaeologically! (It is similarly impossible in the case of other eastern populations as well.) This leads us to two other problems. The first is that the material culture of the Kutigurs is unknown even in the period before their settlement in the Carpathian Basin, which would be easy to explain away with the deficiencies of Russian and Ukrainian research. In view of the large number of recent publications from that region, however, it is now clear that that would not be an adequate explanation, since we also cannot demonstrate archaeologically the presence of the Avars and the ancestors of the conquering Hungarians in the steppe (on the latter see below). The other problem is connected to the fact that we have not been successful in identifying the material remains of the first generation of the conquering Avars and Hungarians either (see below), which also cannot be explained by the lack of research or the small amount of material.¹²² In my opinion this situation east of the Carpathians and after the conquests can be understood only if we assume that the characteristic material culture of both the Avars and the conquering Hungarians was formed within the Carpathian Basin, and after a certain amount of time. Thus, the material remains of these peoples of steppe origin do not exactly reflect neither the ethnic components, nor the history of these peoples.

There is a further element which makes us wonder about the ethnic relevance of archaeological remains: after the 100 years following the beginning of the Avar Period (sixth century), the cultural diversity characterizing the Carpathian Basin in the seventh century – as mentioned above – disappeared completely. (The reason for this is not only unknown, but has not even received any attention.¹²³) What is strange in this situation is

¹¹⁸ Walter Pohl, *Verlaufsformen der Ethnogenese – Awaren und Bulgaren*, in: *Typen der Ethnogenese unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bayern I*, ed. Herwig Wolfram/Walter Pohl (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Klasse, Denkschriften 201, Wien 1990) 113–124. According to its title, an article by Radoslav Katičić in the same volume investigates the same issue, in fact, however, it examines ninth-century Slavs in the Carpathian Basin. See Radoslav Katičić, *Die Ethnogenesen in der Avaria*, in: *Typen der Ethnogenese unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bayern I*, ed. Herwig Wolfram/Walter Pohl (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Klasse, Denkschriften 201, Wien 1990) 125–128.

¹¹⁹ István Bóna, *Ein Vierteljahrhundert der Völkerwanderungszeitforschung in Ungarn (1945–1969)*, in: *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 23 (1971) 265–336.

¹²⁰ Uta von Freeden, *Awarische Funde in Süddeutschland?*, in: *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 38, (1991 [1995]) 610–623; Csanád Bálint, *Byzantinisches zur Herkunftsfrage des vierteiligen Gürtels*, in: *Kontakte zwischen Iran, Byzanz und der Steppe im 6.–7. Jahrhundert*, ed. Csanád Bálint (*Varia Archaeologica Hungarica* 10, Budapest/Napoli/Roma 2000) 99–162.

¹²¹ Most recently, with previous literature: Gábor Lőrinczy, *Fülkesírok a Szegvár-oromdűlői kora avar kori temetőből*, in: *A Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve – Studia Archaeologica* 1 (1995) 399–416. For the whole problem see Csanád Bálint, *Kelet, a korai avarok és Bizánc kapcsolatai. Régészeti tanulmányok (Magyar Őstörténeti Könyvtár 8, Szeged 1995)* 188.

¹²² Bálint, *Kelet, a korai avarok* 318–319.

¹²³ Péter Tomka has touched upon the issue, and interpreted the homogeneity of the Late Avar Period as a “political”, and not an “ethnic”, phenomenon: Péter Tomka, *Die Frage der ethnischen oder kulturellen Verwandtschaft bzw. interethnischen Wirkung im Spiegel der Begräbnissitten*, in: *A Wosinszky Mór Múzeum Évkönyve* 15 (1990) 163–174, at 173. We hold the same true for

that Late Avar Period material spread at the turn of the seventh to the eighth century as the continuation of that of the Middle Avar period, without any immigration or ethnic change, and does not show in the eighth century any of the diversity of the preceding phase. At best the products of certain workshops can be isolated as separate groups. Thus, the dynamics of autonomous Avar material culture was rather varied: in the beginning diversity was rather low, which was followed by a period with much richer and variable culture, and was concluded in turn by a period of uniformity. This shows that the characteristics of material culture were independent of ethnicity.¹²⁴

We can observe the same phenomenon if we examine tenth-century material in Hungary diachronically and within itself. I already pointed out three decades ago that it is impossible to delineate political or cultural groups within the tenth-century archaeological culture of Hungary: I suggested that among the ca. 25 tenth-eleventh-century graves of the cemetery of Kiszombor there might be a few individuals, who might have been the subjects of Ajtony in their lives. As it is well known, this petty lord, from his centre at Marosvár (today Cenadul mare, Romania), which he ruled until 1038, opposed King Stephen I and controlled part of the country. This historical fact, however, was not in any way reflected in the objects of graves or the burial rite (10 km from the centre!): the latter differed in no significant way from other eleventh-century graves excavated in other parts of the country.¹²⁵ But not only political, but other (regional, ethnic, cultural) groups have not been – as I think, cannot be – successfully delineated within the tenth-century archaeological material of Hungary. Not only the remains of the seven tribes, or the differences between them, could not be identified, but even the material of the three Kabar tribes is indistinguishable from that of the rest of the conquering Hungarians.¹²⁶ In fact, with a few, rare exceptions, we cannot even separate the remains of the absorbed autochthon population from that of those coming from the east.

The ethnic irrelevance of the archaeological material is especially important for two reasons. First, in this case one cannot invoke the lack of research: we have a large number of tenth-century graves at our disposal. Second, the archaeological material should – according to our expectations – be rather diverse in an ethno-cultural sense: the autochthonous population found here by the conquering Hungarians was of diverse origin (Western, Eastern and Southern Slavs, the descendents of the Avars, maybe some remnant Frankish settlers), to which we may add the slaves captured during the Hungarian incursions into other territories. We could quote examples from the history of research on the archaeology of the Conquest Period, how they tried to identify archaeologically various groups of the tenth-century Hungarians, but none of these attempts were successful in the end.¹²⁷ After decades of research, partly due to the lack of success, partly due to an increase in our knowledge on ethnogenetic issues, now I would say that not the attempts were wrong, but the aims were unrealistic. The fact that it is impossible to delineate social and/or ethnic groups can be explained by the ethnic insignificance of the archaeological material – in this case, in the material culture of the Conquest Period – in the Carpathian Basin as well.¹²⁸

the so-called Bjelo Brdo culture, regarding it – instead of the enduring theory of its identification with the Slavs – as the archaeological remains of the tenth-century commoners in Hungary; see Károly Mesterházy, *A magyar honfoglalás régészetének ötven éve*, in: *Századok* 127 (1993) 270–311, at 289. This interpretation was indirectly accepted by György Györffy as well; see György Györffy, *Magyarország története a honfoglalástól a tatárjárásig*, in: *Magyarország története. Előzmények és magyar történet 1242-ig*, ed. György Székely (Budapest 1984) 575–716, at 637. In his opinion, the Slavic-Hungarian cohabitation led to a “homogenization of material and spiritual culture.” Please note that these opinions actually question the ethnospecific nature of archaeological culture!

¹²⁴ The literature on this issue is again huge. To mention just a few works with further literature see Stephan Shennan, *Introduction: Archaeological Approaches to Cultural Identity*, in: *Archaeological Approaches to Cultural Identity*, ed. Stephan J. Shennan (One World Archaeology 10, London 1989) 1–32; Brather, *Ethnische Interpretationen*.

¹²⁵ Csanád Bálint, *Válasz Dienes Istvánnak*, in: *Archaeologiai Értesítő* 103 (1978) 264–268, at 264.

¹²⁶ István Dienes, *Bela Szőke, A honfoglaló és kora Árpád-kori magyarság régészeti emlékei* (review article), in: *Archaeologiai Értesítő* 91 (1964) 134–139, at 138; Gyula László's comment, in: *Iván Balassa, Mivel járulhat hozzá a néprajztudomány a honfoglaló magyarok életmódjának kutatásához?*, in: *Ethnographia* 85 (1974) 575–585, at 595.

¹²⁷ Gyula László, *A magyar őstörténet régészete*, in: *A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Filozófiai és Történettudományok Osztályának Közleményei* 5 (1954) 459–479, at 463. On the “Transdanubia phenomenon”, that is, the fact that in the area of the chiefly tribe, the cradle of the emerging Hungarian state, only rather little and less spectacular Conquest Period material has been found, see Károly Mesterházy, *Dunántúl a 10. században*, in: *Századok* 136 (2002) 327–340; at 331–333; István Dienes, *Honfoglaló magyarok*, in: *A kisvárdai vár története*, ed. Éri István (Kisvárdai Vár 1961) 96–196.

¹²⁸ The almost a century-long debate about the ethnic identification of the so-called Bjelo Brdo culture is also edifying. Today probably all sides accept that it is the archaeological material of the commoners of tenth-century Hungary, irrespective of ethnic identity, see Csanád Bálint, *Südungarn im 10. Jahrhundert* (*Studia Archaeologica* 11, Budapest 1991) 159–193.

It is an interesting exercise to look at the tenth-eleventh-century material without taking into consideration the written records. What we see is that in the eleventh century an entirely new archaeological culture emerged, which was fundamentally different from that of the tenth century, and had no eastern characteristics, but showed rather the influence of the autochthonous population and Western Europe: stone buildings, new jewellery and ceramic types appeared, feudal centres emerged, Latin literacy spread, and skull trepanation disappeared. The eleventh-century population was significantly “poorer” than that of the tenth century: they had no weapons, horse harness or decorated clothing. They were also Christian: they built churches and did not use pagan burial rituals (there are no horse burials). Does this mean that a new population appeared in the Carpathian Basin and absorbed the earlier inhabitants? (This is how re-emerging elements from previous periods are usually explained in archaeology.) Or, now taking into consideration the written evidence as well to a certain degree, is it possible that this change can be explained by the presence of foreigners from the east and the west who settled here during the reign of Géza and Stephen I? Even elementary school pupils know that the answer is: *no*. Eleventh-century Hungary was just as “Hungarian” as tenth-century Hungary; it only became part of Western Europe in the meantime. In the eleventh century an undisputedly new archaeological culture emerged without the arrival of a new population.

The ethnic irrelevance of the archaeological material is especially salient in the archaeological research on the prehistory of the Hungarians. All historical conclusions are/were built on the unquestioned assumption – without any prior methodological reasoning – that archaeological cultures reflect the histories of peoples and groups of peoples, their continuity indicates ethnic continuity, and the spread of related or identical cultural elements indicates migration or “ethnic connections”. We can ignore the huge, half a century long debate in prehistoric archaeology about the diffusion of culture, but the futility of that approach becomes immediately clear when we try to examine a seemingly simple case, the period immediately preceding the conquest. Naturally we would expect that east of the Carpathians, in the period immediately preceding the conquest, we would find the antecedents and analogues of finds from Hungary. Instead, there are literally only one or two graves that can be remotely connected to the conquering Hungarians.¹²⁹ If we handle typological and ornamental similarities with a little greater freedom, then we can find objects related to tenth-century Hungarian finds and ornamentation anywhere in Eastern Europe. Whether it is a cremation cemetery of the Mari along the Upper Volga, the grave-goods of a kurgan in the Northern Caucasus, in the territory of the Adiges, or a burial from the Bashkir area, it is always possible to integrate them into a valid model of the prehistory of the Hungarians. Consequently, we can always refer to “the proximity of Magna Hungaria [a secondary Hungarian homeland]”, “Hungarian influence”, “the activities of metallurgical workshops that were left behind around Kiev”, the rich literature on the theory of the Caucasian homeland, or those Hungarians who had been left behind in the – not exactly localized! – homeland along the River Kama, whom even Julianus could find centuries later and who had preserved their Hungarian identity. And it is always possible to build new historical reconstructions on the basis of these new finds: at present, this is what makes up the research on the prehistory of the Hungarians. In fact, Gyula László did sketch the method of ‘investigating from two directions’ (that is, backwards from the conquest, and from prehistory towards the conquest), but never described them in detail,¹³⁰ and actually established the impossibility of both already at the beginning¹³¹ (which other researchers of the prehistory of the Hungarians confirmed,¹³² but the illusion still lives on). Later on he pointed out the futility of identifying the remains of ninth-century Proto-Hungarians as well.¹³³ In his work, research on the prehistory of the Hungarians was built without any analysis or reasoning on the widely held assumption that archaeological cultures and phenomena have an ethnic content,¹³⁴ and their continuity reflects ethnic continuity. However, in

¹²⁹ Csanád Bálint, A 9. századi magyarság régészeti hagyatéka, in: Honfoglalás és régészet, ed. László Kovács (A honfoglalásról sok szemmel 1, Budapest 1994) 39–46.

¹³⁰ László, Magyar őstörténet.

¹³¹ László, Magyar őstörténet 463.

¹³² Péter Hajdú’s and Elemér Moór’s comments, see A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Filozófiai és Történettudományok Osztályának Közleményei 5 (1954) 480, 484–485; Róna-Tas, Honfoglaló magyarság 118; János Makkay, Az indoeurópai nyelvű népek őstörténete (Budapest 1998) 418–420.

¹³³ Gyula László, Őstörténetünk legkorábbi szakaszai. A finnugor őstörténet régészeti emlékei a Szovjetföldön (Budapest 1961) 8–13.

¹³⁴ Hungarian research completely ignored the remark of János Banner, the chairman of the debate, that “...Gyula László left out from his presentation the part where he investigates to what extent we can identify a culture with a people.” János Banner, Előnéki zárászó László Gyula előadásához, in: A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Filozófiai és Történettudományok Osztályának Közleményei 5 (1954) 487–488, at 488.

the case of Hungarian type finds from Eastern Europe, the problems of space and time cannot be solved. Had the above mentioned finds all been discovered in the area of Etelköz, and could they be safely dated to the ninth, and not the tenth, century, they could be easily connected to the Proto-Hungarians. That is, however, not the case: all the important Eastern European parallels of tenth-century Hungarian material were found in a tenth-century, and not a Proto-Hungarian, context.¹³⁵ It would be naïve to regard them as the exports of the Hungarians of the Carpathian Basin to Eastern Europe. We also have to add that their identification with the Hungarians of Etelköz¹³⁶ was based only on their similarity with the material of the conquering Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin.

