



Early Medieval Hungary: Between East and West

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ABSTRACT

Hungarians possess a strong sense of national identity, marked by an emphasis on distinctiveness that, to some extent, stems from their Asian origins. This sense of uniqueness and strong self-identification has been evident since the Middle Ages. Upon arriving in Europe, the Hungarian tribes encountered a new and unfamiliar reality that they had to confront and eventually accept. Since that time two parallel trends have characterized Hungarian political, social and economic thought stemming from interactions with both Eastern and Western civilizations. These dual influences have also shaped Hungarian culture and political ideology: a persistent tension between a return to tradition and a drive toward modernization. These opposing tendencies have consistently vied for dominance throughout Hungarian history. Naturally, there have been periods where traditionalist views prevailed and others marked by progressive reform. However, the most fruitful epochs in Hungary's development have been those in which tradition and modernity were successfully reconciled, where elements of the past were used creatively to construct a modern identity. For centuries, Hungary's geographic location, situated between East and West, has played a crucial role in shaping its history and culture. This was accompanied by an enduring aspiration to align with the West. The presented article is devoted to the study of the evolution of Hungarian identity and history over many centuries. The author analyzes various historical periods during which Hungarians turned to their origins connected with the regions around the Urals, and how this dual perception between the West and the East is reflected in their culture. This conflict of identities was particularly evident in the 19th and 20th centuries, when Hungarian nationalism reached its peak. During periods of crisis in relations with the West, most notably following the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, there was a marked tendency to distance from Western values and seek alignment with Turkic and Asian peoples. This shift provided fertile ground for the emergence and development of the Turanist ideology.

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Венгрия: Поиск идентичности между Востоком и Западом

Аннотация. Венгры представляют собой нацию, обладающую мощной национальной идентичностью и уникальной культурной индивидуальностью, корни которой можно проследить до их миграции из Азии в Европу. Эта идентичность, вероятно, была сформирована под воздействием новых реалий, с которыми венгерские племена столкнулись в Европе, и имеет глубокие исторические корни, восходящие к Средневековью.

Миграция венгров на европейский континент стало отправной точкой для сложного взаимодействия с культурным и политическим контекстом, который отличает Запад от Востока. В процессе своей истории венгры развивали две параллельные тенденции: одну, направленную на возвращение к традициям, и другую – стремление к модернизации социальной и политической жизни. Эти тенденции на протяжении веков были в постоянном противостоянии, иногда одной из них удавалось взять верх, в то время как в другие периоды проявлялись стремления к переработке традиционного наследия в контексте новых реальностей.

Наиболее продуктивными для венгерской нации были времена, когда традиции успешно сочетались с современными взглядами, что позволяло использовать элементы исторического наследия для создания нового, актуального облика страны. Географическое положение Венгрии, находящейся между Западом и Востоком, а также постоянное желание ее народа ассоциировать себя с западной цивилизацией оказали значительное влияние на развитие венгерской истории и культуры.

Представленная статья посвящена исследованию эволюции венгерской идентичности и истории на протяжении многих веков. Автор статьи анализирует различные исторические периоды, когда венгры обращались к своим истокам, связанным с регионами вокруг Урала, и как этот дуализм восприятия – с Западом и Востоком – проявляется в их культуре.

Особенно заметен этот конфликт идентичностей был в XIX–XX веках, когда венгерский национализм достиг своего апогея. В моменты кризиса отношения с Западом, такие, как последствия Трианонского договора 1920 года, венгры начали искать ответы на вопросы в тюркских и азиатских культурах. Обращение к восточным корням, вдохновившее идею туранства, стало важной частью венгерской идентичности в ответ на вызовы, с которыми сталкивался венгерский народ. Таким образом, процесс формирования венгерской идентичности представляет собой сложный диалог между традицией и современными вызовами, что продолжает оставаться актуальным и в наши дни.

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Ключевые слова: Средневековая Венгрия, между Востоком и Западом, идентичность *hungarius*, начало государственности, современный дискурс, туризм, национальная идея, венгерские племена, Византийская империя, династия Арпадов, король Святой Стефан, тюркские и финно-угорские языки.

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Мажарстан: Шығыс пен Батыс тоғысындағы болмысы

Аннотация. Мажарлар – Азиядан Еуропаға қоныс аударуынан бастау алатын мықты ұлттық бірегей болмысы мен ерекше мәдени келбеті бар ұлт. Бұл бірегей болмыс, бәлкім, Еуропада мажар тайпалары бетпе-бет келген жаңа шындықтардың әсерінен қалыптасып, кейін келе орта ғасырлардан өрбитін терең тарихи тамырларға ие болды.

