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)¹ 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,² 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.³ Of course these tendencies never became rules as, wanting the geo-

¹ I. Vásáry, *Nép és ország a türköknél* [People and Country at the Turks]: Társadalmak és államalakulatok. ed. F. Tőkei. Budapest 1983, 206.

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,⁴ 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.⁵ 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.

The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia: A History of the Struggle for Great Power among Tibetans, Turks, Arabs, and Chinese during the Early Middle Ages, Princeton NJ 1987; P. B. Golden, "Ethnogenesis on the Tribal Zone: The Shaping of the Türks", Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi 16 (2009/2009), 73–112, especially 104–106.

⁴ I. Zimonyi, "Az eurázsiai steppe nomádjai és szomszédai," [The Eurasian Steppe-zone and its neighbours] *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae, Acta Historica* 99 (1995), 65–74.

⁵ A. M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, Cambridge 1984; Jagchid and Dymons, *Peace, War, and Trade along the Great Wall*; Th. J. Barfield, "The Hsiung-nu Imperial Confederacy: Organizations and Foreign Policy," *Journal of Asian Studies* 41 (1981), 45–61; Th. J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China, 221 BC to AD 1757*, Cambridge MA and Oxford 1996. For a critical reexamination of Barfield's theory, see M. Drompp, "Imperial State Formation in Inner Asia: The Early Turkic Empires 6th to 9th Centuries", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 57 (2005), 101–111.

⁶ On north China, see: W. Eberhard, *Das Toba Reich Nord-Chinas*, Leiden 1949; W. Eberhard, *Conquerors and Rulers, Social Forces in Medieval China*, Leiden 1974; P. Corradini, "The Barbarian States in North China", *Central Asiatic Journal* 50 (2006), 163–232.

⁷ I. Fodor, "Ecology and nomadic migrations," *Chronica. Annual of the Institute of History, University of Szeged* 7–8 (2007–2008), 77–84.

MIHÁLY DOBROVITS

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.8 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 Tabyač) 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.9 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.¹⁰ 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. 11 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). 12 So the new religion was fully dependent on the ruler's support, who even introduced a new decimal sys-

⁸ W. Eberhard, Conquerors and Rulers, Leiden 1974, 127, 144, 147–150; L. W. Moses, The Political Role of Mongol Buddhism, Indiana University, Uralic and Altaic series 133, Bloomington 1977, 20.

⁹ B. Csongor, Kínai források az ázsiai avarokról, [Chinese Sources on the Asian Avars] Budapest 1993, 39-40, 104.

S. G. Kljaštornij - V. A. Livšic, "The Sogdian Inscription of Bugut Revised," Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae 26 (1972) 69–102, A. v Gabain, Buddhistische Türkenmission, in I. Schubert - U. Schneider (Hrsg.), Asiatica. Festschrift Friedrich Welters. Leipzig 1954, 161–173. Chavannes: Jinagupta (528–605 après J.-C.), T'oung Pao 6 (1905), 332–356.

On the general patterns of such conversions, see: A. M. Khazanov, "World Religions in the Eurasian Steppes: Some Regularities of Dissemination," in G. Bethlenfalvy, et al. eds. Altaic Religious Beliefs and Practices, Budapest 1992, 197–201, A. M. Khazanov, "The Spread of World Religions in the Medieval Nomadic Societies of the Eurasian Steppes," in M. Gervers and W. Schlepp, Nomadic Diplomacy, Destruction and Religion from the Pacific to the Adriatic, Toronto 1994, 11–33.

W. Bang and A. von Gabain, Türkische Turfan-Texte II: Manichaica II, Sitzunsberichre 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.

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 tarqan, who set himself on the throne. Manichaeism gained in importance again only after 795, when the influential commander-in-chief from the $\ddot{A}diz$ tribe, who held the title el $\ddot{u}\ddot{g}\ddot{a}si$, 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 Manchaeism for legitimation. The final compromise between the original Yaylaqar dynasty and Manichaeism was made only after 861, on being expelled from the Ötükän 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.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.¹⁵ On the other hand religious rivalry also existed in the steppe zone.¹⁶

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 officials¹⁷) about the legitimation of the dynasty of the Árpáds.¹⁸ They told him that this family was chosen by the

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 *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, ed. D. Sinor, Cambridge 1990, 318.

¹⁴ G. Tucci, "The Secret Characters of the Kings of Ancient Tibet," *East and West* 6 (1955), 197–205.

P. B. Golden, "The Conversion of the Khazars to Judaism," in P. B. Golden, H. Ben-Shammai and A. Róna-Tas, eds. *The World of the Khazars*, HdO VIII, 17, Leiden and Boston MA 2007, 123–162.

