On Some Eastern Parallels of the Development and Consolidation of the Early Hungarian State

MIHÁLY DOBROVITS

The aim of this paper is to investigate the process by which the early Hungarian state came into existence and consolidated itself. We shall focus on the political processes by which the landtaking Hungarian tribes formed a kind of pre-state, or a "state in statu nascendi" (I. Vásáry) and then a really early state. We also intend to pay attention to the role of Christianity, first as a legitimating factor of the power of early Árpádians during the pre-statehood era and later in the process of consolidation of the early state. As the western models and parallels of the formation of the early state in Hungary are known well enough not to be dealt with in detail here, we shall focus instead on the eastern parallels of this process. What we intend to examine are the eastern parallels of the christianization and state founding of the once pagan and (semi-)nomadic Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin.

The Eurasian historical background in general

Although ideas such as comparison between the eastern and western types of the early state occurred infrequently in the past, in current historiography such ideas have become more and more popular. The events at the eastern and western edges of the vast territory of Barbaricum are not connected merely by migrations and intermediary trade relations, but sometimes they might have structural parallels. Of course it is not always easy to understand such parallelisms in so many different cultural backgrounds, but some key-words, like sedentary empires, barbaric peripheries, frontier relations etc., can help us to see the most important similar tendencies. Of course these tendencies never became rules as, wanting the geo-

---

2 As was already demonstrated, e.g. by G. Hirth, China and the Roman Orient, Shanghai 1885, and F. J. Teggart, China and Rome, New York 1936.
3 S. Jagchid and V. Symons, Peace, War, and Trade along the Great Wall: Nomadic-Chinese Interaction through Two Millennia, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1989; C. I. Beckwith,
graphical space and other opportunities that the steppe zone could provide, the barbarians of the western hemisphere never formed “shadow empires” along the limes of the Empire. Such “shadow empires” could exist only in the steppe zone where the geographical circumstances offered enough space for them to exist. On the other hand, not all the Inner Asian nomads formed “shadow empires”, and not all the early state formations on the periphery of the Chinese civilization (and other peripheries) were nomads; e.g., the early Tibetans or the early Manchu-Tunguz peoples shared many common features with their nomadic neighbors but were never (at least as the main bulk of their population) nomads.

At the westernmost edge of the great steppe zone three peoples tried to establish a kind of shadow-empire, based on the exploitation of their neighbors by methods both peaceful (trade) and aggressive (raids); the European Huns, the vast complex of peoples that one usually calls the Avars, and on a lesser scale the Early or “landtaking” Hungarians. The fourth people we could mention here, the Danube Bulgarians, followed another pattern, namely that of the Germans in western Europe or the remnants Xiongnu and Xianbei in northern China. They occupied a part of the Byzantine Empire and formed their polity on some substrate of the earlier inhabitants, until they finally lost their original culture. Usually all “shadow empires” shared in one of two possible fates: either acculturation with their sedentary neighbors or final disintegration. Final disintegration constituted a special danger in the Carpathian Basin for albeit it always had strong political connections with the western steppe zone its geographical, and particularly hydrological, environment was not apt at all to sustain a long-lasting nomadic way of life.

---

Conversions and political relations

Proselytizing religions played a pivotal role in acculturation (and also legitimating) processes even in the Chinese periphery. Buddhism was introduced into China as a state religion by the Toba Wei (386-534), and, according to Wolfram Eberhard, Buddhism became the ideological background of the barbarian dynasties of northern China. Along with northern China we can mention the role of Buddhism amongst the Ruanruan, which might be a part of a wider process of imitatio imperii, fully repudiated by their Chinese (or more precisely Tabyad) rivals. We have good evidence of such processes in our Chinese sources, mostly the Weishu and the Beishi, which even mention that the paternal uncle of Anagui had the name Poluomen (521-524) which is the Chinese Buddhist transcription of Brahman. Although the Second Türk Empire refused it, Buddhism was popular in the First Empire, the rulers of which even tried to introduce it as the state religion. Later the Uygurs accepted Manichaeism as their imperial religion (763). Besides the personal belief of the Uygur Bögü Qayan (759-779), the Tibetan interest in Buddhism might also play a role in this option. Buddhism flourished in Tibet from 649 onwards, finally being made state religion in 791. In these turbulent years of Chinese history, Tibet supported the An Lushan rebellion, while the Uygurs fought on behalf of the legitimate Tang dynasty. The short history of Uygur Manichaeism in the Ötüken/Mongolian empire shows a pattern typical of the barbarian conversion processes. According to a short fragment which was written down later in the Turfan oasis (already in Uygur script), the traditional Uygur aristocracy offered a bitter resistance against the introduction of the new religion and its Sogdian representatives, the electi (dindar-lar). So the new religion was fully dependent on the ruler’s support, who even introduced a new decimal sys-

12 W. Bang and A. von Gabain, Türkische Turfan-Texte II: Manichaica II, Sitzungsberichte der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Kl. Berlin 1929, 411-430, especially 414, lines 8-17; on the decimal system introduced in order to control the newly proselytized Uygurs, see ibid., 418, lines 91-92.

