

Notes on the Ethnic and Political Conditions of the Carpathian Basin in the Early 9th Century

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At the turn of the 9th century, King of the Franks Charles the Great, gradually expanded his reign to the lands in the western part of the Carpathian Basin, formerly under the domain of the Avar Khaganate. Consequently, different ethnic groups and their leaders living earlier under Avar rule started to turn up in written sources in the 9th century, when the changed political situation made possible to form their own ethnic identity and political unit.¹

Saint Emmeram of Regensburg wanted to baptize the Avars in the 8th century. The author of the antiphon of St. Emmeram (9th century) already claimed that the saint even reached the Carpathian Basin.² The Hagiography of Saint Emmeram noted that the saint planned the conversion of the Avar's country (*Avarorum regna*), where Avars (*ad robustam gentem Avarorum, ad gentem Avarorum, cum Avaros, cum Avaris*) and Huns lived (*inter Hunorum, gentes Hunorum*).³ However, there appears a new name to denote the pagans in the text of the 9th century. The source stated that Saint Emmeram travelled to the towns of the *Wandals* (*Wandalorum oppida*), he went to the country of *Wandals* (*Wandalorum regno*), where he met with the *Huns* (*gentes Hunorum*). During the conversion, large groups of *Wandals* (*Wandalorum caterva*) hurried to him. St. Emmeram told the Avars (*Avaris*) that he was their bishop and wanted to build a monastery on their land.⁴

Diesenberger believed that the author, through the example of St. Emmeram, wanted to persuade his contemporaries to take part in the conversion of formerly Avar subjects, who now came under Frankish rule in the Carpathian Basin.⁵ However, while the names *Avar* and *Hun* of the pagan people are taken from the text recorded

1 Cf. Mitterauer 1963, 4; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 285, 288–289, 302–304, 306–307; Pohl 2018, 361–367.

2 *Antiphonae et responsoria de Haimhrammo* 526–526; Pohl 2018, 388–389.

3 *Vita vel passio Haimhrammi episcopi et martyris Ratisbonensis* 474 (3), 476 (4), 476 (5), 477 (5); Bischoff 1953, 8–14; cf. Szádeczky-Kardoss 1986, 99–100; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 264; Pohl 2018, 261.

4 *Antiphonae et responsoria de Haimhrammo* 525–526; Diesenberger 2013, 224–227.

5 Diesenberger 2013, 226–227; Pohl 2018, 388–389.

in the 8th century,⁶ the ethnic name *Wandal* certainly reflected ethnic conditions of the 9th century.⁷ The only question is what ethnic and political identity can be reconstructed under the name *Wandal*.

For a long time, scholars believed that the name *Wandal* was ultimately a contaminated form of the Slavic ethonym, *Vend* and that of the antique Vandals. Therefore, the land of the *Wandals* (*Waldalorum regno*) was interpreted as a country or state formation in the western part of the Carpathian Basin in which, although the Avars were still present, the Slavs represented the majority of population. It was believed that the Vandals who appeared in the Carpathian Basin or its neighborhood were in fact Slavs, whom the contemporary authors thus tried to include – with a name formally similar to the ethonym *Vend* – among the peoples of the ancient world.⁸

The *Wandals* of the Carpathian Basin were mentioned several occasions in sources of the 8th–9th centuries. It seems hard to decide whether they were Slavic group or nomadic people.

The *Annales Alemannici continuatio Murbacensis* (Codex Turicensis, Codex Modoetiensis) used the *Wandal* name – in addition to the *Hun* – instead of the Avar enumerating the enemies of the Franks in the Carpathian Basin at the turn of the 8th–9th centuries.⁹ No doubt, this name denoted an ethnic group of steppe-origin in the Avar Khaganate and not a Slavic people.¹⁰ The same ethnic name was mentioned in other sources.

The author of the *Wessobruni glosses*¹¹ wrote that Pannonia is located south of the Danube and is inhabited by *Uuandals* (*Pannonia, sic nominatur illa terra meridie Danobia. Et Uuandoli habent hoc.*) in the first decades of the 9th century.¹² Later the author clarified that the *uuandal/uuandol* were actually Huns and Schythyans (*Uuandali huni. et citta. auh uuandoli*). There is another list in the source: *Sclauus et auarus. humi et uuinida*.¹³ The author simply swapped the names in this case. The

6 *Vita vel passio Haimhrammi episcopi et martyris Ratisbonensis* 474 (3), 476 (4), 476 (5), 477 (5); Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 264.