Buddhism vs. Manichaeism, Manicaheism (Uyghur) vs. Christianity (Kirghiz, Karluk), Buddhism (Uygur) vs. Islam (Qarakhanids), Judaism (Khazaria) vs. Islam (Volga Bulgarians).

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, Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his World, London 1973, 16.

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

MIHÁLY DOBROVITS

Khagan of the Khazars after the unsuccessful marriage of his daughter with Levedi, the former leader of the Magyars in *Levedia*. The emperor was also informed that the Hungarians who were settled in the Carpathian Basin still had contact with those *Savartoi Asphaloi* who did not migrate to the west together with Árpád's Hungarians who originally also had the ethnonym *Savartoi Asphaloi*, but remained in the east, migrating towards Persia. This emphasis on the Khazarian influence seems somehow strange if one takes into account that the Hungarians had not had direct contact with the rulers of Khazaria for more than fifty years, and they also had another version of their legitimation. In this well-known totemistic legend, a special kind of hawk (in Hungarian *turul* ~ Turkic *toyril* or *toyrul*) appeared in the dream of his pregnant mother and, causing the flow of a river from her womb, foretold the glorious future of her progeny. The cause

ing works (a selected bibliography): Gy. Németh, A honfoglaló magyarság kialakulása. [The making of the landtaking Hungarians] Budapest 1930; J. Deér, Pogány magyarságkeresztény magyarság. [Pagan Hungarians - Christian Hungarians] Budapest 1939; K. Czeglédy, "A magyarság Dél-Oroszországban," [The Hungarians in Southern Rus] in L. Ligeti, ed., A magyarság őstörténete. Budapest 1943 (photomechanically reprinted in 1986), 100-122; Gy. Györffy, Tanulmányok a magyar állam eredetéről. A nemzetségtől a vármegyéig, a törzstől az országig. Kurszán és Kurszán vára. [Studies on the origins of the Hungarian state] Budapest 1959; K. Czeglédy, "A szavárd kérdés Thúry József előtt és után," [The Savard question before and after József Thúry] Magyar Nyelv 55 (1959), 373-385; A. Bartha, A IX-X. századi magyar társadalom. [The ninth-tenth-century Hungarian society] Budapest 1968; A. Bartha, "Türk-ősmagyar etnogenetikai kérdések," [Türkic-Ancient Hungarian ethnogenetic questions] in F. Tőkei, ed. Nomád társadalmak és államalakulatok. Kőrösi Csoma Kiskönyvtár 18. Budapest 1983, 67-79; Gy. Kristó, Levedi törzsszövetségétől Szent István államáig. [From the tribe alliance of Levedi to the state of Saint Stephen] Budapest, 1980; J. Szűcs, "'Gentilizmus', A barbár etnikai tudat kérdése, (A középkori nemzeti tudat prehistorikuma)," [Gentilism] in J. Szűcs, A magyar nemzeti tudat kialakulása, ed. I. Zimonyi, Magyar Őstörténeti Könyvtár 3, Szeged 1993, 9-266.

- 19 Constantinus Porphyrogenitus: De Administrando Imperio, ed. Gy. Moravcsik, trans. R. J. H. Jenkins, (henceforth: DAI), Washington DC 1985, 170-172 (original); 171-173 (translation); K. Czeglédy, "A keleten maradt magyar töredékek," [The Hungarian fragment that remained in the East] in Ligeti, A magyarság őstörténete, 173-176.
- ²⁰ Czeglédy originally supposed that the Khazarian connection ended with the Árpád's coming to power, Czegédy, A magyarság Dél-Oroszországban, 121; later he changed his mind, cf. K. Czeglédy, "Árpád ás Kurszán (az Árpád-ház megalapításához)", [Arpad and Kurszan (to the foundation of the Hungarian state)] in I. Szatmári and F. Ördög, eds., Paizs Dezső tudományos emlékülés Zalaegerszegen, A Magyar Nyelvtudományi Társaság Kiadványai 140, Budapest 1975, parallel edition: Zalai Tükör 1975/II), 51, 55.
- 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 *Fārsnāma*, these four rulers were the Emperor of Rome, Iran, the Turks (or later the King of the Khazars) and China.²² 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, including 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,²³ the information about the collapse 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

in Hungarian language and his birth was predicted in a dream, so he was called Álmos. Or he was called Álmos, that he is holy, because holy kings and dukes were born of his line." Anonymous, Notary of King Béla: The Deeds of the Hungarians, edited, translated and annotated by M. Rady and L. Veszprémy, in Anonymous and Master Roger, Central European Medieval Texts vol. 5, Budapest and New York 2010, 13–15. For a German translation see: G. Silagi and L. Veszprémy, eds. Die "Gesta Hungarorum" des anonymen Notars. Ungarns Geschischtschreiber Bd. 4, Sigmaringen 1991, 37, 39. For a possible explanation of this text, cf. Szűcs, "Gentilizmus," 129–132. For another Hungarian legend called the "Hunting of the mysterious deer", see Simonis de Kéza: Gesta Hungarorum, ed. and trans. L. Veszprémy and F. Schaer. With a study by Jenő Szűcs, Central European Medieval Texts [vol. 1], Budapest and New York 1999), 15, 17; for a possible explanation of this text, see Szűcs, "Gentilizmus," 122–129.

