

## HUNGARIAN-BULGARIAN CONTACTS IN THE NINTH CENTURY

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It is a debated question, when the first encounter of the Hungarians with the Bulgarians took place. According to Imre Boba and Péter Király in 811 Krum, the Bulgarian ruler fought against the Byzantine Empire and his army contained Slavic and Ugor (Hungarian) troops.<sup>1</sup> Gyula Kristó emphasized, that the original sources must have referred not to the Ugri, but to the Avars.<sup>2</sup> So it is very probable, that the first contact between the Hungarians and the Bulgarians should be put at a later date.

It is very important, that the first undisputable mention of the Hungarians (Magyars) concern the Hungarian-Bulgarian relations. The Byzantine chronicler, Georgius Monachus Continuatus tells, that the Macedonian captives having settled by Krum north of the Danube in 813, revolted and wanted to return to their home. Kordulis, the Macedonian leader (strategos) planned the action and asked emperor Theophilos (829-842) to help the captives' return by sending ships to the Danube. Having been defeated by the rebels the Bulgarians turned for help to pagan people, called by the chronicler Ungri, Turks and Huns. The pagans appeared approximately at the same time, when the Byzantine ships arrived for the Macedonians. The enemy offered the captives free leave, if they gave them their values. The Macedonians refused the offer and successfully fought with the attacking pagans.<sup>3</sup> Researchers generally accepted, that all three names refer to one people, namely to the Hungarians.<sup>4</sup> However, some doubted it and put forward a theory, that perhaps three different ethnic groups participated in this raid and only partly can be associated with the Hungarians.<sup>5</sup> In our opinion Hungarians were called against the revolting Macedonians.

We have to examine the time and circumstances of the first contacts between the Hungarians and the Bulgarians. The Byzantine chronicler didn't give the exact time of the Macedonian revolt, so the researchers tried to

deduce it from the informations in the text. The name of the Bulgarian ruler is mentioned as "Vladimir, grandson of Krum and the father of the then ruling Simeon".<sup>6</sup> Gyula Moravcsik pointed out the obvious faults, since Vladimir (889–893) was the brother of Simeon (893–927) and not his father. In his opinion Malomir's name (831–836) should be put instead of Vladimir's.<sup>7</sup> We think, that both the names and the informations about them are so so confusing and contradictory, that the date of the event cannot be fixed so. Most scholars put the Macedonian revolt and the Hungarian appearance between 836–838. The basis of it, that the Byzantine historian maintains, that Basileios (later Byzantine emperor) born between 811–813 came with the captives at the age of 25.<sup>8</sup> Earlier scholars dated the Hungarian raid to 839,<sup>9</sup> more recent research put it even to 831–832.<sup>10</sup> The most probable year of the event may be 838, as will be shown later.

If we consider the background of the Bulgarian–Hungarian alliance, we must note the following facts. The vast area between the Don and the Danube was divided among different powers. The eastern part of it (from the Don to the Dnieper) was controlled by the Khazar Khaganate, the western part of it (from the Dnieper to the Danube) was dominated mostly by the Bulgarian state, while the Crimean peninsula belonged to Byzantium. It is a disputed problem, when and how the Hungarians got to the steppe north of the Black Sea. According to a hypothesis the Hungarians lived as vassals of great nomadic empires (Sabir, Turk, Onoghur-Bulgar, Khazar) from the 6th century and became independent from the Khazars in the 830-s.<sup>11</sup> Another theory is, that the Hungarians came from the Volga-region (Magna Hungaria) just in the 830-s.<sup>12</sup> One thing is certain, in the 830-s certain changes happened in the region and this can be connected with the appearance of the Hungarians. There are other sources testifying their activity besides the raid at the Danube. The Khazar khagan sent an embassy to emperor Theophilos and asked him to build a fortress named Sarkel at the Don.<sup>13</sup> Most scholars connect this information with an Arabic source. Ibn Rusta tells, that it is said, that earlier the Khazars defended themselves against the Magyars (Majghari) and other peoples by digging trenches.<sup>14</sup> Although we cannot date this information, according to an accepted theory Ibn Rusta's record on the Hungarians generally refer to 870–880-s, and this particular sentence may reflect the conditions of the 830-s.<sup>15</sup> It was supposed, that Sarkel was built against the attacks of the Hungarians or