The inadequacy of investigating ‘backwards’ had already been pointed out before László’s programmatic article. Nándor Fettich wrote in 1933 that “it is impossible to identify archaeologically the Proto-Hungarians much earlier than the decades before the middle of the ninth century. At present, we can talk about an archaeologically distinguishable Hungarian people only after the 30s–40s of the ninth century.”¹³⁷ A few years later István Zichy pointed out that the most characteristic object type of the Hungarians, the sabretache plate, does not occur east of the Carpathians.¹³⁸ Although since then we know of a few such finds in Eastern Europe, their find spot, age and context do not support their connection with the Proto-Hungarians. (These views were ignored by later Hungarian research, instead they continued Gyula László’s programme.¹³⁹) The methodological shortcomings of the investigation from prehistory towards the conquest are even more obvious: here ethnic meanings have to be assigned to archaeological phenomena from the very beginning, although there is no justification for that beyond the acceptance of the concept of “object = culture = ethnicity”, nor for the assumption that their continuity reflects ethnic continuity.

Should someone try to find the *archaeological* remains of the Proto-Hungarians within a *political formation* of Eastern Europe (Khazaria), then in the case of the centuries preceding the ninth it would be possible only by ignoring the changes of the territory of the given political formation at specific points in time and its great ethnic diversity. This will remain impossible for the time being – or maybe forever – since the archaeological identification of its ethnic components has been attempted only a couple of times (and the results are very questionable to say the least). After the early debates and uncertainties, the material excavated in the 1950ies during the Volga-Don expeditions enabled the delineation of the Saltovo-Mayatsk culture, its identification with Khazaria, and the publication of a monograph on this culture.¹⁴⁰ In Soviet-Russian research there is an opinion – still widely accepted, probably due to reasons of professional authority – on the ethnic composition of this culture, according to which the Lower Don variant may be connected to the Onogur Bulgars, while the variant on the northern edge of the steppe to the Alans.¹⁴¹ Beside the fact that the above mentioned interpretation and the interpretation of the skeletal material were based on methodological errors,¹⁴² and archaeological, historical and ideological reservations may also be put forward,¹⁴³ we should be cautious because this interpretation was based not on written sources, but archaeological finds and the analysis of a small amount of skeletal material. Our suspicion is further strengthened by the fact that in the case of the other groups, despite the long history of research and the large amount of material found since then, no-one has attempted ethnic identifications or a refinement of the regional-ethnic groupings set up by Svetlana A. Pletněva. This “silence” is especially remarkable around the “Crimean variant”, since during the last two decades a huge amount of material has been discovered in the peninsula, within which some of the object types of the Saltovo-Mayatsk culture are certainly present, although its characteristics within the Saltovo-Mayatsk culture are not apparent

¹³⁵ Csanád Bálint, *Die Archäologie der Steppe* (Wien/Köln/Graz 1989) 136–142; id., 9. századi magyarság.

¹³⁶ István Fodor, *Leleték Magna Hungariától Etelközig*, in: *Honfoglalás és régészet*, ed. László Kovács (*A honfoglalásról sok szemmel* 1, Budapest 1994) 47–65, at 55–56; István Bóna, *A magyarok és Európa a 9–10. században* (*História Könyvtár – Monográfiák*, Budapest 2000) 97.

¹³⁷ Nándor Fettich, *A levediai magyarság a régészet megvilágításában*, in: *Századok* 67 (1933) 250–276, at 255.

¹³⁸ Zichy, *Magyarság őstörténete* 4.

¹³⁹ Károly Mesterházy established – independently from István Zichy and Nándor Fettich – that “we are unable to trace back the settlement area of the Hungarian tribes with archaeological means.” See Károly Mesterházy, *Uráli népek* (review article), in: *Archaeologiai Értesítő* 105 (1978) 135–136; at 136.

¹⁴⁰ Svetlana A. Pletněva, *Ot kočevij k gorodam* (*Materialy i Issledovanija po Archeologii* 142, Moskva 1967).

¹⁴¹ Most recently see Gennadij E. Afanas’ev, *Donskie alany. Social’nye struktury alano-asso-burtasskogo naselenija bassejna Srednego Dona* (*Archeologija ÉPOCHI Velikogo Pereselenija Narodov i Rannego Srednevekov’ja* 1, Moskva 1993).

¹⁴² Bálint, *Archäologie der Steppe* 56–57.

¹⁴³ Božena Werbart, *Khazars or „Saltovo-Majaki culture”?* Prejudices about archaeology and ethnicity, in: *Current Swedish Archaeology* 4 (1996) 199–221.

to me – or to the other silent scholars – yet. In light of the material I think that the review of the groups identified by Svetlana A. Pletněva 40 years ago has been omitted for good reason in other regions, since nowhere can we find those characteristic traits that would actually support the existence of such groupings. We also have to bear in mind that – despite the abundance of written and archaeological sources in the region – there is little hope for the archaeological identification of the Caucasian peoples within the Khazar Khaganate. It is also remarkable that beside a few naïve ideas the identification of the Khazars themselves has not yet been attempted, and beyond a reference to material from Dagestan, Pletněva did not do so either. There have indeed been significant excavations in Dagestan, and their correct historical, cultural, economic and archaeological evaluation is independent from the fact whether their identification with Balangar and Semender, two of the early centres of Khazaria,¹⁴⁴ is well-founded or not. It is important to note that the criteria of identification of not only the Khazars, but all the other peoples of the Khaganate as well, are not fulfilled. An important methodological shortcoming of the setting up of the groups of the Saltovo Mayatsk culture is that so far it has not been examined, indeed, not even the question has been raised, whether the above-mentioned groups are actually the variants of the same culture, or simply certain types of the Saltovo Mayatsk culture are present in other archaeological cultures of Eastern Europe as well!¹⁴⁵ When reaching a conclusion about this issue we should bear in mind for example how many object types could be found in the settlement area of how many people in the territory of modern Germany and France – whose area is roughly similar to Dagestan, the Dnepr region and the Upper Volga region under study here – in the fifth to seventh centuries, while the whole of the material culture (so-called Reihengräberzivilisation¹⁴⁶) shows great similarity throughout the region.¹⁴⁷

Another good example for the lack of connection between ethnicity and the archaeological remains is provided by the case of the Savard Hungarians. It is well known that Constantine Porphyrogenitus knew about the existence of a Hungarian group around the middle of the tenth century in Transcaucasia that had connections with the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin.¹⁴⁸ The time and way of their arrival there is still debated, possibly unclearable,¹⁴⁹ but it is obvious even at first sight that in the territory of Georgia – or, for that matter, in the whole Transcaucasia – there is not a single find, not to mention group of finds, which could be connected to them.¹⁵⁰ At the same time it is beyond doubt that this group of people – who obviously had a different material culture – preserved their ethnic identity,¹⁵¹ indicating that these two aspects are in fact not related to each other.

Let us now have a look at the Asian part of the steppe. There we find a material culture roughly identical to that in Europe, which certainly provides fuel for speculations about migrations and kinship relations. The distances, however, are so huge, and the typological similarities so general, that they can only very rarely be explained by the ethnic assumptions. It would certainly require more investigation to see whether the obvious typological similarities observed in the Eurasian steppe reflect a general character of the material culture of the Turkic peoples of the steppe, or the situation can be simply explained by the lack of research. It is conceivable that in the latter case the availability of more material in the future will confirm that we are dealing with separate archaeological cultures, which are only superficially linked through the use of a few identical object types (as, I think, is the case with the Saltovo-Mayatsk culture). A solution, however, is impossible at the present state of research, since the amount of Turkic (type) and other material remains from the Asian steppe is smaller even than those from Khazaria.

Nevertheless, the amount of material connected to the Eastern Turks, who ruled Inner Asia between the sixth and eighth centuries except for a period of 60 years, can be regarded as significant within the archaeology of the early medieval Eurasian steppe. Within this Eastern Turkic material three groups have been distinguished, once on the basis of the metal equipment of horse harness, and another time on the basis of the

¹⁴⁴ For a summary of the literature on this issue see Bálint, *Archäologie der Steppe* 68.

¹⁴⁵ As Attila Türk – who is preparing his PhD thesis on the Saltovo-Mayatsk culture – informed me, the majority of Russian scholars does not believe in the existence of the Saltovo-Mayatsk culture as such any more.

¹⁴⁶ Joachim Werner, *Zur Entstehung der Reihengräberzivilisation*, in: *Archaeologia Geographica* 1 (1950) 23–32.

¹⁴⁷ It has been attempted only recently to differentiate within these cemeteries between Germanic and non-Germanic groups, see Hubert Fehr, *Volkstum as Paradigm: Germanic People and Gallo-Romans in Early Medieval Archaeology since the 1930s*, in: *On Barbarian Identity. Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Andrew Gillett (Studies in the Early Middle Ages 4, Turnhout 2002) 177–200, at 177.

¹⁴⁸ Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio* 38, ed. Moravcsik, trans. Jenkins 170–175.

¹⁴⁹ See Samu Szádeczky-Kardoss, *Sabartoi asphaloi*, in: *Korai Magyar Történeti Lexikon* 590.

¹⁵⁰ For the latest review see Krym, *Severo-Vostočnoe Pričernomor'e i Zakavkaz'e v epochu srednevekov'ja. IV–XIII veka*, ed. Tamara I. Makarova/Svetlana A. Pletněva (Moskva 2003) 297–320.

¹⁵¹ Szűcs, *Nemzeti tudat* 141.

types of vessels represented on funerary sculptures, and are explained with ethnic differences. These regions (Minusinsk, Tuva and Altai) are separated by hundreds of kilometres, and in such cases the differences of the material remains and the presence of various ethnic groups is evident. Consequently, it is questionable whether it is worth to attach greater historical significance to them beyond the acknowledgement of the archaeological variation. An even graver methodological problem is posed by the question: why is the amount of material connected to the Western Turkic Khaganate much smaller than that of the material of the Eastern Turkic Khaganate? This question has not been raised so far, and at present I can only assume that the Western Turks abandoned earlier (or perhaps had not even formed?) their own archaeological culture.¹⁵²

The archaeological research on other Inner Asian steppe peoples is in an even worse state, and the ethnic identification of the material connected to them is completely uncertain. For example, in the case of ‘Uyghur’ and ‘Kyrgyz’ archaeological remains, this identification is based not on archaeological criteria, or at least the combination of archaeological and written sources (‘mixed argumentation’!), but simply on the date of the given finds. The argument is the following: if the given find comes from (according to the opinion of the given scholar) the eighth or ninth century, it is automatically considered Uyghur or Kyrgyz.¹⁵³ It is never even attempted – probably because it is not possible – to delineate the archaeological material of the subjected peoples of the above-mentioned khaganates.

So far we have talked only about material culture. In Hungarian research, however, there is a firm belief – not substantiated by thorough analyses – ever since Gyula László, that burial customs are extremely conservative and remain unchanged for long periods, consequently – although this remained a covert view – they are ethnospecific. Detailed analysis, however, demonstrates exactly the opposite. For example, it has been well-known that the partial horse burials of the Early Avar Period disappeared after ca. 100 years, which has now been confirmed by the analysis of the remains of the Tisza-Maros-Körös interfluves, where one of the characteristic and frequent variants became sporadic by the end of the eighth century. The same analysis demonstrated chronological fluctuations in the case of another burial rite (deposition of animal remains) as well.¹⁵⁴ Consequently, it is possible that burial rites changed already within the time-span of one or two generations, together with changes in lifestyle. Had burial rites been really that conservative, then the ethnic questions of the early medieval archaeology of the Carpathian Basin could be answered much more easily. For example, it would have been easy to identify the Gepids before the emergence of the characteristic Gepid culture or under the rule of the Avars, the Avars who survived into the ninth century, the various ethnic components of the multiethnic Avar Khaganate, or the ethnically diverse communities of Hungary in the Conquest Period. Instead, we are not even able to identify on these grounds the various – culturally rather diverse – Slavic groups! The situation of the Inner and Central Asian Turks is not better either: their characteristic horse burials are present only during the period of their political dominance, but not earlier or later.¹⁵⁵ According to Marvazī, who lived at the turn of the eleventh to twelfth centuries, the Burtas¹⁵⁶ of Eastern Europe – whose origin is otherwise unknown – buried their dead in two different ways: they cremated or inhumated them. So, are we talking about two different ethnic groups, or is it possible that the author included into one ethnic group people with varied traditions? The same author also wrote that earlier the Kyrgyz had cremated their dead, but after becoming the neighbours of Muslims they changed their burial rite to inhumation (IX. 4), while in another place he wrote that they placed them into trees.¹⁵⁷ Thus, burial rites were indeed subject to changes as well (which is by no means a surprise).

¹⁵² Csanád Bálint, A nagyszentmiklósi kincs. Régészeti tanulmányok (VariaArchHung 16a, 2004) 215; Der Schatz von Nagyszentmiklós, in press.

¹⁵³ Leonid R. Kyzlasov, Drevnechakasskaja kul'tura čaatas VI–IX vv., id., Kul'tura drevnich ujgur (VIII–IX vv), in: Stepi Evrazii v ėpohu srednevekov'ja (Arheologija SSSR, Moskva 1981) 46–54.

¹⁵⁴ Lívía Bende, Temetkezési szokások a Körös-Tisza-Maros közén az avar kor második felében (Unpublished PhD Dissertation Budapest 2005) 10–13. The author explained this with the impoverishment and “regeneration” of the given population.

¹⁵⁵ Jurij I. Trifonov, Ob ėtničeskoj prinadležnosti pogrebenij s konem drevnetjurkского vremeni (v svjazi s voprosom o strukture pogrebal'nogo obrjada tjurkov-tugju), in: Tjurkologičeskij Sbornik (1972) 351–374; V. A. Mogil'nikov, Tjurki, in: Stepi Evrazii v ėpohu srednevekov'ja (Arheologija SSSR, Moskva 1981) 29–43, at 33–34.