[&]quot;It was one of the rites of the court of Anūšīrvān that he had set up a golden chair on the right side of his throne, and on the left side and behind it he had set up similar golden chairs. And one of these places was for the ruler of China (malik-i Ṣīn), and the other place was for the ruler of Rome (malik-i Rūm), the third place was for the ruler of the Khazars (malik-i Ḥazar). Should they happen to come to his court, they would sit on these chairs. He set up these three chairs every year and never removed them. And no one dared to sit on them except for these three persons." (our translation) cf. Ibn Al-Balhī, Fārsnāma (eds. G. Le Strange and R. A. Nicholson, London 1921), 97 (later reprints: London 1965, 2008, and Tihrān 1385 [1997] with the same pagination); Ibn-i Balhī: Fārsnāma (ed. Waḥīd Dāmgānī, Tihrān s.a.), 129–130; A. Christensen, L'Iran sous les Sasanides. Copenhagen 1971, 411–412; P. B. Golden, "Irano-Turcica: The Khazar Sacral Kingship Revisited," Acta Orientalia Hungarica 60 (2007), 162; for an older Buddhist variant of this tradition, see P. Pelliot, "La théorie des quatre Fils du Ciel", T'oung Pao, 2nd series 22 (1923), 97–125.

²³ DAI 172-174 (original); 173-175 (translation).

MIHÁLY DOBROVITS

Middle East. 24 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. 25

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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ This latter ex-

²⁴ М. И. Артамонов, *История хазар*. Санкт-Петербург 2001, 546–550; Golden, "Khazars," 108; Golden, *Introduction*, 237; К. А. Brooks, *The Jews of Khazaria*. Lanham 2006, 76–79; I. Zimonyi, "A kazárok szerepe Kelet-Európában," [The role of the Khazars in Eastern Europe] *Magyar Tudomány* (1996/8), 962–957. In the frame of this short article we cannot discuss the name and origin of the Radhanite merchants operating this route.

²⁵ F. Makk, "A l'ombre de menace byzantine. Le choix politico-religieux du prince Géza," *Chronica* 1 (2001), 19–29.

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 Ğaihânî-Tradition, Studien zur Geschichte Ungarns, Bd. 9, Herne 2006.

[&]quot;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 poer 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 Szűcs, "Gentilizmus," 98 (with further German literature). cf. also J. Dickinson, The Medieval Conception of Kingship and some of its Limitations, as developed in the Policraticus of John of Salisbury." Speculum 1 (1926), 310.

²⁸ M. Dobrovits, "Buyruq. Egy ótörök tisztségnév anatómiája," [Buyruq: The Background of an Old Turkic Title] Acta Universitatis Szegediensis. Acta Historica 112 (2002), 49–61. On the connection of the verbal stems Old Turkic buyur- 'to command' > Hungarian bír 'to have (sg. at sb.'s disposal)' see: I. Mándoki Kongur, "Two Hungarian verbs of Turkic origin," Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae 33 (1979), 291–295. cf. also A. Róna-Tas-Á. Berta, West Old Turkic. Turkic Loanwords in Hungarian. Turkologica Bd. 84. Wiesbaden 2011, 130–133.

planation would fit better into the political context of the steppe zone, but still has many details to clear them up.²⁹

With Géza the landscape totally changed. His name, or more probably his title, derives from an Old Turkic title of Indian origin – yabyu/jabyu.³0 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).³¹ 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.³² Of course this full Turkization of power did not last long. With Saint Stephen a new age of Hungarian history was begun.

²⁹ A. Márton, "Katonai kíséret és az ótörök *bujruk* tisztségnév viszonya a koraközépkori steppén," *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis*. *Acta Historica* 106 (1998), 39–45.

³⁰ K. Czeglédy, "Géza nevünk eredete," [The origin of the name Géza] *Magyar Nyelv* 52 (1956), 325–333.

³¹ D. Sinor, "Qapqan," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 86:3-4 (1954), 174-184; G. Clauson, "A Note on Qapqan," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 88:1-2 (1956), 73-77.

³² Together with these titles one could also mention the name/title Béla < boyla.