against the Normans (Rus).<sup>16</sup> In our opinion the former hypothesis seems more probable, since the activity of the Hungarians can be proved close to the Danube and Ibn Rusta refers to the Khazars' defending themselves against them. The Normans (Rus) at the same time sent an embassy to Byzantium to emperor Theophilos, who didn't dare to let them return because of the barbarian peoples on the steppe. The Rus envoys were sent with the Byzantine embassy to the Frank emperor, Louis the Pious. Theophilos asked Louis to help the Rus envoys on their way back to their home.<sup>17</sup> This story clearly shows, that the Dnieper region was dominated by barbarian people, who we can associate with the Hungarians. Since the Rus and Byzantine envoys appeared at the court of Louis in May, 839, we can put the arrival of the Rus embassy to Constantinople at the autumn of 838. The building of Sarkel may be dated to about 838,<sup>18</sup> the probable time of the Hungarian raid at the Danube.

All these events point to a great turmoil at the steppe in the second half of the 830's, possibly in the year 838 A.C. The Khazars and the Normans (Rus) sent embassies to Byzantine alike. The Byzantine emperor received them very politely, helped the building of Sarkel and the return of the Rus envoys as well. We can interpret emperor Theophilos' behaviour as the usual Byzantine policy of "divide et impera", playing off the Normans and the Khazars against each other as Novoselcev supposed.<sup>19</sup> In our opinion it's more probable, that the appearance or activity of the Hungarians explains these events. Khazar territories must have been attacked by the Hungarians and west of the Don had been occupied by them. The Normans were possibly afraid of losing the control over the neighbouring Slavs. The Byzantine Empire tried to strengthen its influence over the Crimean peninsula by appointing a military governor to Kherson and thus turning it a thema (a military administrative unit).<sup>20</sup> It is likely, that the Byzantine emperor felt, that the Byzantine hold over the Crimean might get in danger with the presence of the barbarians on the steppe. The fact, that the Hungarians helped the Bulgarians against the Macedonians, led emperor Theophilos to form a kind of alliance with the Khazars, the Rus and perhaps the Franks. The Byzantines couldn't really help the revolting Macedonians, because they fought against the Arabs; in 837 they won victories, but in 838 they suffered defeats as well.<sup>21</sup> The Bulgarian-Hungarian alliance was an occasional one and didn't last long,

because their interests were quite different. The Bulgarians wanted to force the Macedonians to remain and to hinder their return to the Byzantine Empire, the Hungarians wished just to plunder them. It seems probable, that the Macedonians' urgent leave was motivated by the sudden appearance of the Hungarians in the region as testified by other sources.

After the alliance of 838 there are no informations on the Hungarian-Bulgarian relationship for a long time. It is likely, that the Hungarian tribal federation's settlement or home (called Etelköz) was between the Don and the Danube, although there are several hypotheses supposing a much smaller territory.<sup>22</sup> However, about 870-880 some of the Hungarian tribes must have lived in the vicinity of the Bulgarian state. According to Gardizi, "when the Hungarians are on the banks of the river (Danube), they see those N.n.drs (Onogundurs = Bulgarians)".<sup>23</sup> In the middle of the tenth century among the eight Petcheneg tribes, who expelled the Hungarians from Etelköz (895), Jazikapan was nearest to the Bulgarians. According to Constantine VII., this tribe lived half a day distance from Bulgaria.<sup>24</sup> Comparing the two data it may be supposed, that there was one Hungarian tribe which settled similarly close to the Danube and the Bulgarians in the ninth century, like Jazikapan did in the tenth century. From Constantine's work (DAI) we know, that the Bulgarians were frequently attacked by the Petchenegs.<sup>25</sup> Using the Petcheneg analogy, we can hypothesise, that the Bulgarian-Hungarian relationship wasn't a friendly one after the episode of 838. The Hungarians occupied territories formerly under Bulgarian influence as well and one Hungarian tribe probably occupied the place of the Macedonian captives. Gardizi noted, that the Bulgarians "are more numerous, than the Hungarians, but they are weaker".<sup>26</sup> It can be deduced from these informations, that there may have been conflicts between the Bulgarians and the Hungarians, in which the latter proved to be stronger. Possibly there were Hungarian raids against Bulgarian territories.