98
tem, in order to control the obedience to the new religion. At last the tension broke out in open revolt, in which the ruler was killed by one of his relatives, Tun baya targa'n, who set himself on the throne.\textsuperscript{13} Manichaeism gained in importance again only after 795, when the influential commander-in-chief from the Adiz tribe, who held the title el ügäsi, overthrew the young Qayans of the Yaylaqar clan and set himself on the throne. Although he and his successors accepted the clan name Yaylaqar, they also turned to Manichaeism for legitimation. The final compromise between the original Yaylaqar dynasty and Manichaeism was made only after 861, on being expelled from the Ötükan by the Yenisei Khirghiz. On the other hand, the Sogdian Manichaean merchants who converted the Uyghurs also gained influential supporters for their religion. After the collapse of the Uygur Khaganate in Mongolia, both Manichaeism and Buddhism underwent severe persecution in China.

Analyzing the role of Buddhism in early Tibetan kingship, Giuseppe Tucci supposed that this was a way to reestablish the legitimation of the Yar-lung kings of Tibet, whose power earlier was blocked by their sacral role in the Bön religion.\textsuperscript{14}

Long-distance trade relations, acculturation processes, a search for political equilibrium and maybe a struggle for legitimacy equally played an important role in the conversion to Judaism of the Khazar Khaganate.\textsuperscript{15} On the other hand religious rivalry also existed in the steppe zone.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Case study on the landtaking Hungarians}

Visiting the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (908/913/945-959) Bulcsu and Tormás informed him (or most probably his officials\textsuperscript{17}) about the legitimation of the dynasty of the Árpáds.\textsuperscript{18} They told him that this family was chosen by the

\textsuperscript{13} The conflict was finally caused by the Sogdian counselors, who recommended that the ruler should take advantage of the state-mourning in China that followed the death of Emperor Daizong and invade China, C. Mackerras, "The Uighurs," in \textit{The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia}, ed. D. Sinor, Cambridge 1990, 318.

\textsuperscript{14} G. Tucci, "The Secret Characters of the Kings of Ancient Tibet," \textit{East and West} 6 (1955), 197-205.


\textsuperscript{16} Buddhism vs. Manichaism, Manichaism (Uyghur) vs. Christianity (Kirghiz, Karluk), Buddhism (Uygur) vs. Islam (Qarakhanids), Judaism (Khazaria) vs. Islam (Volga Bulgarians).

\textsuperscript{17} During formal imperial audiences it was a taboo for the emperor to engage in direct communication with his visitors. Later he could grant private audiences to them, as he did to Liutprand of Cremona, cf. A. Toynbee, \textit{Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his World}, London 1973, 16.

\textsuperscript{18} On the eastern background of the landtaking Hungarians, in English, see: D. Sinor, "The Outlines of Hungarian Prehistory," \textit{Journal of World History} 4 (1958), 513-540. Of the long debates concerning this topic in Hungarian historiography one can mention the follow-


21 “In the year of Our Lord’s incarnation 918, Ügek, who, as we said above, being the kindred of King Magog became a long time later a most noble prince of Scythia, took to wife in Dentumoger the daughter of Eunedubelian, called Emese, from whom he begot a son, who was named Álmos. But he is called Álmos from a divine event, because when she was pregnant a divine vision appeared to his mother in a dream in the form of a falcon that seemed to come to her and impregnate her and made known to her that from her womb a torrent would come forth and from her loins glorious kings be generated, but they would not multiply in their own land. Because a dream is called álom
may be more clear if one understands that Khazaria was not only a real but also a
symbolic power. It was one of the four Sons of the Heaven. According to the
Middle Iranian tradition, as it was preserved in the Fârsnâma, these four rulers
were the Emperor of Rome, Iran, the Turks (or later the King of the Khazars) and
China. But with its collapse in 965, this symbolic legitimation through the
Khazars went into ruins. So the dynasty needed a new source of legitimation.