¹⁵⁶ On historical questions see Hansgerd Göckenjan/István Zimonyi, Orientalische Berichte über die Völker Osteuropas und Zentralasiens im Mittelalter. Die Ğayhānī-Tradition (Veröffentlichungen der Societas Uralo-Altaica 54, Wiesbaden 2001) 55–56, for the latest attempt at their identification see Gennadij J. Afanas'ev, Naselenie lesostepnoj zony bassejna Srednego Dona v VIII–X vv. (Archeologičeskie otkrytija na novostrojkach 2, Moskva 1987) 155–167; id., Burtasy, in: Izceznusvie narody (Moskva 1988) 85–96.

¹⁵⁷ Marvazī IX, 12, in: Sharaf al-Zamān Ṭāhir, Marvazī on China, the Turks and India (London 1942) 30, 31, 33.

To sum it up, we are probably not far from the truth if we state that the material remains of the peoples living in the political formations led by certain peoples of the early medieval Carpathian Basin, the East European and Central and Inner Asian steppe cannot be identified, and the given archaeological cultures – without any specific ethnic content – are probably connected to the given political formations, and disappear simultaneously with their collapse (as in the case of the archaeological cultures of the Turks, the Khazars, the Avars and the Hungarian Conquest Period).

b) Weaponry

Since the beginnings of archaeology, the detailed study of weaponry as an ethnic marker has been a widespread practice. It is possible to argue for such an approach, but it cannot be simply based on written sources. The fact that Tacitus ascribed such significance to weapons might surprise many not specializing in early Germanic history. The specialists, however, have been aware since the eighteenth century of the many different early medieval sources that – following the approach formulated by Virgil (*arma virumque cano*) – considered it important to describe the weaponry of various European peoples and tribes as their characteristic feature (although they did that in topoi!).¹⁵⁸ The idea that peoples can be characterized through their weaponry was widespread not only in Europe, but appeared in Asia as well, which thus provides another parallelism between the research on ethnogeneses in Europe and the steppe. A sentence in the letter of the shan-yü of the Xiongnu written to the Chinese emperor in 174 BC also reflects the ethnographic approach of Tacitus: during his reign “[a]ll the people who draw the bow have been united into one nation.”¹⁵⁹ No-one thinks that this was the only or most important characteristic of the inhabitants of the – ethnically very diverse! – Xiongnu Empire, since they had obviously much more and more significant characteristic features than this rather general trait – which was at best a lowest common denominator. But this is the information that has been handed down to us: the shan-yü – more exactly, the author of the Chinese chronicle that contains his letter – thought it to be true or considered it important enough to emphasize it as a characteristic feature. This brief definition also reflects the ethnographic disinterest of the Chinese in the observation and identification of the differences between the peoples living north of them – and generally outside their empire. This was also apparent in coining and using the (‘barbarian’) ethnonyms ‘Hua’ and ‘I’, or generally in the way how they did not care to properly distinguish between the Xiongnu (second century BC to second century AD), Juan Juan (fourth to sixth centuries) and Turkic Khaganates (sixth to eighth centuries).¹⁶⁰ A similar approach, a similar sense of ‘us and them’ is reflected by the use of the adjective ‘barbarian’ by the Greeks, the Romans and the Byzantines, and later on in early medieval Central and Eastern Europe and the Caucasian region by the archaicizing use of the ethnonyms ‘Scythian’, ‘Hun’, ‘Turkic’, etc., which again underlines the possibility of the comparative research of these two worlds.

The diversity in the above-mentioned description of the battle of Nedao by Jordanes is a spectacular example – of great importance for us – of how difficult it is to regard the data of the written sources as ethnic markers. It is obvious that this passage should not be taken at face value, and the weapons listed should not be considered ethnic markers, since it is inconceivable that each ethnic group used only one kind of weapon. The colourful description is only a result of the literary and scholarly aspirations of the author, and should not be regarded as exact information. Centuries later Regino, the author of a chronicle, had similar intentions, and made an irrelevant comparison between the warfare of the Hungarians, who had just appeared in Central Europe and that of the Bretons: “The difference between their warfare and that of the Brits is that the latter use spears, while the former use arrows...”¹⁶¹ Another example for how uncertain it is to use descriptions of warfare and weapons in written sources – even if they are contemporary! – as ethnic markers is provided by the description of the Suebi by Jordanes and Claudianus: the former described them as infantrymen, the latter as equipped with horse-harness (that is, as mounted warriors).¹⁶² The situation may be somewhat differ-

¹⁵⁸ Pohl, *Telling the Difference* 27–38; Johannes Gießauf, *A lovasnomád fegyverzet és harcmodor az ellenfelek beszámolóinak tükrében*, in: *Fegyveres nomádok, nomád fegyverek*, ed. László Balogh/László Keller (Magyar Őstörténeti Könyvtár 21, Budapest 2004) 27.

¹⁵⁹ Han Shu 94, *Memoir on the Hsiung-nu by Ssu-ma Ch'ien and Pan Ku* (ed. and trans. Pantelis E Tinios, Leeds no date) 13.

¹⁶⁰ Vásáry, *Belső-Ázsia* 66.

¹⁶¹ Regino, *Chronicon* a. 889 (ed. Friedrich Kurze, *MGH SS rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum* [50], Hannover 1890) 133; Györffy, *Bevezetés* 208.

¹⁶² Pohl, *Telling the Difference* 29.

ent in cases where the author might have had direct knowledge of the given issue:¹⁶³ Ammianus Marcellinus compared the weapons of the Iranian Sarmatians to those of the Germanic Quadi, who were their neighbours from the northwest, and considered this similarity a result of their spatial proximity.¹⁶⁴ On the one hand, this similarity is important for archaeologists: it was a natural consequence of geographical closeness; on the other hand, however, it is another warning for scholars of ethnic identity about the ethnically non-specific nature of weaponry.

At first sight we might believe that the issue is simpler in the case of steppe peoples: all sources emphasize the importance of the bow and arrow and of mounted warfare.¹⁶⁵ This, however, also means that ethnic conclusions cannot be based on these sources, since the lifestyle of the various steppe peoples was similar to such an extent that there could be no significant differences in the structure of weaponry. Of course, there could exist certain specific characteristics, even in greater numbers (for example the colour marks on arrows),¹⁶⁶ but it is hopeless to expect a detailed description of these elements for each and every people in the sources. In theory, archaeological finds should be more promising in this respect, but the above-mentioned example or similar characteristics appear in such small quantities that it will never be possible to decide whether they signal smaller or larger differences between individuals, tribes or perhaps tribal alliances (the latter is highly unlikely in my opinion).

W. Pohl – following F. Daim¹⁶⁷ – is quite optimistic regarding the identification of ethnic markers in connection with the archaeology of the Avars. (So was I earlier in connection with the material remains of the Conquest Period in Hungary, but these ethnic markers can be used with success exclusively when comparing them to the material of neighbouring peoples – a fact which I did not emphasize enough previously.¹⁶⁸) He is right in mentioning the use of the reflex bow, since it was never adopted by European peoples.¹⁶⁹ We also have to see, however, that this feature was not an ethnic marker – just like the clay cauldrons of the tenth-century Hungarians – since it was significant only when comparing two continents with extremely different cultures. At such a scale, differences in material culture are self-evident. Consequently, the use of the reflex bow is relevant for ethnic identification only in a certain area, at the juncture of these two worlds (Carpathian Basin, Central Europe) and in a certain period (sixth to tenth centuries), and not in the case of Eurasian peoples, since there its various types were used everywhere. The situation is similar in the case of the role of the Avars in the spread of the use of the stirrup in Europe, in other words, the use of the stirrup as an ethnic marker (again, only in a European context!). This can, namely, be questioned on the basis of the fact that in those regions of Inner and Central Asia that can be considered possible Avar homelands and the starting point of their migrations, no iron stirrups or stirrup representations are known from the fifth and sixth centuries¹⁷⁰ (although their use in Korea and China in the preceding centuries is well documented,¹⁷¹ which, however, would take us to the issue of the origin of the stirrup). The situation is again similar in the case of the archaeological material of tenth-century Hungary: many jewellery, horse harness, weapon and pottery types qualify as ethnic markers when compared to contemporary assemblages from Central Europe but only in this relation. Otherwise significant differences and groupings cannot be observed in the material of the Conquest Period, which could be connected to ethnic

¹⁶³ Pohl, *Telling the Difference* 30.

¹⁶⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* 17, 12 (ed. Wolfgang Seyfarth, *Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*, Stuttgart 1999) 122.

¹⁶⁵ The latter often appears in connection with Germanic peoples as well, see Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, ed. Seyfarth 122.

¹⁶⁶ Sevjan I. Vajnštejn, *Pamjatniki vtoroj poloviny I tysjačeljetija v Zapadnoj Tuve*, in: *Trudy Tuvinskoj kompleksnoj archeologo-etnografičeskoj ekspedicii 2* (Moskva/Leningrad 1966) 125, ris. 39.

¹⁶⁷ Falko Daim, *Archaeology, ethnicity and the structures of identification. The example of Avars, Carantanians and Moravians in the eighth century*, in: *Strategies of Distinction. The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800*, ed. Walter Pohl/Helmut Reimitz (*The Transformation of the Roman World 2*, Leiden/New York/Köln 1998) 71–93.

¹⁶⁸ Csanád Bálint, *Some ethnospecific features in Central and Eastern European archaeology during the Early Middle Ages: the case of Avars and Hungarians*, in: *Archaeological Approaches to Cultural Identity*, ed. Stephan J. Shennan (*One World Archaeology 10*, London 1989) 185–194.

¹⁶⁹ Pohl, *Telling the Difference* 29.

¹⁷⁰ Csanád Bálint, *Probleme der archäologischen Forschung zur awarischen Landnahme*, in: *Ausgewählte Probleme europäischer Landnahmen des Früh- und Hochmittelalters*, ed. Michael Müller-Wille/Reinhard Schneider (*Vorträge und Forschungen 41*, Sigmaringen 1993) 195–273, at 261.

¹⁷¹ Igor L. Kyzlasov, *O proischoždenii stremjan*, in: *Sovetskaja Archeologija* (1973) 24–36; Wakou Anazawa/Junichi Manome, *The Tomb of Fens-Su-Fu, Northern Yen and its Problem*, in: *Kobi-Jitsu 85* (1973) 9–11; Albert E. Dien, *The Stirrup and its Effect on Chinese Military History*, in: *Ars Orientalis 16* (1986) 33–56.

groups and would signify anything else than regional characteristics.¹⁷² This means that the archaeological cultures of the Avars and the conquering Hungarians were not ethnospecific in themselves, but only in the given geographic and cultural context: this specificity was not an inherent feature derived from their ethnic characteristics, but can be observed only from an external point of view, through their difference from others, from their environment.¹⁷³ This ethnic specificity is the result of the ethnic-cultural circumstances, equally valid for all inhabitants of the political formation in question. This has already been recognized in connection with the archaeological remains of the Eastern European Goths,¹⁷⁴ and this should be the line of research to follow in the case of the peoples of steppe origin as well.

In Hungary and in Central and Eastern Europe in general, many archaeologists went too far in evaluating the historical competence and possibilities of their discipline. We should pay attention to István Bóna's warning about the most simplified use of archaeology as a historical source: "... archaeology expected too much from itself."¹⁷⁵

c) Costume

Costume has been considered by the authors of written sources – since the beginnings of historiography – and by scholars until recent times an ethnospecific feature beside language and customs.¹⁷⁶ (An exception is the outstanding Herodotus: he realized that the characteristic costume of a people could be worn by others as well, and in other cases he noted that peoples wearing the same costumes were speaking different languages¹⁷⁷) Modern research has demonstrated about what we call today traditional costume that it is not the direct reflection of ethnic and/or cultural identity, but in most cases the result of nineteenth-century romantic national movements,¹⁷⁸ and is rather the expression of position within society and of affiliation with a community.¹⁷⁹ We have no reason to doubt that the situation was the same in archaeological periods as well: unequivocal written evidence suggests from both ends of early medieval Eurasia that costume (and language) does not necessarily reflect ethnic identity. This is also true the other way round: ethnic identity could remain unchanged even when costume and language did change. For example, when the ruler of the late Zhao Empire gave an order to kill all the Xiongnu (i.e. Asian Huns) in his empire, many Chinese were executed as well, since most of those who were to be killed spoke Chinese and dressed like the Chinese.¹⁸⁰ The same happened almost one and a half millennia later, when the Mongolian dynasty forced its costume and hairstyle on the Chinese, who later returned to their own costume after the accession to power of the Ming Dynasty and even banned the use of Mongolian costume, language and personal names.¹⁸¹

Costume has always been exposed to changes both through time and space,¹⁸² which is not surprising; and it reflected social status always and everywhere rather accurately, as it is well-known. In certain cases archaeology can demonstrate this nicely (although many scholars consider it an ethnospecific trait at the same time!). We have to add that – especially in the fundamentally patriarchal societies of the Eurasian steppe – female costume reflected not the social status of women but of their fathers or husbands.¹⁸³ Consequently it was meth-

¹⁷² See, for example, the case of the largest assemblage of female jewellery from the tenth century: Bálint, *Südungarn* 123–132.

¹⁷³ See note 150.

¹⁷⁴ Irina V. Zin'kovskaja, *Das Gotenreich Ermanarichs im Lichte aktueller historisch-archäologischer Forschungen im Süden Osteuropas*, in: *Ethnographisch-Archäologische Zeitschrift* 44 (2003) 369–386.

¹⁷⁵ István Bóna, *Régészetünk és Kelet-Európa*, in: *A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Filozófiai és Történettudományok Osztályának Közleményei* 28 (1979) 39–49, at 45.

¹⁷⁶ For literature see Walter Pohl, *Introduction: Strategies of Distinction*, in: *Strategies of Distinction. The Construction of Ethnic Communities*, 300–800, ed. Walter Pohl/Helmut Reimitz (*The Transformation of the Roman World* 2, Leiden/Boston/Köln 1998) 1–15, at 9. The same in the case of one of the most influential Hungarian scholars see László, *Magyar őstörténet* 461.