Only one Hungarian raid can be proved against Bulgaria, although we can guess, that there were more. A Byzantine-Bulgarian war broke out during the reign of Simeon (893-927) and Leon VI., the Wise (886-912). Many sources recorded this war, so it is possible to reconstruct the events.<sup>27</sup> Among the causes of the war the most important was, that the Bulgarian tradesmen suffered losses due to Byzantine commercial policy and Leon refused Simeon's demands to improve the commercial relations. Simeon

made war against Byzantium, which had already fought against the Arabs. Leon gathered troops and sent them against Simeon, but they were defeated. The Byzantine emperor had no choice but to look for allies. He sent an envoy to the Hungarians to hire them to attack Simeon in the rear. Nikitas gave presents to the Hungarian leaders, Arpad and Kusan. They changed hostages and the Byzantine envoy promised buying the Bulgarian captives from the Hungarians.<sup>28</sup> The ceremony probably included an oath by both sides. The Byzantines used the same method with the Petchenegs in the 10-th century.<sup>29</sup> It is a debated issue, whether the army of the whole Hungarian tribal federation attacked Simeon or just one tribe (the Kabars).<sup>30</sup> We think, that perhaps just two tribes were interested in the Bulgarian raid, since Nikitas made agreement with two chiefs.<sup>31</sup>

Byzantine warships led by Efsthathios transported the Hungarian troops across the Danube to Bulgaria, while a Byzantine army fought with Simeon in Macedonia. The Hungarians had devastated and plundered Bulgaria, so Simeon left his Byzantine opponent and turned towards them. Sources differ, where and how many times Simeon was defeated; probably around his capital, Preslav and near the Danube, at Distra (Silistra).<sup>32</sup> So the Hungarians won at least two battles against Simeon, who asked for peace. The Hungarians sold their captives to Efsthathios according to the agreement. Leon VI. was willing to deal with Simeon and sent his envoy to him and withdrew his army and navy. However, Simeon did not want to accept a humiliating peace just to deceive his opponents. He hold in captivity (in Mundraga) the Byzantine envoy and asked for the help of the Petchenegs, the enemy of the Hungarians. He made an agreement with them to destroy and expel the Hungarians from Etelköz.<sup>33</sup> Simeon used the Byzantine policy; to divide his enemies and to defeat them seperately. The Bulgarian-Petcheneg coalition was much stronger, than the Hungarians, who got in trouble, since the Byzantines did not help them. Some sources mention, that the Bulgarians defeated the Hungarians completely,<sup>34</sup> while others emphasize, that the Petchenegs destroyed the Hungarian families and expelled the Hungarians guarding their homes.<sup>35</sup> There is a debate, where Simeon inflicted the final defeat on Hungarians, in Bulgaria<sup>36</sup> or in Etelköz.<sup>37</sup> One thing is sure, it was rather *Simeon's diplomacy*, than his military force, that gained him the war. The Petchenegs, who lost their former home in a war with the Uz (Oguz) and the Khazars, needed a new

settlement. It was probably easy for Simeon to hire them against the Hungarians, who were forced to leave Etelköz for the Petchenegs. In the Hungarian-Petcheneg war the Hungarians were defeated and suffered heavy losses both in lives and in values.<sup>38</sup> The Byzantine-Bulgarian-Hungarian-Petcheneg wars led to the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin. These events – according to the testimony of *Annales Fuldenses* – may be dated to either 895 or 896, although some researchers supposed, that these took place in 894–895.<sup>39</sup>