7 Cf. Bóna 1981, 109; Bóna 1984, 342.

8 Steinacher 2004, 331–334; Diesenberger 2013, 225.

9 *Annales Alamannici* 47, 48; Lendi 1971, 168, 170, 172. The source was written in Murbach Abbey. Here they could have direct information about the ethnic conditions of the Carpathian Basin. Bishop Sindpert of Regensburg was appointed head of the abbey in 789 (Hammer 2008, 256). He took part in Charles the Great's campaign against the Avars in 791, where he died (Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 279–281). Perhaps one should look around for the person who also wrote the entries in the yearbook between 786–789 (Lendi 1971, 118, 125–126) who described the entries about Wandals in the source.

10 Lendi 1971, 125; Bóna 1981, 109–112; Vékony 1981, 71, 73; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 296; Steinacher 2004, 333; Olajos 2013, 528–529.

11 Bischoff 1974. I. 20–21; Veszprémy 1996, 158; Steinacher 2004, 331–333; Veszprémy 2014, 274.

12 <https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/0003/bsb00031771/images/index.html?id=00031771&groesser=&fip=193.174.98.30&no=&seite=133>

13 <https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/0003/bsb00031771/images/index.html?id=00031771&groesser=150%&fip=193.174.98.30&no=&seite=125>

sclauus is identical with the *uuinida*, while the *auarus* is with the *huni*.¹⁴ There is no doubt that the names *uuandal/uuandol* referred to an ethnic group of steppe-origin and not a Slavic group. This population certainly can be identified with one community of the Avar Kaghanate, still living in large numbers in the western part of the Carpathian Basin at the beginning of the 9th century.

The East Frankish ruler Louis the German donated estates to the monastery of Matsee on May 8, 860. This diploma includes the name *Uuamgariorum marcha* as the name of a mountain in the description of the boundary of the estates.¹⁵ *Uuangariorum marcha* was a smaller geographical point, such as the *Sauariae vadum* (Gyöngyös brook), *Sprazam* (Zöbernbach brook) and *Uuitinesberc* (Vütöm, Günser Gebirge) mentioned together with it.¹⁶ The first element of the name *Uuamgariorum marcha* can be related to the previously mentioned name *Wandal* (*Waldalorum regno, Uuandali, Uuandoli, caterva Wandalorum, etc.*).¹⁷

The first element, *Uuangar-* in the description of the boundary of the charter of 860 is a vernacular form, while *Wandal* reflects the influence of the antique ethnic name Vandal in the antiphon of the St. Emmeram, in the *Annales Alemannici continuatio Murbacensis* and in the *Wessobruni glosses*.¹⁸ If the *Uuangar* was identical with *Wandal*, their habitat and ethnic identity must be determined.

According to the *Wessobrun glosses*, the *Wandals* lived east of Bavaria, south of the Danube. The same is stated in the *Annales Alamannici continuatio Murbacensis*: Charles the Great destroyed the territory of the *Vuandals* (*in regionem vuandalorum*) in 791.¹⁹ This Frankish campaign touched upon the part of the Avar Khaganate south of the Danube and west of the River Rába.²⁰ In other cases, the source repeatedly referred as *Vuandal* to the people (or at least part of it) under the rule of the Tudun, who held power in the western half of the Avar Khaganate. It was also recorded that the Franks had conquered the *Vuandal* before the Avar Khagan surrendered. Then the prince of Pannonia, the Tudun, visited the emperor in Aachen.²¹ The *Annales Alamannici continuatio Murbacensis* also mentioned that Erik the dux of Friaul waged war – no doubt on the western edge of the Carpathian Basin – against the *Vandals* and subjugated them during the year 797.²² Under the year 798, the source reported a

14 Steinberger 1920, 119; Veszprémy 1996, 158; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 266; Steinacher 2004, 333.

15 Plank 1946, 34–37; Wagner 1955, 6 (N. 9.); Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Diplomata regum Germaniae ex stirpe Karolinorum. I. 145–146. (N. 101); Steinhübel, 2021, 167. Kollautz 1966, 263–264.