¹⁷⁷ Herodotus, I, 135 (trans. George Rawlinson, *The History of Herodotus. The History of the Peloponnesian War* Thucydides, London/New York 1910) 32; V, 87, trans. Rowlinson 177; IV, 23, trans. Rowlinson 128; IV, 106, trans. Rowlinson 143

¹⁷⁸ Gabriella Schubert, *Kleidung als Zeichen: Kopfbedeckungen im Donau-Balkan-Raum* (Wiesbaden 1993) 9–17.

¹⁷⁹ Brather, *Ethnic Identities* 153; Schubert, *Kopfbedeckungen* 42; Pohl, *Telling the Difference* 40.

¹⁸⁰ William M. McGovern, *The Early Empires of Central Asia: A Study of the Scythians and the Huns and the Part They Played in World History* (Chapel Hill NC 1939) 350.

¹⁸¹ Kurakichi Shiratori, *The Queue among the Peoples of North Asia*, in: *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 4 (1929) 6.

¹⁸² See note 176.

¹⁸³ Brather, *Ethnic Identities* 160.

odologically correct to build the groupings of Conquest Period material on female costume, which was richer and more diverse than that of men,¹⁸⁴ but it was a mistake to use it as a source of conclusions about society.

The non-ethnospesific nature of costume through time is apparent in cases where populations lived for generations without mixing and outside influences. We have written evidence for this: when seeing the paintings of Theodelinda's († c. 630) palace, the Langobard Paul the Deacon (ca. 720–790) was surprised that his people – during the past hundred years – completely changed their costume.¹⁸⁵ This is unequivocal proof (and warning to archaeologists) that the costume of a people may change without a change of their ethnic identity. We can see that in the case of eastern peoples as well: male and female jewellery from the Late Avar Period (eighth century) is somewhat different from that of the Middle Avar Period (second half of the seventh century), and has even less similarity with that from the Early Avar Period, used in the first half of the seventh century, although the Avar Khaganate remained in existence all that time. The huge difference between the costumes of the conquering Hungarians and eleventh-century Hungarians has already been mentioned, and it is never explained by the merging of other peoples with the Hungarians during those hundred years, or by the influence of other arrivals (see above). These examples demonstrate again that data from Europe and the East can be compared when studying ethnospesific phenomena.

As far as the spatial or ethnic distribution of costume is concerned, we should mention two important sources from the early medieval Carpathian Basin. Five years after the conquest of the Hungarians Theotmar, the Archbishop of Salzburg complained to Pope John IX that the Moravians shaved their heads like the Hungarians did.¹⁸⁶ (It is remarkable how fast foreign, and not even European, fashion was adopted by the neighbours!) We can see here the same phenomenon: the costume and hairstyle of a people could change significantly through time, could follow foreign fashion, and certain phenomena of fashion – in the same period! – could be adopted by peoples with a completely different origin and culture than those of its creators.

In the case of steppe peoples we do not have at our disposal descriptions of costume remotely as detailed as the above, but what we do know does not suggest that the situation was any different from that in Europe. At first sight a famous passage from *De administrando imperio* seems to contradict this, when Constantine Porphyrogenitus reports that “At the time when the Petchenegs were expelled from their country, some of them ... united with the so-called Uzes ... and wear such distinguishing marks as separate them off and betray their origin ... for their tunics are short, reaching to the knee, and their sleeves are cut off at the shoulder, whereby, you see they indicate that they have been cut off from their own folk and those of their race.”¹⁸⁷ Even without greater expertise in historical disciplines we may recognize that we are dealing here with a pseudo-scholarly explanation, which tries to clarify a detail of costume retrospectively. No doubt, there were differences in costume between the various early medieval peoples of the steppe; but great caution is needed when we historically evaluate them – if they are known at all.

There is another important source from Central and Southeastern Europe on the question of the ethnospesific nature of costume and its spread across ethnic boundaries. So far it has not been used often, since the historians who work with this source apparently do not know about its archaeological relevance, while archaeologists do not use the source. It is the “Bulgaroi” entry of the well-known *Suda*, stating the following: “As the Bulgars liked the costume of the Avars, they abandoned their own in favour of it and still use it.”¹⁸⁸ Again, we do not need special expertise to be able to evaluate the issue, and even after a brief overview of the archaeology of the Avars and the Proto-Bulgars we can see that the Danube Bulgars actually did not adopt the costume of the Avars: in the ninth century, namely, there was not much to adopt, and in the eighth, the decoration of their clothing was different, based upon which their clothing – or, at least their appearance, and that is what the source is about! – can be, at least partly, reconstructed. (We have to add that the information was at the time of the writing of the *Suda*, in the tenth century, already out of date and irrelevant.) During the last decades a number of finds have been discovered in Bulgaria that show a great similarity with eighth-century Avar objects (earrings, belt mounts, dress ornaments), and the study of these – just like of the similarities between tenth-century Hungarian and Proto-Bulgar material – will be the task of future research. If, however,

¹⁸⁴ Béla Szőke, *A honfoglaló és kora Árpád-kori magyarság régészeti emlékei* (Régészeti Tanulmányok 1, Budapest 1962).

¹⁸⁵ Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* 4, 22, ed. Waitz 124; Pohl, *Telling the Difference* 43.

¹⁸⁶ Fritz Lošek, *Die Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum und der Brief des Erzbischofs Theotmar von Salzburg* (MGH Studien und Texte 15, Hannover 1997) 151; Györfy, *Bevezetés* 221.

¹⁸⁷ Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio* 37, ed. Moravcsik/trans. Jenkins 168f.

¹⁸⁸ *Suidae Lexikon* 1, ed. Ada Adler (Lexicographi Graeci 1, Lipsiae 1928) 483–484.

we do not want to discard this information from the encyclopaedia as completely unfounded (although it was inaccurate), then we can say that a tradition survived until the tenth century that the costume of the Bulgars and Avars was somehow similar – we cannot say more, however; the costume of the tenth-century Bulgars had no resemblance with eighth-century Avars. The above source is a great illustration of not only the relationship between written and archaeological sources, but also of the specific value of the former.

Archaeological finds in themselves do not help much: first, due to their small number the archaeological identification of certain peoples is still in its infancy, and even in the future it will be possible only in the case of large, politically significant ethnic groups. Second, I see only a very slight possibility for making further, finer ethnic identifications within larger archaeological cultures already connected to certain peoples. (On the problems of the material known from the Asian steppes see below.) At the present state of research we have no reason to believe that the costume of steppe peoples was more varied and ethnospecific than that of the Europeans.

Archaeology often endeavours to reconstruct past costumes and clothing, and in the case of regions with more abundant written records this attempt is supplemented by the sources of the other discipline as well.¹⁸⁹ The number of written sources specifically on costume is small even in Western Europe, they are uncertain, and the synchronization of the two groups of sources poses difficulties. A methodological problem regarding the use of the sources is revealed by the case of the Germanic peoples, where the otherwise abundant sources do not mention the changes of costume in the fourth and fifth centuries, although these are obvious from the archaeological remains¹⁹⁰ – thus the former are irrelevant in this respect. With regard to the allegedly ethnospecific nature of clothing, when exaggerations due to methodological mistakes are revealed, it is apparent that in the Merovingian Period – otherwise rich in both written and archaeological sources – nothing indicates that male or female costume had such a role.¹⁹¹ Similarly, the analysis of written and archaeological records from early medieval Italy has shown that costume does not reflect ethnic identity or ethnic differences between the Langobard and the Roman population, it had a distinguishing role only within or between given communities.¹⁹² It would be, however, an exaggeration to state that the diversity of the early medieval archaeological material of Europe reflects nothing else but differences between social groups.¹⁹³ There are numerous archaeological cultures – and consequently numerous costumes – in the numerous regions of Europe, and not even laymen could assume that clothing in the Kama region, the Baltic, the Carpathian Basin, the Rhine region, etc. were similar. These are, however, huge regions and not political units identical with peoples. Within them numerous smaller archaeological-cultural groups can be distinguished, evaluation of which is the task of archaeology. It is evident that different peoples inhabited these regions, which may also have had different origins, but the differences manifesting themselves in their material culture were not caused only by ethnic differences, but by many other factors as well. The relationship between archaeological cultures and political units is best demonstrated by the similarities that can be observed on the boundaries of neighbouring archaeological cultures, or in the peripheries of political formations.¹⁹⁴ Be it the Sassanid-Byzantine or the Breton-Frankish border in the Carolingian Period,¹⁹⁵ according to an apt remark peripheries resemble each other much more than their centres.¹⁹⁶ Although the cultural groupings of a given region had been obviously influenced by the ethnospecific characteristics of the inhabitants of the region, but the formation of their material culture was always determined by the real material, political, commercial and economic possibilities of the population,

¹⁸⁹ See e.g. Mechthild Müller, *Die Kleidung nach Quellen des frühen Mittelalters* (RGA Erg. Bd. 33, Berlin 2003).

¹⁹⁰ Pohl, *Telling the Difference* 45.

¹⁹¹ Brather, *Ethnische Interpretationen* 285.

¹⁹² Brather, *Ethnic Identities* 153 (note 5).

¹⁹³ As W. Pohl stated in connection with early medieval material from Europe (Pohl, *Telling the Difference* 41).

¹⁹⁴ *Centre and Periphery. Comparative Studies in Archaeology*, ed. Timothy C. Champion (One World Archaeology 11, London 1995).

¹⁹⁵ Julia M. H. Smith, *Confronting Identities: the Rhetoric and Reality of a Carolingian Frontier*, in: *Integration und Herrschaft. Ethnische Identitäten und kulturelle Muster im frühen Mittelalter* (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 3, Wien 2002) 163–176.

¹⁹⁶ Nina Garsoïan, *Byzantium and the Sasanians*, in: *Cambridge History of Iran 3 (1), The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Cambridge 1983) 568–592, at 569; id., *Frontier-frontiers? Transcaucasia and Eastern Anatolia in the pre-islamic period*, in: *La Persia e Bisanzio* (Atti dei Convegni Lincei 201, Roma 2004) 327–352; Reinhard Schneider, *Lineare Grenzen. Vom frühen bis zum späten Mittelalter*, in: *Grenzen und Grenzregionen*, ed. Wolfrang Haubrichs, Reinhard Schneider. *Veröffentlichungen für Saarländische Landesgeschichte und Volksforschung* 22 (Saarbrücken 1994) 51–68, at 67; *Borders, Barriers, and Ethnogenesis. Frontiers in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Florin Curta (Studies in the Early Middle Ages 12, Brepols 2005).

and it was the changes in these factors that caused cultural changes. Material culture was – actually is – in constant change irrespective of ethnic identity, consequently costume is culturally, and not ethnically, specific.

d) Hairstyle

Scholars consider hairstyle a cultural, ethnic and individual feature.¹⁹⁷ It can be studied mostly through written records, rarely through representations, and even more rarely through archaeological finds. In the case of hairstyle, the possibility of differentiation mentioned above in connection with costume is present as well: the differences are obvious and salient between cultures,¹⁹⁸ within them only larger groups and regional differences are perceivable for us, and within those real ethnic differences cannot be specified with the help of these groups of sources. It is easy to believe that the inhabitants of Italy, Scandinavia and the Iberian Peninsula had different hairstyles. Here we are interested in the hairstyles of the Hungarians and other peoples of steppe origin who migrated to Europe.

The hairstyle of the steppe peoples of Central and Southeastern Europe differed considerably from that of the Europeans. A vivid description can be found in the well-known report of Theophanes the Confessor on the envoys arriving to Constantinople in 557/558, who attracted great attention: “They wore their hair very long at the back, tied with ribbons and plaited.”¹⁹⁹ The deviation from European hairstyles was described in more detail by a contemporary, perhaps eye-witness, Byzantine historian, according to whom, although the king of the Franks had long hair, “[i]t is not, however, like that of the Turks and Avars, unkempt, dry and dirty and tied up in an unsightly knot.”²⁰⁰ If we have a closer look at the – rather few – sources at our disposal, it becomes clear that – similarly to the above-mentioned bows stiffened with bone-plates – we are not faced with an ethnospesific feature. They did treat their hair differently from Europeans, but it is evident from the relevant sources that although some grouping is possible, a clear differentiation of hairstyles according to ethnic groups of the Avars is impossible.

Based on written, material and pictorial evidence, the following variations have been attested: long hair let down at the back, braid(s), and shaved head. According to the data at our disposal it is probable, although not unequivocal, that shaved head was combined with braids. These subtypes, however, are so characteristic that even the few and not always clear sources enable us to establish certain ethnic differences.

A description of Avar hairstyle similar to those by Theophanes and Agathias can be read in other, contemporary Byzantine sources as well; they all report about long, let down hair (Iohannes Ephesinus: “This people with a curious hairstyle²⁰¹ called Avars...”).²⁰² It is an important piece of information that the same hairstyle was depicted – obviously by an Avar – on a bone disentangling point from Mandjelos.²⁰³ We have to add immediately, however, that beside this, braids were also popular among the Avars as shown by the representations on the – not exactly datable – bone disentangling point from Pörös²⁰⁴ and the eighth-century fitting from Egyházaskér.²⁰⁵ Braids worn in pairs are also suggested by lockrings, which appeared first in the Middle Avar Period and became popular in the Late Avar Period.²⁰⁶ We have no data on shaving the head among the Avars.

¹⁹⁷ Percy E. Schramm, *Zu Haar- und Barttracht als Kennzeichen im germanischen Altertum und im Mittelalter*, in: id., *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik I* (Stuttgart 1954) 118–127, at 121; Renate Rolle/Henning Seemann, *Haar und Bart als individuelles Kennzeichen*, in: *Bilder früher Menschen. Archäologie und Rekonstruktion*, ed. Günter Bernhardt (Münster 1992) 111–139.

¹⁹⁸ The fourteenth-century author of the Hungarian Illuminated Chronicle reported that Vata, who rebelled against Christianity in 1046, “shaved his head and grew three queues like the pagans” (cap. 82). The chronicler obviously saw a causal relationship between his actions as a pagan and his (pagan) hairstyle. We have also take into account that Vata had already previously worn his hair that way, and it became significant only as a consequence of his political role. Be as it may, the message was obvious: *in this situation*, hairstyle had a religious and political meaning.