It is difficult to summarize the Hungarian-Bulgarian relationship in the 9-th century in a few words. It was characterized by alliance (838) and hostility (895) alike, since the Hungarians (one tribe of least) became close neighbours of the Bulgarian state. Both the Byzantine and the Bulgarian diplomacy tried to use the Hungarians for their aims, but the Hungarians just followed their own goals (booty, captives). It is interesting to note, that both the Hungarians' appearance (in history or at least in written sources) and their disappearance, i.e. leave from Etelköz (and the conquest of the Carpathian Basin, the southern and eastern parts of which belonged to or was controlled by Bulgaria) is connected with Byzantine and Bulgarian diplomacy and conflicts.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Boba, I.*: Nomads, Northmen and Slavs. Eastern Europe in the Ninth Century. The Hague–Wiesbaden, 1967. 79.; *Király P.*: A magyarok említése a 811. évi események óbolgár leírásában (The Mention of the Hungarians in the Old Bulgarian Relations of the Events of the Year 811). *Magyar Nyelv* 72 (1976) 136–148, 257–268, 408–422.

<sup>2</sup> *Kristó Gy.*: Levedi törzsszövetségétől Szent István államáig (From the Tribal Federation of Levedi to the State of Saint Stephen). Budapest, 1980 (ref. as Kristó 1980) 17–18.

<sup>3</sup> A magyarok elődeiről és a honfoglalásról. Sajtó alá rendezte *Györffy Gy.* (On the Ancestors of the Hungarians and the Conquest of the Carpathian Basin). Budapest, 1986<sup>3</sup> (cf. MEH) 104–106.; *Moravcsik Gy.*: Az Árpád-kori magyar történelem bizánci forrásai (The Byzantine Sources of the Hungarian History in the Arpadian Age). Budapest, 1984 (cf. ÁMTBF) 53–58.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. *Györffy Gy.*: Honfoglalás, megtelepedés és kalandozások (Conquest, Settlement and Raids). In: Magyar őstörténeti tanulmányok (Hungarian Proto-History Studies). Ed. *Bartha A.–Czeplédy K.–Róna-Tas A.* Budapest, 1977 (cf. MÓT) 143.; Kristó 1980. 38.

<sup>5</sup> *László Gy.*: A "kettős honfoglalás" (The "Twofold Conquest"). Budapest, 1978. 184.; *Boba, I.*: A Twofold Conquest of Hungary or Secundus Ingressus. *Ungarn Jahrbuch* 12 (1982–1983) 23–41.

<sup>6</sup> MEH 105.; ÁMTBF 55.

<sup>7</sup> ÁMTBF p. 55. n. 6.

<sup>8</sup> To 836–838 see e.g. *Moravcsik Gy.*: Bizánci krónikaírók a honfoglalás előtti magyarságról (Byzantine Chroniclers about Pre-Conquest Hungarians). *Antik Tanulmányok* 4 (1957) 282–285.; *Czeplédy K.*: Magyar őstörténeti tanulmányok (Studies Concerning Hungarian Prehistory). Budapest, 1985. 54, 119.; *Bartha A.*, in: Magyarország története tíz kötetben (The History of Hungary in ten volumes). Ed. *Székely Gy.–Bartha A.* I/1. Budapest, 1986. 526.; for 836 see e.g. *Vajay, Sz.*: Der Eintritt des ungarischen Stämmebundes in die europäische Geschichte. (862–933). München, 1968. 11, 87.; for 837 see e.g. *Moravcsik Gy.*: Byzantium and the Magyars. Budapest, 1970. 44.

<sup>9</sup> *Pauler Gy.*: A magyar nemzet története Szent Istvánig (The History of the Hungarian Nation up to Stephen the Saint). Budapest, 1900. 14–15.; *Zichy I.*: Magyar őstörténet (Hungarian Pre-History). Budapest, 1939. 6, 33.; for 839–840 see *Marquart, J.*: Osteuropäische und Ostasiatische Streifzüge. Leipzig, 1903. 30.