Hungarian historiography usually connects the conversion of Géza in 973
with the catastrophic defeat in the Lechfeld, in the vicinity of Augsburg, in 955.
Of course, the total destruction of an entire army should be a heavy loss and an
impressive lesson. But we are still lacking exact argumentation as to how and
why it might cause a conversion and a radical change in political orientation
eighteen years later. So we may well assume that, along with other facts, includ-
ing of course the defeat at the Lechfeld, the collapse of the symbolic protecting
power must be decisive factor that led towards this step. Taking into account that
the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin had contacts with their relatives in the
East, who later moved towards the Caucasus, the information about the col-
lapse of Khazaria must have reached Hungary very quickly. Together with
Khazaria collapsed the traditional trade relations that connected the landtaking
Hungarians with the steppe zone and, through the Khazarians, trade with the
Middle East. On the other hand, the temporary recovery of the Byzantine power in the Balkans could also have played a role in this change of orientation.

These changes happened in accordance with the rules of building (or rebuilding) a monarchy in the steppe zone. Not only were the traditional tribal settlements changed, but there was a radical change in the system of rule. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, who seemingly did not deem them real sovereign rulers, mentions a well known triumvirate of the kende-gyula-karcha at the top of the landtaking Hungarians. Our Arabic sources also partly confirm this information. Speaking about the power of the last two, the emperor added that they were "judges". This amendment might be an allusion to the Judges of Israel in the Old Testament, who ruled and governed their tribes before the establishment of the monarchy. Another possibility is that the emperor wanted to emphasize that these rulers of the landtaking Hungarian tribes were merely officials (Old Turkic buyruq/biruq > Hungarian bíró "judge") of the Khazar Khagan. This latter ex-

---

26 The Islamic sources make no mention of karcha at all, and show the internal structure as much more centralized, still mentioning their close connections with the Khazars, cf. Czeglédy, A magyarság Dél-Oroszországban, 105-118; Czeglédy, Árpád és Kurszán, 46-48; I. Zimonyi, Muslimische Quellen über die Ungarn vor der Landnahme. Das ungarische Kapitel der őaiháni-Tradition, Studien zur Geschichte Ungarns, Bd. 9, Herne 2006.  
27 "Marked progress in Hebrew political thought was made during the period of the judges, the transitional stage between a nomadic life based on tribal organization and the beginnings of the national monarchy. The tribal framework still prevailed and the nomadic spirit, so averse to centralized power and so fond of unlimited political freedom, still possessed the hearts of the Hebrews." F. Dvornik, Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy. Origins and Background. Dumbarton Oaks Studies IX, Washington DC 1966, 1: 281; on the Byzantine topoi behind Constantine’s work cf. Czeglédy, Árpád és Kurszán, 54-55; on the Carolingian allusions to the Kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament, see Szücs, “Gentilizmus,” 98 (with further German literature), cf. also J. Dickinson, The Medieval Conception of Kingship and some of its Limitations, as developed in the Poriclasticus of John of Salisbury. " Speculum 1 (1926), 310.  
planation would fit better into the political context of the steppe zone, but still has many details to clear them up.\footnote{A. Márton, “Katonai kíséret és az ötöörök bujruk tisztségnév viszonya a koraközépkori steppén,” Acta Universitatis Szegediensis. Acta Historica 106 (1998), 39-45.}

With Géza the landscape totally changed. His name, or more probably his title, derives from an Old Turkic title of Indian origin - \(yabyu/fabyu\).\footnote{K. Czeglédy, “Géza nevünk eredete,” [The origin of the name Géza] Magyar Nyelv 52 (1956), 325-333.} We can mention that the name or title of his brother, Koppány, is also connected with the well known Old Turkic and Avar title \(qapyan/qapqan\) (Capcanus).\footnote{D. Sinor, “Qapqan,” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 86:3-4 (1954), 174-184; G. Clausen, “A Note on Qapqan,” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 88:1-2 (1956), 73-77.} We do not hear any more about \(karcha\), and the \(gyula\) became the local ruler of the eastern parts of the country. So we can add that, together with their proselytization, the Árpáds accepted the Old Turkic royal titles, some of which later continued their careers as personal names of many important kings of Hungary.\footnote{Together with these titles one could also mention the name/title Béla < \textit{boyla}.} Of course this full Turkization of power did not last long. With Saint Stephen a new age of Hungarian history was begun.