¹⁹⁹ English translation: *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284–813, 6050* (trans. Cyril Mango/Roger Scott, Oxford 1997) 340. The same text can be found in both versions of the *Chronicle of Monembasia* as well.

²⁰⁰ Agathias, *Historiarum libri quinque I*, 3, 4, ed./trans. Frenndo 11, see Pohl, *Telling the difference*.

²⁰¹ Samu Szádeczky-Kardoss here inserted in brackets and with a question mark: „with braids(?)”, but this was only his interpretation, Pohl, *Telling the difference* 17. Iohannes Ephesinus VI, 24.

²⁰² Pohl, *Telling the difference* 17. Corippus, *Praefatio* 4–5, III. 262.

²⁰³ Slavenka Ercegović-Pavlović, *Avarski konjanički grob iz Mandjelosa*, in: *Starinar* 24–25 (1973–1974) Tab. IV: 1.

²⁰⁴ László, *Kettős honfoglalás* 176–177.

²⁰⁵ Nándor Fettich, *Die Metallkunst der landnehmenden Ungarn* (*Archaeologia Hungarica* 21, Budapest 1937) Taf. VIII: 8.

²⁰⁶ Júlia András, *Avar kori varkocsszorítók*, in: *Archaeologiai Értesítő* 123–124 (1996–1997) 85–123.

The fact that Theophanes, when describing the envoys, mentioned the hairstyle of the Avars first, deserves attention since after that the unknown author, from whose work he got his data, stated firmly that “[t]he rest of their dress was like that of the other Huns”.²⁰⁷ From this it follows that the hairstyle of the Avars (“They wore their hair very long at the back, tied with ribbons and plaited”) was surprising, new and unique for the onlookers,²⁰⁸ suggesting indirectly that until their appearance, Byzantines knew only about other hairstyles among the peoples of the steppe. In other words, the hairstyle of the Avars was different from the “modo hunico”²⁰⁹ hairstyle of the peoples of the Eastern European steppe known to the Byzantines until that time. Although we do not know anything about the latter, it is certain that the steppe peoples of Central and Inner Asia had different hairstyles, consequently – following the internal logic – we may assume that the peoples the Byzantines had known before the Avars wore their hair let down or shaved the top of their head.

Chinese annals report about the Eastern Turks that they wore their hair long and let down (Wei Shu, Sui Shu).²¹⁰ Sa-po-li, a Western Turkic Khagan, wrote in 585 in his letter to the Chinese Emperor that he did not dare to change the customs of his people and let down the braids.²¹¹ There is an interesting piece of information on the hairstyle of the Western Turks and the inhabitants of a city-state in Central Asia in a decree of the ruler issued in 612. According to this, the Turfanians wore their hair let down before the arrival of the Turks, afterwards they started to wear braids, but the ruler ordered them to return to the old style.²¹² This – together with the above-mentioned letter of the Western Turkic Khagan – enables us to establish two things, one specific and one general: 1) the Western Turks had braids, 2) the inhabitants of Turfan changed their hairstyle as the result of an almost half a century long Turkic rule (the abandonment of which and the return to the old style was ordered by the ruler in 612). The fact that they wore braids is confirmed by the travel report of Hsüan-tsang as well. The Chinese monk met the West Turkic Khagan around the same time (630) near Tokmak, and reported that the 200 mounted escorts of the latter also had braids, while the ruler’s hair was let down and had a silk ribbon around his forehead.²¹³ Here we have to mention that a number of braids were placed beside the dead – probably as a sign of bereavement²¹⁴ – in the kurgans of Noin-ulai, which are usually connected to the Xiongnu; in their case, written sources also confirm that they wore their hair in braids.²¹⁵

It is notable in connection with the question of the origin of the Avars that the Juan Juan, who are usually considered to be their ancestors, wore their hair similarly, let down,²¹⁶ just like the Caucasian Huns.²¹⁷ We can see the same on representations from Dagestan and Northern Mongolia on seventh-century bone saddle ornaments, Central Asian terracotta figurines and the seventh-century wall-paintings of Pendjikent;²¹⁸ consequently other Asian peoples had the same hairstyle.²¹⁹ In other words: it was widespread among nomads and town-dwellers, Turkic-speaking and Iranian-speaking alike.

A completely different hair treatment was the shaving of the head or the cutting off of the hair on the top of the head. In Inner Asia this was customary among the *Sien-pi*.²²⁰ The first part of the List of Bulgar Princes concludes the following way: ‘these five princes ruled for 515 years on the other side of the Danube with a bald

²⁰⁷ English translation: Theophanes Confessor 6050, trans. Mango/Scott 340.

²⁰⁸ Historians usually reported the unusual, if we want to exaggerate, only the exceptional and extraordinary, Esch, Zeitalter 48.

²⁰⁹ Procopius, Anecdota 7, 8–10 (ed./trans. Otto Veh, Prokop Werke 1, München 1970) 68f.

²¹⁰ Stanislas Julien, Documents historiques sur les Tou-kioue (Turcs). Extraits du Pien-i-tien, et traduits du Chinois, in: Journal Asiatique 6, 3 (1864) 325–367, at 331 and 351; Nikita Ja. Bičurin, Sobranie svedenij o narodach, obitavšich v Srednej Azii v drevnie vremena I (Moskva-Leningrad 1950) 229.

²¹¹ Julien, Documents 502.

²¹² Bičurin, Sobranie II 254.

²¹³ Edouard Chavannes, Documents sur les Tou-kiue (turcs) occidentaux (Sbornik trudov orchonskoj ekspedicii 6, St. Petersburg 1903) 134; René Grousset/George Deniker, La face de l’Asie (Petite Bibliothèque Payot 8, Paris 1955) 53.

²¹⁴ Grousset/Deniker, La face de l’Asie 53.

²¹⁵ Shiratori, Queue among the Peoples of North Asia 68–69.

²¹⁶ Vásáry, Belső-Ázsia 73.

²¹⁷ English translation: The History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movsēs Dasxuranci II, 11 (trans. C. F. J. Dowsett, London Oriental Series 8, London/Oxford/New York/Toronto 1961) 83–84.

²¹⁸ Murad G. Magomedov, Kostjanye nakladki sedla iz verchnečirjurtovsogo mogil’nika, in: Sovetskaja Archeologija (1975) 279. ris. 3; Aleksandr D. Grač, Drevnetjurkskie izvajanija Tuvy (Moskva 1961) 79.

²¹⁹ Lazar’ I. Al’baum, Živopis’ Afrasiaba (Taškent 1975) 30; V. A. Meskeris, Terrakoty Samarkandskogo muzeja (Leningrad 1962) 39–40. taf. XVII–XVIII.

²²⁰ Shiratori, Queue among the Peoples of North Asia 17–18.

head...'. This is confirmed by Liutprand's statement from 968, according to which the Bishop of Cremona met the envoy of the Bulgars, "whose hair was cut like the Hungarians' hair", in the Byzantine royal court,²²¹ which is clarified by the information provided by Theotmar, Archbishop of Salzburg²²² and Regino, Abbott of Prüm: according to these sources the Hungarians "cut their hair down to the skin with a knife".²²³

These observations allow a few conclusions on the ethnogenesis of the Avars and the Hungarians.

- 1) In the 200-year-long debate around the origin of the Avars the contribution of the Hephtalites is a constantly returning element. In the light of the above it would be important to take into consideration²²⁴ that the Hephtalites shaved their head,²²⁵ which is not attested in the written sources on the Avars. In my opinion, when Theophanes (or his source) wrote about the unusual hairstyle of the Avar envoys, he meant that it was different from the well-known hairstyle let down or in braids, and after the description of the differences he wrote about the similarities with the other 'Hun' peoples. If we try to translate the semiotic content of this statement into the language of history, we may assume that the hairstyle of the Ogur peoples, who moved into Eastern Europe around 463 (see the 'other Huns' of Theophanes), and of the branch of the Onogur-Bulgars, who moved to the Balkans (see the List of Bulgar Princes), was different from that of the Turks and the Khazars (that is, they shaved their head).
- 2) With regard to the hairstyle of the Hungarians, they followed that of the peoples of Ogur-Onogur origin – and not that of the steppe peoples who had settled down near the Caucasus – and of the Central and Inner Asian Turks.²²⁶ These similarities and differences – in light of the large number and significance of Bulgar-Turkic loanwords in Hungarian – might suggest a new direction for research regarding which branch of the Turks the Hungarians had closer contacts with.²²⁷ Thus, in this respect hairstyle may indeed prove to be helpful in the study of ethnogeneses.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to something which is – beyond our everyday experiences and the constant flow of information towards us – an absolute commonplace in ethnography and cultural history: the constant change of culture (even if ethnic identity itself remains [more or less] unchanged!). I would like to quote two sources as illustrations, deliberately one from the "west" and one from the "east".

The first is Tacitus, who, when writing about the activities of Iulius Agricola, the prefect of Britannia (AD 77–84), described not only the Romanization (that is, change of culture and lifestyle) of the natives, but also – overtly! – the original political aims of the Romans regarding the latter, and that must have been highly authentic in the case of this author: "For, to accustom to rest and repose through the charms of luxury a population scattered and barbarous and therefore inclined to war, Agricola gave private encouragement and public aid to the building of temples, courts of justice and dwelling-houses, praising the energetic, and reproving the indolent. Thus an honourable rivalry took the place of compulsion. He likewise provided a liberal education for the sons of the chiefs, and showed such a preference for the natural powers of the Britons over the industry of the Gauls that they who lately disdained the tongue of Rome now coveted its eloquence. Hence, too, a liking sprang up for our style of dress, and the 'toga' became fashionable. Step by step they were led to things which dispose to vice, the lounge, the bath, the elegant banquet."²²⁸

In the other source, it is the 'defeated' side that has the voice: it chides and laments about the loss of the culture and language of its people. On the world-famous Orkhon Inscription, Kül Tegin writes about the internal

²²¹ Liutprandus Cremonensis, *Relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana* 19 (ed. Joseph Becker, MGH SS rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum [41], Hannover/Leipzig 1915) 185.

²²² Liutprandus Cremonensis, *Relatio*, ed. Becker 185.

²²³ Regino a. 889, ed. Kurze 133; Györfy, *Bevezetés* 208.

²²⁴ Vásáry, *Belső-Ázsia* 73.

²²⁵ Omeljan Pritsak, *Die bulgarische Fürstenliste und die Sprache der Protobulgaren* (Ural-Altäische Bibliothek 1, Wiesbaden 1955) 76.

²²⁶ The custom of shaving the head and having braids at the back survived not only until the first pagan revolt (Pohl, *Telling the Difference* 25), but practically until the beginning of the twentieth century, see Alice Gáborján, *Honfoglalás kori elemek a magyar viseletben*, in: *Honfoglalás és néprajz*, ed. László Kovács/Attila Paládi-Kovács (*A honfoglalásról sok szemmel* 4, Budapest 1997) 235–249, at 239–242.

²²⁷ At first sight this might be contradicted by the sources stating that thirteenth-century Cumans also shaved their head (Szűcs, *Nemzeti tudat* 251), while thirteen-fourteenth-century stone sculptures from the East European steppe show that the hair of men – just like that of Vata – was worn in three long braids, see Svetlana A. Pletněva, *Poloveckie kamennye izvajanija* (Archeologija SSSR, *Svod Archeologičeskich Istočnikov* E4–2, Moskva 1974).

²²⁸ Agricola 21, english translation: Tacitus, *opera omnia* (ed. Moses Hadas, English trans. Alfred John Church/William Jackson Brodrib, *Complete Works of Tacitus* (New York 1942).

processes leading to the collapse of the first Turkic empire: “The Tabgach people gave us gold, silver, silk and fabric in abundance. Their words have always been sweet and their materials soft. With sweet words and soft materials they lured remote peoples to come closer. After [these] settled down near them, they started to have bad thoughts ... [But you], multitudinous Turkic people, beguiled by sweet words and soft materials, you perished!”²²⁹ Historians used to the scarce and laconic sources of the early medieval history of Central and Eastern Europe, or the archaeologist observing the types and distributions of objects, can never gain such a deep insight into past events, they can only acknowledge the emergence, then disappearance of ‘peoples’ or archaeological cultures. It is, however, obvious, that innumerable similar cases happened in the world, we just simply do not know about them, since these processes occurred not within the horizon of large empires with literacy, nor with peoples in contact with them, and/or we are unable to interpret archaeological phenomena in ethnic terms!

4) FOLKLORE

Hungarian ethnography believed that it could significantly contribute to the study of the prehistory of the Hungarians only in the very first period, in its nascent momentum. Although it is not widely known, it should be appreciated that the best ethnographers recognized already at the time of the millennium of the conquest that their discipline had to face considerable limitations in this field of study. Only few realize even today²³⁰ that modern research (L. Kósa, T. Hofer) has given up the romantic visions still flourishing among amateurs, and unfortunately present in academic circles as well,²³¹ not to mention international research,²³² about its competence in the research on ethnic prehistory.²³³ Although folklore did reveal some undoubtedly ancient elements of religion,²³⁴ it is clear that due to the uncertain chronology of the available data and the unknown mechanism of cultural interactions no historical reconstructions can be based on them. Numerous, from a modern point of view ancient, elements of European culture now overlay the eastern heritage of Hungarian folklore (e.g. the legend of the white horse, the motifs of blood pact and hoisting the chief on a shield in Anonymus’ thirteenth-century *Gesta*),²³⁵ as shown by the title of L. Vargyas’ volume of articles (‘Eastern heritage – western culture’).²³⁶ Thus, folklore data may orient and refine the study of Hungarian ethnogenesis, but we cannot expect from them ethnic ‘decipherment’ and the solution of historical questions.

R. Wenskus’ theory on the formation and transmission of ethnogenetic traditions²³⁷ is supported by the psychological processing of the defeat of the Hungarians in 895 east of the Carpathians, which triggered the conquest, and the dichotomy of the written traditions about Hungarian ethnogenesis. Whatever the extent of the destruction by the Petchenegs – whether small or devastating – it is beyond doubt that the survivors preserved their Hungarian ethnic identity. With regard to origin myths, we know about one which is about the origin of the people, and another one, which was the origin myth of the ruling dynasty in the Árpád Period: the two stories are different and they are connected to different ancestral animals. The first is the myth of the magic deer, according to which the ancestors of the Hungarians, Hunor and Magyar were lured into the

²²⁹ Berta, Jól halljátok 190.