<sup>10</sup> *Király P.*: A magyarok említése a Konstantin-legendában (The Mention of the Hungarians in the Legend of Constantine/Method). *Magyar Nyelv* 70 (1974) 6, 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Némethi Gy.*: A honfoglaló magyarság kialakulása (The Formation of Hungarians Conquering the Carpathian Basin). Budapest, 1930. 151, 176–177, 181–182.; *Halasi-Kun T.*: A magyarság kaukázusi története (The Caucasian History of the Hungarians). In: A magyarság őstörténete (The Pre-History of the Hungarians). Ed. *Ligeti L.* Budapest, 1943 (cf. *Ligeti* 1943) 71–72, 98.; *Bartha A.*: A IX–X. századi magyar társadalom (IX–X. century Hungarian Society). Budapest, 1968. 82–83.

<sup>12</sup> *Pauler Gy.*: op. cit. 13, 132.; *Kristó* 1980. 38–39, 43, 55.

<sup>13</sup> *Bekker, J.* (rec.): Theophanes Continuatus, Iohannes Cameniatae, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus. Bonnæ, 1838. 122.; Constantine Porphyrogenitus: De administrando imperio. Greek text edited by *Gy. Moravcsik*, English translation by *R.J.H. Jenkins*. Washington, 1967 (cf. *DAI* 182.; *ÁMTBF* 43.; *MEH* 123).

<sup>14</sup> *MEH* 88.; *Wiet, G.*: Ibn Rusteh. Les autours précieux. Le Caire, 1955. 160.; for connecting Ibn Rusta's and Theophanes' and Constantine's informations see e.g. *Pauler Gy.*, op. cit. 14, 132.; *Marquart, J.*, op. cit. 28.; *Macartney, C.A.*: The Magyars in the Ninth Century. Cambridge, 1930. 74–75.; *Györffy Gy.*: Tanulmányok a magyar állam eredetéről (Studies on the Origin of the Hungarian State). Budapest, 1959. 79.; *Czeplédy K.*, op. cit. 55, 119.; *Kristó* 1980. 20–21.

<sup>15</sup> It refers to 870, see *Czeplédy K.*, op. cit. 118.; to about 880 see *Kristó* 1980. 87.; the chronological problems of the Arabic sources going back to the lost work of Jayhani, see *Zimonyi I.*: The Origins of the Volga Bulgars. *Studia Uralo-Altaica* 32. Szeged, 1990. 155.

<sup>16</sup> For the Hungarian theory cf. n. 14.; for the Rus theory see e.g. *Czeplédy K.*: A magyarság Dél-Oroszországban (The Hungarians in South Russia). In: *Ligeti* 1943. 105.; *Toynbee, A.*: Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His World. London, 1973. 444–445.; *Novoselcev, A.P.*: Khazarskoe gosudarstvo i ego rol v istorii vostochnoj Evropy i Kavkaza. Moszkva, 1990. 208.

<sup>17</sup> *Waitz, G.* (rec.): Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum. *Annales Bertiniani*. Hannoverae, 1883. 19–20.

<sup>18</sup> For the different dates see comprehensively *Tóth S.L.*: A magyarok "etelközi honfoglalása" (The "Conquest of Etelköz" by the Hungarians). *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila*

József nominatae, *Acta Historica*. Tomus 98. Szeged, 1993. 9–10.; for 838 see e.g. *Golden, P.B.*: *Khazar Studies. A Historico-Philological Inquiry into the Origins of the Khazars*. Budapest, 1980. 67.; *Sinor, D.* (ed.): *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia*. New York, 1990. 267.; *Tóth S.L.*, op. cit. 9–10.; for 838–839 see e.g. *Wozniak, F.E.*: *Byzantine Policy on the Black Sea on Russian Steppe in the late 830's*. *Byzantine Studies* 2 (1975) 56–62.