16 Steinhübel, 2021, 167.

17 Plank 1946, 36; Olajos 1969, 88–90; Vékony 1981, 76–77; Bóna 1981, 109; Olajos 2013, 524–527.

18 Vékony 1981, 71.

19 *Annales Alamannici* 47, 48; Lendi 1971, 164.

20 Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 279–282; Pohl 2018, 380–382.

21 Lendi 1971, 168.

22 Lendi 1971, 170, 172; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 296–297.

revolt of the *Vandals*, which certainly meant an uprising of the Tudun.²³ In 796, Pippin, son of Charles the Great, went to the territory of the *Vuandals* (*in regionem Vuandalorum*), whose inhabitants they surrendered to him. This area was also largely south of the Danube, in the western part of the Carpathian Basin.²⁴ It is evident from the biography of St. Emmeram that he intended to go along the Danube. It can be rightly assumed based on this that the author of his antiphon also knew the residence of the *Wandals* to be along the Danube, east of Bavaria.

There can be little doubt that the *regionem Wandalorum* against which Charles the Great waged war in 791 was the same as the *Wandalorum regno* to which the Frankish missionaries following the example of St. Emmeram had to go in the 9th century. In the same way, the *Wandals* conquered by the Franks at the end of the 8th century were the same people referred to as the *Wandal* by the antiphon of St. Emmeram.

Wandals are mentioned in the sources as inhabitants of the area east of the Frankish Empire south of the Danube. The *Wandals* were certainly not Slavic people, but some nomadic groups also named as *Hun* and *Citta* (Scythian) of the Avar Khaganate. After several decades of the fall of the Avar Khaganate, the term Vandal already meant Slavs (Vends)²⁵ on several occasions which is completely irrelevant in terms of interpretation of the sources from the 8th–9th centuries.

We cannot exclude the possibility that the *Wandals* became the leading ethnicity of the Avar Khaganate by the end of the 8th century,²⁶ but much more obvious is the assumption that the *Wandals* were one of the subjugated ethnic groups of the Khaganate, whom the Avar Khagan entrusted with the protection of the western frontier. There are many examples of a steppe empires deploying subjugated ethnic groups to protect their borders. The most obvious such an example is the case of the Danube Bulgarians, who deployed Slavic tribes to protect their borders against the Byzantine Empire and the Avars after they had occupied the Balkans.²⁷ Certainly, the Avars did the same.²⁸ When the Khaganate began to decline the leaders of these people placed themselves under the rule of the Frankish Empire since there were no Avars living along the borders of the Khaganate. It could have been a similar case with the Slavic Timocans and Abodrites living on the southern edge of the Carpathian Basin, even if just for a short time in the years 810–820, broke away from the Bulgarian Principality and recognized the authority of the Frankish Empire.²⁹

23 Lendi 1971, 172; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 297–298.

24 Lendi 1971, 170; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 280.

25 Steinacher 2004, 331–332, 335–348.

26 Vékony 1981, 75–76. cf. Madaras 2008, 190–191.

27 Dujčev 1938; Beševliev 1981, 179–181; Mango 1990, 90–91. (36); Mango–Scott 1997, 499.

28 Cf. Lemerle 1979, 222–223, 227–229.

29 *Annales regni Francorum* 149, 159, 165–166; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1983, 191–194.

The *Wandals*, who lived in the Carpathian Basin in the 8th–9th centuries were associated with the Onogurs or Onogundurs from the empire of Kuvrat.³⁰ Some of their groups came under the rule of the Avar Khagan at different times over the centuries.³¹