²³⁰ For a history and a critique of research see Péter Langó, *Archaeological research on the conquering Hungarians: A review*, in: *Research on the Prehistory of the Hungarians: a Review*, ed. Balázs G. Mende (*Varia Archaeologica Hungarica* 18, 2006) 175–340.

²³¹ László Kósa, *A magyar népi kultúra honfoglaláskori elemei*, in: *Bevezetés a magyar őstörténet kutatásának forrásaiba I/1*, ed. Péter Hajdú/Gyula Kristó/András Róna-Tas (Budapest 1976) 246–308, at 246; id.; *A magyar műveltség kezdetei: a rekonstrukció módszerei és lehetőségei*, in: *Magyar Tudomány* 103 (1996) 972–981; Tamás Hofer, *Néprajz és őstörténet a millennium idején*, in: *Magyar Tudomány* 103 (1996) 1018–1025.

²³² Jean-Louis Amselle, *Ethnie*, in: *Encyclopaedia Universalis* 8 (Paris 1989) 971–973. It is increasingly clear that the emergence of anthropology was accompanied by the dismissal of history.

²³³ This illusion led to the organization of a meeting by the Hungarian Ethnographic Society in 1974, see Balassa, *Mivel járulhat hozzá*.

²³⁴ Sándor Solymossy, *Magyar ősvallási elemek népmeséinkben*, in: *Ethnographia* 42 (1931) 113–132; Lajos Vargyas, *Keleti elemek a magyar néphitben*, in: *Antiquitas Hungarica* 1 (1947) 81–83; Vilmos Diószegi, *A sámánhit emlékei a magyar népi műveltségben* (Budapest 1958); id., *A pogány magyarok hitvilága* (Budapest 1973).

²³⁵ György Rózsa, „Árpád emeltetése”, in: *Néprajzi Értesítő* 77 (1995) 35–43; Tamás Hofer, *A birtokba iktatás, ajándékozás középkori rítusai és a fehérló-monda*, in: *Néprajzi Értesítő* 77 (1995) 61–66; György Németh, *The Origins of the Tale of the Blood-Drinking Hungarians*, in: *Tolerance and Intolerance in Historical Perspective*, ed. Csaba Lévai/Vasile Vese (Pisa 2003) 91–109.

²³⁶ Lajos Vargyas, *Keleti hagyomány – nyugati kultúra* (Budapest 1984).

²³⁷ Herwig Wolfram et al., *Origo gentis*, in: *RGA* 2. Aufl. 22 (Berlin/New York 2003) 174–210.

swamps of Maeotis by a stag during a hunt, after which the two peoples got separated.²³⁸ This is a variant of a Classical Greek tale (the myth of Io), which can be read in the second-century work of Pausanias as well (there it is a hind that lures the hunters into the swamp). In connection with early medieval steppe peoples it was first described by Sozemenos between 439 and 450. According to his story, “a fleeing hind showed the Hun hunters”²³⁹ the way through Maeotis. This legend in connection with the Huns appears in the work of other authors as well,²⁴⁰ and spread among medieval authors through Jordanes,²⁴¹ and it is remarkable that the story of the deer hunt was recorded in connection with two other, related peoples as well (the Utigurs and the Kutigurs, see Procopios).²⁴² Thus, the myth of the magic stag is not originally and exclusively Hungarian.²⁴³ The other origin myth of the Hungarians, the Turul legend is, however, unique; it is totemic (the ancestress is inseminated by a bird of prey) and was originally the origin myth of the royal family in the Árpád period.²⁴⁴ These two legends were probably made up of elements that go back to different peoples and sources, and probably different periods;²⁴⁵ to these even a third may be added: the name of a sword given away as a gift by King Salamon’s mother in 1063 suggests that an Attila-tradition also flourished in the family of the Árpáds.²⁴⁶ It seems that not only was it acceptable for the royal family to trace back their ancestry to the Turul and Attila at the same time, but it did not disturb the medieval chroniclers either, although based on formal logic we would consider them incompatible. This also implies that there might have been even more Hungarian origin myths, they just have not been preserved! It was also possible that origin myth and language were radically different. Gyula László recognized such a dichotomy apparent in Julianus’ expedition in 1235 to look for the Hungarians who had been left behind in the East. Following Hungarian traditions, the black friar first went to the Kuban region (where the Onogur homeland was – I have to add that the external ethnonyms of the Hungarians are derived from the ethnonym “Onogur”), but in the end found this Hungarian-speaking population around the Upper Volga.²⁴⁷

Of course, among the steppe peoples it was not only the Hungarians, who had more than one origin myth. For example, Sozomenos, who described the deer hunt in the Maeotis, knew about two Hun origin myths (“cow chased by a bot-fly” and “fleeing hind”). A similar diversity can be observed in other cases as well. Chinese data on the origin of the Turks show the same picture, actually – as a perfect illustration of the above – in one case we may read two versions in the same source (Chou Shu), while in others at least three Turkic origin myths were recorded (Sui Shu, Yu-Yang Tsa-Tu, Chi Shi).²⁴⁸ Thus, various Chinese chroniclers knew about the different origin myths of different Turkic groups, in a period when one or the other had not yet become dominant. This is something that should raise attention. In most cases, namely, because of the concepts and approaches of the authors of the sources we meet that final state of the ethnogenetic process described by R. Wenskus, where the various ethnic components of a given ‘people’ already have shared traditions and from then on live according to shared models and norms (‘Verfassung’).

²³⁸ Simon de Kéza, *Gesta Ungarorum* 5 (ed./trans. László Veszprémy/Frank Schaer, Central European Medieval texts, Budapest/New York 1999) 14–17.

²³⁹ Gyula Moravcsik, A csodaszarvas mondája a bizánczi íróknál, in: *Egyetemes Philologiai Közlöny* 38 (1914) 280–292, 333–338, at 283.

²⁴⁰ Agathias, *Historiarum libri quinque* 5, 11, ed./trans. Frendo.

²⁴¹ Jordanes, *Getica*, ed. Mommsen 123–125. Moravcsik, A csodaszarvas 288, 333.

²⁴² Procopios, *De bello gothico* 4, 5 (ed./trans. Otto Veh, Prokop Werke 2, München 1966) 736–739; Gyula Moravcsik, *Zur Geschichte der Onoguren*. *Ungarische Jahrbücher* 10 (1930) 53–90, at 68.

²⁴³ Szűcs, *Nemzeti tudat* 116–148. For literature see Zoltán Kordé, *Csodaszarvasmonda*, in: *Korai Magyar Történeti Lexikon* 153.

²⁴⁴ Gyula Kristó, *Ősi epikánk és az Árpád-kori íráshagyomány*, in: *Ethnographia* 81 (1970) 116–119; Szűcs, *Nemzeti tudat* 129–132; Zoltán Kordé, *Turul-monda*, in: *Korai Magyar Történeti Lexikon* 693.

²⁴⁵ György Györffy, *Krónikáink és a magyar őstörténet. Régi kérdések – új válaszok* (Budapest 1993) 203.

²⁴⁶ See note 49. As opposed to the view entrenched in Hungarian research after György Györffy, I agree with András Róna-Tas and Károly Rédei, who do not refuse the possibility of an eastern origin (Róna-Tas, *Honfoglaló magyarság* 25, 326–329; Károly Rédei, *Őstörténetünk kérdései* [Magyar Őstörténeti Könyvtár 11, Budapest 1998] 29), since it could have reached the Árpáds through the Bulgar-Turks as well, who merged into the Hungarians. On this possibility – after Gyula László and Péter Tomka – most recently see Csanád Bálint, *Das Karpatenbecken von der Landnahme bis zur Staatsgründung*, in: *Europas Mitte um 1000*, ed. Alfred Wiczorek/Hans-Martin Hinz (Stuttgart 2000) 555–563, at 561. Western concepts about the origin of the Hungarians could hardly have had any effect on Salamon’s mother, who was born and raised in Kiev.

²⁴⁷ László, *Őstörténetünk* 19.

²⁴⁸ Denis Sinor, *The Legendary Origin of the Türks*, in: id., *Studies in Medieval Inner Asia* (Variorum Collected Studies Series, Ashgate 1997) 223–253; Vásáry, *Belső-Ázsia* 63–65.

5) PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY, PHYSIOGNOMY

The relevance of physical anthropology²⁴⁹ in the study of ethnogenesis is usually ignored. Although this is a relatively young discipline, the silence surrounding it in international research has other reasons. It is mainly used in Central and Eastern Europe, although due to the cremation burial rite of the early Slavs only to a limited extent.²⁵⁰ In Western Europe – except for a few, sporadic cases – it never became important, before World War II due to reasons of the history of research, after the war due to an extreme reaction to its abuse in Nazi Germany. In Hungary, it was Lajos Bartucz who introduced it to the research on the prehistory of the Hungarians, and later on it gained a firm position in this field after its inclusion in the first multidisciplinary study (1943).²⁵¹ In the 1950ies and 1960ies – due to optimistic exaggeration²⁵² – physical anthropology was credited with great significance in the study of ethnogenesis,²⁵³ which was followed by a period of more realistic assessment in the 1970ies and 1980ies.²⁵⁴ In the past one and a half decades research has shifted from traditional analysis towards statistical methods and the inclusion of palaeopathology,²⁵⁵ which can be regarded as a sign of – advised – withdrawal from direct historical and ethnogenetic interpretations.²⁵⁶ History and archaeology cannot really deal with those physical anthropological observations, which suggest the appearance of a brand new population within the same cemetery,²⁵⁷ or when physical anthropology cannot confirm the appearance of a new population inferred on the basis of the archaeological data.²⁵⁸ Similarly, so far it has been impossible to evaluate historically²⁵⁹ the physical anthropological observation that one of the components of the population of the Conquest Period had strong connections with the northern shores of the Black Sea and the Azov Sea.²⁶⁰

It would be illusory to turn to the skeletal material of cemeteries – not to mention a few skulls – for answers to ethnogenetic problems. Peoples have always been mixing with each other. It is a fact supported by physical

²⁴⁹ In Central and Eastern Europe it is still usually called “anthropology”, which is not identical to Anglo-Saxon cultural or social anthropology.

²⁵⁰ Cremation makes the traditional, metric study of the bones impossible, and the chemical study of the tiny bone fragments started only two decades ago.

²⁵¹ János Nemeskéri, *Az embertan és a magyar őstörténet*, in: *A magyarság őstörténete*, ed. Lajos Ligeti (Budapest 1943) 223–239.

²⁵² Previously Lajos Bartucz assessed the possibilities of physical anthropology more realistically.

²⁵³ Especially Pál Lipták went to extremes in the ethnogenetic and historical interpretation of the skeletal material, see Pál Lipták, *Avars and ancient Hungarians* (Budapest 1983).

²⁵⁴ Kinga Éry, *Reconstruction of the tenth century population of Sárbogárd on the Basis of Archaeological and Anthropological Data*, in: *Alba Regia 8–9* (1968) 98–147; id., *A magyar őstörténet néhány embertani kérdése*, in: *Magyar Tudomány* 141 (1980) 338–341; id., *Embertani tanulmányok a Kárpát-medence IV–XVII. századi népességeiről. Kandidátusi értekezés tézisei* (Budapest 1994); id., *Régi magyarokról – újból*, in: *Anthropologiai Közlemények* 42 (2001) 17–28; Erzsébet Fóthi, *A Veszprém megyei honfoglalók embertani vizsgálata*, in: *Veszprém és környéke a honfoglalás korában*, ed. Zsuzsanna V. Fodor (Veszprém 1998) 68–90; id., *Összehasonlító antropológiai vizsgálat a Kárpát-medence népeinek etnogeneziséhez. Embertani kapcsolatok a 6–8. században az eurázsiai steppe és a Kárpát-medence között*, in: *Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve – Studia Archaeologica* 4 (1998) 497–514.

²⁵⁵ *Honfoglaló magyarság – Árpádkori magyarság*, ed. Gyula Pálfi et al. (Szeged 1996) 79–272; László Szathmáry, *Populációdinamikai szempontok honfoglalás- és Árpád-kori etnogenezisünk kérdéseire*, in: *Déri Múzeum Évkönyve* 58 (1977) 143–165; Ildikó Pap, *Some Data on the Palaeosomatology of 10–12th Century Hungarians*, in: *Annales Historico-Naturales Musei Nationalis Hungarici* 78 (1986) 329–337; id., *Oral Pathology and Social Stratification in the Hungarian Middle Ages*, *Annales Historico-Naturales Musei Nationalis Hungarici* 78 (1986) 339–345.

²⁵⁶ István Bóna, *Honfoglalás és régészet*, in: *Korunk* 8 (1996) 21–40, 36: “The previous generation expected too much from physical anthropology.”

²⁵⁷ Zsuzsanna Just, *Előzetes adatok 10. és 11. századi népességek elkülönítéséhez a koponya non-metrikus jellegei alapján*, in: *Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve – Studia Archaeologica* 3 (1997) 323–328.

²⁵⁸ Livia Bende/Gábor Lőrinczy, *A szegvár-oromdűlői 10–11. századi temető*, in: *Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve – Studia Archaeologica* 3 (1997) 201–285, at 238; László Szathmáry/Zsuzsanna Guba/Antónia Marcsik, *Szegvár-Oromdűlő csontvázeleteinek szerepe a 10–11. századi népesség kontinuitásának megítélésében*, in: *Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve – Studia Archaeologica* 3 (1997) 335–343.

²⁵⁹ As pointed out in Balázs G. Mende, *Problèmes d’actualité de l’anthropologie historique du bassin des Carpathes*. (Unpublished manuscript. Here I would like to thank the author for allowing access to his results).