<sup>19</sup> *Novoselcev, A.P.*, op. cit. 208.

<sup>20</sup> *Toynbee, A.*, op. cit. 270.; *Novoselcev, A.P.*, op. cit. 202, 207.

<sup>21</sup> *Dupuy, R.E.-Dupuy, T.N.*: *The Encyclopaedia of Military History*. New York, 1986<sup>2</sup>. 265–266.

<sup>22</sup> For the theories concerning Etelköz see recently *Tóth S.L.*: *Az etelközi magyar-besenyő háború* (The Hungarian-Petcheneg War in Etelköz). *Századok* 122 (1988) (cf. *Tóth* 1988) 555.

<sup>23</sup> MEH 88.

<sup>24</sup> DAI 168–169.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. DAI 50–53, 56–57, 64–65. etc. see *Toynbee, A.*, op. cit. 458.

<sup>26</sup> MEH 88.

<sup>27</sup> The main sources are: *Annales Fuldenses*, *Constantine's DAI*, *Georgius Monachus Continuatus*, *Nestor-Chronicle*, *Leon VI's Tactica* etc.; in Hungarian see them in MEH 106–107, 109, 120, 124, 127. — For the reconstruction of the war see e.g. *Zlatarski, V.N.*: *Istorija na prǎvoto bălgarsko carstvo* (History of the First Bulgarian Empire). Tom 2. Sofia, 1927. 283–313.; *Marquart, J.*, op. cit. 521–526.; *Macartney, C.A.*, op. cit. 181–185.; *Kristó* 1980. 175–181.; *Tóth* 1988. 551, 559–561, 563–564.

<sup>28</sup> For the agreement see MEH 106., ÁMTBF 59–60, 63.

<sup>29</sup> MEH 116.; DAI 56–57.

<sup>30</sup> For the tribal federation's army see e.g. *Hóman B.-Szekfű Gy.*: *Magyar történet* (Hungarian history) I. Budapest, 1929. 115.; *Kristó* 1980. 181.; for the Kabars see *Györffy Gy.*, in: MÖT 128.; *Magyarország története* op. cit. I/2. 592.

<sup>31</sup> *Tóth S.L.*: *Kabarok (kavarok) a 9. századi magyar törzsszövetségben* (Kabars /Kavars/ in the Ninth Century Hungarian Tribal Federation). *Századok* 108 (1984) 110.

<sup>32</sup> For the differences of the sources and the reconstruction of the events see e.g. *Kristó* 1980. 176–181.; *Györffy Gy.*, op. cit. in: MÖT 128.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. MEH 107.; ÁMTBF 60–61, 67.; for the agreement DAI 176–177.; MEH 120.; *Tóth* 1988. 560–561.

<sup>34</sup> *Annales Fuldenses*, cf. MEH 211–212.; *Georgius Monachus Continuatus*, see MEH 107.; ÁMTBF 61, 64.

<sup>35</sup> For the Petcheneg victory see *Regino*, e.g. *Gombos, F.A.*: *Catalogus fontium historiae Hungaricae I–III*. Budapestini, 1937–1938. III. 2038–2039.; MEH 205–206.; *Constantine's* work, DAI 166–167, 172–173, 176–177.

<sup>36</sup> E.g. *Marquart, J.*, op. cit. 524–525.; *Vajay, Sz.*, op. cit. 26.; *Tóth* 1988. 564.

<sup>37</sup> *Kristó* 1980. 188.

<sup>38</sup> For the Petcheneg-Hungarian war etc. see *Kristó* 1980. 185, 190–195.; *Tóth* 1988. 556–557, 565–568.

<sup>39</sup> MEH 211–212.; for the problem of chronology see e.g. *Pauler Gy.*, op. cit. p. 150. n. 61.; *Macartney, C.A.*, op. cit. 185–186.; *Kristó* 1980. 196–197.; *Tóth* 1988. 551–552.