The *Annales regni Francorum* also left a trace that people living on the western borders of the Avar Khaganate were not primarily Avars. Theodorus Kapgan (*capcanus, princeps Hunorum; capcanus christianus nomine Theodorus*), one of the princes of the *Huns* turned to Charles the Great with a request in 805. He could not stay in his old residence with his people because of the hostile action of the Slavs, so he asked the ruler to allow him to relocate between Savaria and Carnuntum.³² Accordingly, this territory was ruled by the Frankish Empire at that time and was not under the rule of the Avar Khagan. The emperor complied with the request, but the Kapgan soon died. In the second half of the year 805, the Avar Khagan offered the entire Avar Khaganate (*totius regni*) to Charles the Great. By this he meant that he would receive “the old dignity which the khagan used to have among the Huns”.³³ When the emperor agreed to this, the Khagan was baptized and received the name Abraham.³⁴ In reconstructing the events, some historians have been misled by the data in Regino’s work, and in the works of authors who followed his textual tradition, Theodorus’ title was not in the form Kapgan (*capcanus*) but in the form Khagan (*caganus*) and he was not the prince of the *Huns* (*capcanus, princeps Hunorum*), but that of the Avars (*Caganus princeps Avarorum*).³⁵ Those who considered Theodorus as an Avar Khagan assumed that after his death, another Avar leader, Abraham received the title Khagan and the people living between Savaria and Carnuntum from Charles the Great. Thus, Theodorus and Abraham would have been the heads of an Avar vassal state under Frankish rule in the western part of Transdanubia.³⁶ Since the title (name?) *qapgan* is known among the peoples of the Eurasian steppe,³⁷ it is logical presumption that the title *capcanus* was written in the erroneous form *caganus* by later authors. Theodorus was a *qapgan*, who did not create an Avar Khaganate under Frankish rule in the area between Savaria and Carnuntum. In turn, Abraham Khagan obviously did not want to change his title *qagan* to a *qapgan* of lesser rank with the permission of Charles the Great.

What does it mean that the Avar Khagan claimed for himself authority over the entire Khaganate in 805? How is it to be interpreted that the Khagan wants to gain the dignity that the Khagans have long enjoyed over the *Huns*? Abraham Khagan could

30 Moravesik 1958, 218–219; Zimonyi 2014, 259, 263–264; Zimonyi 2016, 239–244.

31 Olajos 1969, 90; Bóna 1981, 109–111; Vékony 1981, 73; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1987, 111; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 218–220; Olajos 2013.

32 *Annales regni Francorum* 119–120; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 306–307; Szőke 2019, 126–127.

33 *Annales regni Francorum* 120; Scholtz 1972, 84.

34 *Annales Iuvavenses maiores* 734.

35 Regino 65.

36 Pohl 2018, 387; Szőke 2018, 133.

37 Sinor 1954; Clauson 1956.

have gained power over the whole Avar Khaganate (*totius regni*) if Charles the Great had also placed the *Huns* under his rule (*petens sibi honorem antiquum, quem caganus apud Hunos habere solebat*). But who were these *Huns*? The *Annales regni Francorum*, unlike many other Latin sources, does not seem to use the Avar and Hun ethnic names as synonyms. The ruling ethnic group of the Avar Khaganate and the people under the rule of the Khagan were called Avar (782, 788, 791, 795, 796, 797, 799, 811, 822).³⁸ The people of the Kapgan was called *Hun* only in that source and they were threatened by the Slavs (805).³⁹ This nomadic group of the Avar Khaganate lived in the western part of Transdanubia in the early 9th century. A *Hun* group of steppe origin also lived in the same area, who were in serious conflict with the Slavs (811).⁴⁰ The author of the same source noted that the people of the Kapgan (*capcanus, princeps Hunorum*) moved to the Frankish territory in 805 with the permission of Charles the Great, so the Khagan could no longer assert his supremacy over them. The Tudun and one of his descendants also surrendered to the Franks (795–796, 803). Thus, in 805, the populations of the western edge of the Khaganate were certainly already outside the jurisdiction of the Khagan.

When Theodorus died, the Khagan wanted to regain his old supremacy over Theodorus's *Huns* and perhaps over the Tudun's people. It is not the case that the Avars had not had a Khagan from 795, and Abraham wanted to restore this title,⁴¹ but the Avar Khagan no longer exercised supremacy over the Tudun's people living in Transdanubia and the Kapgan's people called *Hun* living between Savaria and Carnuntum. The Khagan wanted to regain his supremacy over these peoples in 805, and thus he wanted to restore his rule over the entire Avar Khaganate (*totius regni*) with the permission of Charles the Great.⁴² These *Huns*, in turn, lived in whole or in part in an area whose inhabitants are called *Wandal/Uuanger* in other Latin sources.

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³⁸ *Annales regni Francorum* 60, 80, 88, 96, 98, 102, 108, 135, 159.

³⁹ *Annales regni Francorum* 119–120.

⁴⁰ *Annales regni Francorum* 135.

⁴¹ Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 302–303.

⁴² Balogh 2017, 236–239.

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