²⁶⁰ Tibor Tóth, *A honfoglaló magyarság etnogenezisének problémája*, in: *Anthropologiai Közlemények* 9 (1965) 139–149; id., *Az ősmagyarok genezisének szarmata kori etapjáról*, in: *A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Filozófiai és Történettudományok Osztályának Közleményei* 19 (1969) 85–95; Kinga Éry, *Újabb összehasonlító statisztikai vizsgálatok a Kárpát-medence 6–12. századi népességeinek embertanához*, in: *Veszprém Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei* 16 (1982) 35–118, at 55–57. This can have something to do with the genetic observation that a haplotype is especially frequent in the modern populations of Ukraine, Poland and Hungary, see Ornella Semino et alia, *The Genetic Legacy of Paleolithic Homo sapiens sapiens in Extant Europeans: A Y Chromosome Perspective*, in: *Science* 290 (2000) 1155–1159, at 1159.

anthropological data that the mixing between the Europid and Mongolid types started extremely early: the discovery of the spectacular Europid mummies of the Tarim Basin (some of them had blonde hair and blue eyes!) has great significance not only regarding the homeland and dispersal of the Indo-Europeans, but also makes it obvious that this mixing started in Inner Asia, the cradle of steppe peoples, already around 1800 BC.²⁶¹ (It seems now that this can be demonstrated genetically as well.²⁶²) The death masks of the kurgans of the Tagar culture from the first half of the first millennium provide important information on the anthropological composition of Central Asia. The extremely naturalistic representations make it obvious even for the non-specialist that these were not the depictions of Mongolid people.²⁶³ The infiltration of the Mongolid type into Europe also started very early: in the fifth-century graves of the cemetery at Lugovo, in the Kama region, a large number of such skulls were found.²⁶⁴

There can be many explanations – beside migrations – for the constant mixing of physical anthropological types and genetic pools:

- 1) *military*: prisoners and slaves captured during wars and campaigns,²⁶⁵ diplomatic connections,
- 2) *deportation*: This was a general practice of the rulers of large empires, and often involved the resettlement of whole populations. We have abundant data on this from Byzantium,²⁶⁶ and I have already mentioned examples from Sassanid Iran and China. It is important to remember a detail from an already mentioned story: when the order of Emperor Shih-min to kill all the Xiongnu in the empire was carried out, many Chinese were killed as well due to their identical language and costume.²⁶⁷ This implies that for the executors of the order physical anthropological traits provided no clue already at that time! Although the differences between the Sinid and Sayanid types ('Chinese' and 'Inner Asian') may be obvious for the non-specialist as well, they are still nothing more but scientific constructs that do not exactly reflect real life.
- 3) *marriage*: The physical anthropological consequence of inter-marriage are usually ignored, since sources report about them only in the case of the ruling elite. Consequently, such mixing is often considered sporadic, although they were frequent in every period, in the case of every people, of all social status. Foreign women – beyond the need for procreation and the maintenance of the family and the lineage – had great prestige value. Based on modern examples it is highly likely that Asian peoples might have been interested in acquiring blonde women of obviously non-steppe origin. (Since in the fifth century the mixing of the Nordic type and other types with darker hair was still minimal,²⁶⁸ it is conceivable that Ildico, Attila's last wife, was blonde.) I have already mentioned the origin of Edica and Odoacer, the last will of the Roman comes Bonifatius,²⁶⁹ the Suebian wife of a Vandal warrior,²⁷⁰ the Gothic wife of Balamber, the king of the Huns around 370, and the Germanic origin of Attila's last wife. Chinese and Byzantine princesses were also often married to Eastern Turkic leaders or Khazar Khagans. These obviously always had physical anthropological consequences, which – according to the rules of genetic inheritance – could resurface a few generations later – and all the cemeteries we find belonged to such groups!

²⁶¹ The Tarim Mummies. Ancient China and the Mystery of the earliest Peoples from the West, ed. James P. Mallory/Victor H. Meir (London 2000); Christopher P. Thornton/Theodore G. Schurr, Genes, Language and Culture: an Example from the Tarim basin, in: Oxford Journal of Archaeology 23 (2004) 83–106.

²⁶² Olga A. Derbeneva/Elena B. Starikovskaya/Douglas C. Wallace/Rem I. Sukernik, Traces of Early Eurasians in the Mansi of Northwest Siberia Revealed by Mitochondrial DNA Analysis, in: American Journal of Human Genetics 70 (2002) 1009–1014.

²⁶³ Most recently: El'ga B. Vadeckaja, Sibirskie pogrebal'nye maski (predvaritel'nye itogi i zadači issledovanija), in: Archeologičeskie Vesti 11 (2004) 298–323; id., New Facts concerning Tashtyk burial masks, in: Archaeology, Ethnology & Anthropology of Eurasia 17 (2004) 51–64.

²⁶⁴ Anna V. Zbrueva, Istorija naselenija Prikam'ja v anan'inskuju èpochu, in: Materialy i Issledovanija po Archeologii 30 (1952) 189–190.

²⁶⁵ When the leader – who ordered the inscription – defeated the tribal alliance rebelling against the Turks, he “took their herd of horses, their property, daughters and women.” – Sine-usu Inscription, eastern side, 3., see Berta, Jól halljátok 304.

²⁶⁶ Peter Charanis, The Transfer of Population as a Policy in Byzantine Empire, in: Comparative Studies in Society and History 3 (1961) 140–154; Jadran Ferluga, Untersuchungen zur byzantinischen Ansiedlungspolitik, in: Zbornik Radova Vizantinološkog Instituta 23 (1984) 49–61; Hans Ditten, Ethnische Verschiebungen zwischen der Balkanhalbinsel und Kleinasien vom Ende des 6. Jahrhunderts bis zur zweiten Hälfte des 9. Jahrhunderts (Berlin 1993).

²⁶⁷ See note 176.

²⁶⁸ At the turn of the sixth and seventh centuries, Maurikios described the Franks and the Langobards as “blonde peoples”, see Pohl, Telling the Difference 27.

²⁶⁹ Walter Pohl, Ethnicity, theory, and tradition: a response, in: On Barbarian Identity. Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages, ed. Andrew Gillett (Studies in the Early Middle Ages 4, Turnhout 2002) 221–239, at 234.

²⁷⁰ Brown, Szent Ágoston 510.

- 4) *slave trade*: Slave trade was frequent since antiquity, and has increased enormously in the ninth and tenth centuries. Due to the trade activities of the Caliphate throughout Eurasia a great amount of Slavic²⁷¹ and Finno-Ugrian slaves²⁷² were transported to Central Asia. Similarly, when the Hungarians “attacked the [Eastern – Cs. B.] Slavs” in the Crimea around 860 to capture slaves for sale, it is quite likely that at least a few Slavic women ended up in the household of high-ranking Hungarian leaders, and this was obviously not an isolated case. The fifth-century fur trade of the Onogurs (Jordanes *Getica* fr. 37) – according to a widespread opinion, with the Finno-Ugrian population of the Ural region – might have involved such instances as well. These “foreigners” (and those we do not even know about!) had mixed to such an extent and in a such way with those populations which later became the components of the conquering Hungarians, that they cannot even be detected with the means of physical anthropology. Furthermore, this mixing continued even after the conquest, and was practically continuous.

What are the ethnogenetic results of physical anthropology in research on the early medieval peoples of the steppe? It seems that not only is it impossible to demonstrate significant differences between the steppe peoples, the exact ethnic connections of the fairly large series from larger political formations could not be cleared satisfactorily either. This is probably not a deficiency of research, but derives from the nature of the material. The number of dolichocephalic Europid and brachycephalic Europid-Mongolid skulls – that were subjected to comparative analysis more than half a decade ago – is less than one hundred²⁷³ (a similar analysis has not been carried out ever since), and the suggested ethnic interpretation (that these are Alans and Bulgar Turks respectively)²⁷⁴ can be challenged on both methodological and historical grounds.²⁷⁵ Although the amount of the skeletal material from the Avar Period in the sixth to eighth centuries and from tenth-eleventh-century Hungary is much larger (60,000 and 26,000 respectively),²⁷⁶ still neither certain eastern physical anthropological types (‘Pamirid’, ‘Turanid’, etc.), nor the Europid series could be connected to any of the ethnic groups living in Avaria or Hungary. The 10–15% ratio of Mongolid elements within the skeletal remains of the – obviously eastern – Avars²⁷⁷ raises questions about both their ethnogenesis and the competence of physical anthropology in historical issues (especially if we take into consideration that in the early phase of research in Hungary Mongolid types were preferably collected, which actually invalidates all previous statistics!). Similarly, in the case of tenth-eleventh-century skulls from Hungary there is not even hope to identify within the Europid type the Eastern Slavs, certain Finno-Ugrian and Iranian groups, who might have had joined the Hungarians in Eastern Europe, and the Western and Southern Slavs (and their various groups!) and Franks, furthermore the prisoners of war from Western Europe and Italy, who were absorbed in the Carpathian Basin. (In the latter case – after a lot of primary research – we may expect some progress through archaeogenetic research, since there is a fundamental difference between Eastern and Western European populations in terms of the presence of the EU19 marker.²⁷⁸) It is another interesting and unexplained issue how the skeletal material of the Árpád Period can be so homogeneous. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the latter cannot be considered the direct continuation of the population of the Conquest Period,²⁷⁹ but rather that of the population before 895.²⁸⁰ Since – at least in the early medieval Carpathian Basin – no population can be identified with a specific physical anthropological type or types, furthermore no physical anthropological type can be connected to any one given population, we have to establish that physical anthropological data can provide at best only a guideline for research on ethnogenetic processes.

The situation is not better in the case of physical anthropological data obtainable from written sources. A well-know information from Hungarian history illustrates well the uncertainty of conclusions based on them.

²⁷¹ In the Caliphate, this ethnonym became synonymous with ‘slave’, see Jutta Reisinger/Günter Sowa, *Das Ethnikon Sclavi in den lateinischen Quellen bis zum Jahr 900*, in: *Glossar zur frühmittelalterlichen Geschichte im östlichen Europa*, Beiheft 6 (Stuttgart 1990).

²⁷² Peter B. Golden, *Al-Sakaliba*, in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* 8 (Leiden 1995) 872–878.

²⁷³ V. V. Ginzburg, *Antropologičeskie materialy k probleme proischoždenija naselenija chazarskogo kaganata*, in: *Sbornik Muzeja Archeologii i Ėtnografii* 13 (1951) 309–416; for further literature see Bálint, *Archäologie der Steppe* 56 (note 131).

²⁷⁴ Pletněva, *Ot kočevij* 184–185.

²⁷⁵ Bálint, *Archäologie der Steppe* 56–59.

²⁷⁶ Mende, *Problèmes* 3.

²⁷⁷ Mende, *Problèmes* 9.

²⁷⁸ Semino et al., *Genetic Legacy* 1155–1159.

²⁷⁹ Éry, *Régi magyarokról* 25.

²⁸⁰ Kinga Éry, *Comparative Statistical Studies on the Physical Anthropology of the Carpathian Basin Population between the 6th–12th Centuries A. D.*, in: *Alba Regia* 20 (1983) 89–141, at 126.

According to a very specific and impressive report in a contemporary source, there was a White Hungary and a Black Hungary at the time of King St. Stephen I. It is, however, rather uncertain, to what extent can we take the statement that the colour of the skin of the inhabitants of the latter was like that of the Ethiopians (“populus est colore fuscus velus Etiopes”)²⁸¹ at face value. Surely, Bruno of Querfurt had never seen Ethiopians, thus the core of truth in the data he provides about the complexion of Black Hungarians could be only that the appearance of this group was different from that of the Europids (that he knew). (What would have he written for example about the Sicilians with Punic and Arabic strains?) The ethnic affiliation of this group of Hungarians is completely unknown, there have only been guesses so far. Until the – unlikely – appearance of a new source, we simply cannot expect that the problem of the “Black Hungarians”²⁸² and the ethnogenetic content of this – otherwise authentic – source could be resolved.

6) ARCHAEOGENETICS

The foundation of the Archaeogenetic Laboratory of the Institute of Archaeology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2004 was special not only because a new discipline was introduced into the study of the pre-history of the Hungarians, but also because the setting up of a research team specializing in the analysis of exclusively ancient DNA samples was unique even in an international context. Most of the historical genetic research that had been carried out in the world was based on recent samples, and genetic material from ancient bones had been studied only sporadically. (The problem of early hominids and the emergence and dispersal of modern humans is a completely different issue and is irrelevant here.) The practice followed so far in the publication of archaeogenetic results, however, poses a number of problems:

The *selection of samples* was never described, without which their historical and ethnographic background is completely beyond control, and the reasons for selection remain unknown. The publication of these, however, is absolutely essential for any kind of social scientific research, since – obviously – sampling may influence the results.²⁸³

The possibilities of ancient DNA sampling are very limited – and this aspect is usually ignored. Selection has a number of theoretical difficulties:

It is trivial that samples can be selected *only from skeletal remains at our disposal*, and we do not – cannot – know anything about how representative the individuals under study were for their whole community,

Sampling can only be subjective, since the criteria of the choice are not more than the consequences of a scientific construct. Such a construct cannot reflect anything else than the present knowledge available for, and the methodological approach of, research. Its relevance for past reality is, on the one hand, unknown, on the other, new data, from perhaps a completely different source group, might change significantly both our knowledge and its scientific treatment. The possibility of sampling is limited as well: due to soil chemistry and other, individual factors (e.g. nutrition, individual physiognomy) it is not always possible to extract DNA from every bone.

The historical value of ancient DNA samples is relative, since “peoples” have been *constantly* mixing with each other since the beginning of history (see above). Migrations happened not only in the Migration Period, and not only from the east to the west. That is how the Early Bronze Age Bell Beaker culture spread from the Iberian Peninsula till the Carpathian Basin, such was the migration of the Celts in the Iron Age until Anatolia, the movement of the Goths in the Roman Period from perhaps Gotland itself through Southern Russia, the Carpathian Basin and the Balkans to France, the migration of the Langobards from the estuary of the Elbe through Moravia, Hungary, Slovenia to Italy, the southern Slavic conquest in the Balkans in the sixth century, the Slavization of the Baltic-speaking population of the Dnepr region and of the Finno-Ugrian-speaking population of the Upper Volga region in the eighth to tenth centuries, the settlement of the Normans in Normandy and around Kiev in the ninth century, then later on in Sicily in the twelfth century,

²⁸¹ Vita quinque fratrum Poloniae, in: Catalogus fontium historiae Hungaricae aevu ducum et regum ex stirpe Arpad descendentium ab anno Christi DCCC usque ad annum MCCCCI, III, collegit Albinus Franciscus Gombos (Budapest 1937–1938) 2569.

²⁸² Most recently, with full literature see Gyula Kristó, A fekete magyarok és a pécsi püspökség alapítása, in: Acta Universitatis Szegediensis, Acta Historica 82 (1985) 11–16.

²⁸³ In the archaeogenetic project of our Institute, the criteria of selection for sampling from thousands of tenth-eleventh-century skeletal remains will be described for the first time. We (archaeologists!) worked out with P. Langó a system of criteria, which ensures that all the regions, cemetery types, social strata and assumed ethnic groups will be represented proportionately as far as possible and according to the present state of research.

the Germanization of the originally Baltic-speaking Prussians, the mixing of the autochthonous population of the British Isles (Britons, Picts, Scots) with the Anglo-Saxons in the fifth-sixth centuries and the Normans in the eleventh century, the formation of the French through the absorption of the Germanic Franks by the various local peoples (Celts, Romans). The list could go on and on, especially if we recall the practice of the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires to resettle whole populations in new areas. What we know about the history of various peoples from the relatively scarce written evidence from Asia and the – for us especially interesting – Eurasian steppe confirms that ethnogenetic processes there were not at all different from those in Europe.

As a consequence of the above, *the value of recent DNA samples as historical sources is minimal*. Geneticists, however, do not seem to be aware of this. The great majority of genetic publications is based on DNA samples from recent populations, and their historical evaluation should be handled with the greatest caution.²⁸⁴ For the above reasons, ethnogenetically ‘pure’ peoples never existed; homogeneity was possible only at the dawn of humankind, in the case of certain groups (although the variability of groups can be observed even among primates). Homogeneity is possible in communities that are isolated due to their special natural environment (see e.g. the Caucasus), or due to their special lifestyle (e.g. the Palaeo-Sibirid peoples), but even in such cases great caution is needed.²⁸⁵ Consequently, when geneticists write – not once – about ‘Balkan’ peoples, that is historically meaningless. It is only suitable for comparisons with other, similarly large regions, but is completely unsuitable to base ethnogenetic conclusions on. In the case of the Balkans, starting only from the Iron Age – that is, ignoring the Neolithic, and the issue of the origin and dispersal of the Indo-Europeans – we have to reckon with *at least* five peoples (Illyrian, Dacian, Thracian, Roman, Greek), on whom settled in the sixth and seventh centuries *at least* two kinds of Slavic groups (eastern and southern), then these populations mixed in the seventh to thirteenth centuries with *at least* four peoples from the steppe (Avars, Bulgar-Turks, Petchenegs, Cumanians), all of whom had very different origins. And this rather simplistic list ends around the fourteenth century and ignores everything that happened afterwards, although both the Turkish Empire and Yugoslavia were characterized by significant ethnic mixing! A well-known example is provided by the Bosnians: they were composed of very different elements (Slavic, Caucasian and Turkic) during the Middle Ages above a substrate of Balkan natives of Iron Age origin, while Bosnian national identity crystallized only in the nineteenth century based on their Muslim religion.

These uncertain factors could be reduced if instead of taking a small amount of samples from cemeteries – however careful the selection may be – archaeogenetic research would start to analyze large series from cemeteries. I am convinced that only *the ethnic structure of micro-communities can help us explore regional and/or ethnic characteristics*. Consequently, even ancient DNA samples are relevant and valuable only regarding their own temporal horizon.

The study and possible solution of the causes of the above problems and contradictions is a huge task. Archaeogenetics is still in its infancy all around the world and – to stay with the metaphor – the historical evaluation of its results must be aware of its infantile disorders. In order to do so, *we need a much closer collaboration between geneticists and historians*. I am convinced that the only way to proceed is the one chosen by the scholars of the Institute of Genetics and the Institute of Archaeology in Budapest. And even so, the increase of the number of ancient DNA samples will only provide a guideline; a “complete decipherment” will never be achieved: “peoples” are made up of a *inextricable* mixture of language, material and spiritual culture, physical anthropological types and genetic features.

Some problems of archaeogenetic research on tenth-century Hungarians

When the introduction of archaeogenetics into the research on Hungarian ethnogenesis was first brought up, it turned out that not only the public and the mass media, but also academia had unfounded expectations

²⁸⁴ In this respect the approach and methodology of a work – already apparent from its title – is noteworthy: Mauro Rubini/Silvia Mogliazza, *Storia delle popolazioni italiane dal neolitico a oggi*. Soprintendenza per i beni archeologici del Lazio (Roma 2005).

²⁸⁵ A good example: a tenth-century Arabic historian described a geographically rather isolated settlement, whose population was practicing metalworking, and was composed of “Muslim, Christian and Jewish” peoples (Masudi: *Les prairies d’or*). It is obvious that this settlement was not formed on an ethnic basis, and if we were lucky enough to find its cemetery (or one of its cemeteries!), then – had we not known this source – we would identify the population with the help of ancient DNA samples or traditional physical anthropological methods with one of the peoples practicing one of the above listed religions.

from the application of the method and were rather uninformed about its uncertainties, problems and limitations.²⁸⁶ Thus, it might be useful to draw attention to some historical circumstances in connection with tenth- and eleventh-century skeletal remains.

Even the earliest groups of the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin had very diverse origins, and when the first genetic research group published its results on their ethnogenesis,²⁸⁷ they made – among many others²⁸⁸ – numerous methodological and historical mistakes when selecting the ‘most autochthonous’ Hungarian group.²⁸⁹ That is why I feel it necessary to emphasize – however evident it may be for historians – that the Hungarians were ethnically not homogenous even at the time of the conquest. During the study of the formation of the conquering population we have to take into account a source that used three different ethnonyms (Ungroi, Unnoi, Tourkoi) to describe the Hungarian army fighting in the Lower Danube region around 839.²⁹⁰ The seven tribes of the actual conquerors were evidently of different origin, as described by the contemporary Leo the Wise (Taktika: “...were composed of many tribes...”²⁹¹). Furthermore, we have to regard a conquering tribe, that of the Turkic – and already heterogeneous – Kabars, who entered the Carpathian Basin together with the “Hungarians”. Their exact origin is also unknown, and we can find only guesses about this issue in the literature. This ethnic heterogeneity is resolved by a tacit agreement among scholars according to which they – correctly – regard all the conquering tribes and groups as “Hungarian”. Although the report of the *Annales Fuldenses* from 894 on the Hungarian incursion into Pannonia does contain exaggerations, the statement that the Hungarians abducted young women²⁹² is hardly unrealistic – consequently, there might have been Moravians and Bavarians and their babies among the later conquerors! This is what we can say about the composition of the conquering Hungarians around 895 at the present state of research, which shows that genes (supposedly) characteristic for Central European ethnic groups might have been present in their genetic pool as well. The ethnic composition of Hungary around 1000 became even more varied during the next one hundred years, and this was an essential change. During these hundred years after the conquest, the already mixed conquerors were joined by many more groups, most of whom were not of eastern origin. First we should mention the Avars, since many – specialists and non-specialists – think that their descendants mixed with the conquering Hungarians. We have to bear in mind that during their 250-year-long rule they had mixed with other European populations – although we cannot even estimate the ratio of these groups – which could have accelerated after the collapse of their political formation in 803. It is extremely significant that within the physical anthropological material of the Avar Period we cannot observe the dominance of eastern, steppe populations (Europid-

²⁸⁶ Beyond the problems listed in Patrick Sims-Williams’ article Genetics, linguistics, and prehistory: thinking big and thinking straight, in: *Antiquity: A Quarterly Review of Archaeology* 72, 277 (1998) 505–527, see András Róna-Tas, Megjegyzések a legújabb genetikai vizsgálatok felhasználhatóságáról, in: *Magyar Tudomány* 151 (1990) 918–924; Thornton/Schurr, Genes; Brather, *Ethnische Interpretationen* 610–613 (with further literature), see also Walter Pohl, Aux origines d’une Europe ethnique. Transformations d’identités entre Antiquité et Moyen Âge, in: *Annales* 60 (2005) 183–208, at 191; Csanád Bálint, A magyar eredetkérdés és a történelmi genetika, in: *Magyar Tudomány* 2008 (in preparation).

²⁸⁷ Carmela R. Guglielmino/Annalisa de Silvestri/Július Béréš, Probable ancestors of Hungarian ethnic groups: an admixture analysis, in: *Annals of Human Genetics* 64 (2000) 145–159.

²⁸⁸ There are a series of unacceptable simplifications: they mention that according to *one* opinion, the Csángó, who speak a very archaic Hungarian dialect, might be the descendants of the Hungarians who had been left behind in Etelköz, but forget to mention that this is not accepted any more, since it is not supported by any evidence. Most scholars consider the Csángó the descendants of the Székely who migrated there in more waves, see Michael Arens, Csángós, in: *Lexikon zur Geschichte Südosteuropas*, ed. Edgar Hösch/Karl Nehring/Holm Sundhaussen (Wien/Köln/Weimar 2002) 172. Methodological problems: When a people makes statements about their origin (“claim to be the descendants”, p. 145), scholars always have to take into account that tradition is not a guarantee for the antiquity of the source, even less for its authenticity. This has a huge international literature (Otto Höfler, *Abstammungstraditionen*, in: *RGA* 1 (Berlin/New York 1973) 18–29). Consequently, we cannot be certain that the various traditions that had *actually* been handed down to us truthfully reflect the actual state of affairs in the Conquest Period. With regard to the Cumans, they not only “claim” (p. 147) to be of Turkic origin, they actually are! Furthermore, the Jász not only “believe” that they arrived together with the Cumans (p. 158), all archaeological evidence seems to support that they did in fact arrive in Hungary in the thirteenth century. They write that “the continuity of the population of the Órség until the present day seems to be guaranteed” (p. 146) – but exactly what data proves this (assumed) continuity?

²⁸⁹ Their work is characterized by the lack of knowledge of basic historical works and reference books (they gave a wrong date even for the Hungarian conquest!) and the use of the works of amateurs, accompanied by methodological and political ignorance.

²⁹⁰ *Georgius monachus continuatus*, quoted from Györffy, *Bevezetés* 105.

²⁹¹ *Tactica*, PG 107, 669–1120, quoted from Györffy, *Bevezetés* 112.

²⁹² *Annales Fuldenses* a. 894 (ed. Friedrich Kurze, *MGH SS rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum* 7, Hannover 1891) 125; Györffy, *Bevezetés* 211.

Mongolids and Mongolids: 16.7 %).²⁹³ It is obvious that beyond these – largely Europid! – descendants of the Avars, there were other Europeans who joined the sons and grandsons of the conquering Hungarians: Western, Eastern and Southern Slavs, surviving Franks, and an unknown number of slaves from Western Europe, Italy and the Balkans who had been captured during the Hungarian incursions into these areas.²⁹⁴ All of the above groups must have had different biological features (physical anthropological type, blood type, DNA). As a consequence of the political changes during the reign of Stephen I, even more western, eastern and northern peoples mixed with the population of the country: knights moving in in the eleventh century from Swabia, the Petchenegs and Volga Bulgars, or the Rus’ “clan” serving under Prince Imre. All this is clearly reflected in the skeletal material of the Árpád Period: its 98 % (!) is made up of Europids. That is why Kinga Éry could write that “the majority of the population cannot be regarded the descendants of the conquerors”.²⁹⁵

The above questions and problems became even more articulated during the genetic analysis of DNA samples from tenth-eleventh-century human and animal remains carried out by our institutes. The first results are undoubtedly exciting, if for nothing else then for the nature of such investigations, since this was the first time we gained insight through genetics into the endless labyrinth of the biological origins of tenth-century Hungarians. But however important and exciting the first results of the geneticists may be, we cannot forget the numerous problems surrounding their evaluation. Those who endeavour to evaluate the DNA samples from human remains from a historical point of view have to take into account the diverse ethnic composition of the population of tenth-eleventh-century Hungary.

Sources describing the *extremely* varied origin of the population must be taken into account, see the Kabars – of unknown origin! – who joined the conquering Hungarians or the Petchenegs and Volga Bulgars who moved in around the turn of the millennium. We have to reckon with the absorption of a large number of autochthonous European populations (Eastern, Western, Southern Slavs, Bavarians), the slaves captured during the incursions into Western Europe and the Balkans, the “Swabian” nobles from the era of St. Stephen and the Rus’ serving Prince Imre.

We have to bear in mind the example provided by the rulers of the Árpád Dynasty: should Prince Imre’s skeleton or the skull relics of St. László be available for mitochondrial DNA analysis, and had we not had written evidence about their origin (which would not be surprising in this period and region!), we would be astonished by the results of the genetic analysis stating that one was Bavarian, the other Polish! Similarly, if another genetic study could carry out a Y-chromosome analysis of Géza’s grandson (Veszprém), it would show that he was Polish, while King Péter was Italian. It is probably safe to assume that there were foreigners among the wives of tenth-century leaders of lower or higher rank as well.

All this implies that we should expect a high degree of ethnic diversity in the case of the skeletal remains from Conquest Period and Árpád Period cemeteries.

²⁹³ Tibor A. Tóth/Berta V. Firštejn, Antropologičeskie dannye k voprosu o velikom pereselenii narodov. Avary i sarmaty (Leningrad 1970) 33; Lipták, Avars 84.

²⁹⁴ On the ethnic composition of medieval Hungary see Gyula Kristó, Nem magyar [sic!] népek a középkori Magyarországon (Budapest 2003). Although it might have been exaggerated or based on a misunderstanding, it is noteworthy that in 974 Pilgrim, the Bishop of Passau estimated the number of foreign Christian slaves to be more than that of the Hungarians, see György Györffy, König Stephan der Heilige (Budapest 1988) 67.

²⁹⁵ Kinga Éry, Embertani tanulmányok a Kárpát-medence IV-XVII. századi népességéről (Unpublished doctoral thesis) (Budapest 1994) 11, 14.

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