Мажарлардың Еуропа құрлығына қоныс аударуы Батыс пен Шығысты ерекшелендіріп тұратын мәдени және саяси мазмұн аясындағы күрделі өзара әрекеттестіктің бастау нүктесіне айналғаны белгілі. Өз тарихы барысында мажарлар екі параллельді үрдісті қатар дамытты: бірі – дәстүрлерге қайта оралуға бағытталса, екіншісі – әлеуметтік және саяси өмірді жаңғыртуға ұмтылыс болды. Бұл үрдістер ғасырлар бойы үздіксіз тартыс үстінде де көрініс тапты: кей кездері олардың бірі басымдыққа ие болса, ал басқа кезеңдерде жаңа шындықтар аясында дәстүрлі мұраны қайта қарау талпыныстары алға шықты.

Мажар ұлты үшін дәстүр мен заманауи көзқарастар сәтті үйлесім тапқан уақыттар және ең нәтижелі кезеңдерге айналғаны сөзсіз. Бұл тарихи мұра құндылықтарын елдің жаңа, көрнекі бейнесін қалыптастыру мақсатында тиімді пайдалануға мүмкіндік берді. Мажарстанның Батыс пен Шығыстың тоғысында орналасқан географиялық жағдайы, сондай-ақ халқының өзін Батыс өркениетімен байланыстыруға деген ұдайы ұмтылысы мажар тарихы мен мәдениетінің дамуына айтарлықтай әсер еткенін айта кету керек.

Ұсынылған бұл мақала мажардың ұлттық болмысы мен тарихының ғасырлар бойғы эволюциясын зерттеуге арналған. Мақала авторы мажар халқының Орал маңындағы өз бастауына қайта бет бұрғаны жайлы баяндаған. Сонымен қатар, ол түрлі тарихи кезеңдерді жан-жақты талдай отырып, Батыспен және Шығыспен байланысқан осы қосұдай қабылдаудың олардың мәдениетінен қалай көрініс тапқанын саралайды.

Бұл бірегейліктер арасындағы қарама-қайшылық әсіресе XIX–XX ғасырларда, мажар ұлтшылдығы шарықтау шегіне жеткен кезеңде айқын байқалды. 1920 жылғы Трианон келісімінің салдарлары секілді, Батыспен қарым-қатынас дағдарысқа ұшыраған сәттерде де мажарлар өз сауалдарына түркілік және азиялық мәдениеттерден жауап іздей бастады. Тұраншылдық идеясын шабыттандырған Шығыстық тамырларға бет бұру үрдісі мажар халқы тап болған сын-қатерлерге жауап ретінде ұлттық болмыстың маңызды бөлігіне айналды. Осылайша, мажар ұлттық болмысының қалыптасу үдерісі дәстүр мен заманауи сын-қатерлер арасындағы күрделі диалог болып табылады және бүгінгі күнге дейін өзекті күйінде қалып отыр.

Кілт сөздер: ортағасырлық Мажарстан, Шығыс пен Батыс тоғысында, *hungarius* болмысы, мемлекеттілік бастауы, қазіргі заманғы дискурс, туризм, ұлттық идея, мажар тайпалары, Византия империясы, Арпадтар әулеті, король Әулие Иштван, түркі және финн-угор тілдері.

Introduction

Hungarian tribes began their migration to Europe in the early Middle Ages and arrived in Pannonia in 895. The Hungarians transformed into a multi-ethnic conglomerate during their migration from Asia to Central Europe. Hungarian belongs to the agglutinative language and scientists believe it may be as old as 3,000,000 years. It is widely believed that Hungarian belongs to the Finno-Ugric language family. Structurally similar, though only distantly related to Hungarian are languages such as Turkish, Dravidian languages of India, Japanese and Korean in East Asia and the Basque language in Europe. In terms of structure, and to some extent vocabulary, Hungarian most resembles languages often grouped under the so-called Ural-Altaic family, as the peoples who spoke them historically lived in regions between the Urals and the Altai Mountains. The Ural-Altai family of languages is divided into five main groups: Finno-Ugric, Samoyedic, Turkic-Tatar, Mongolian and Tunguso-Manchurian (Maticsák, 1998: 20-23). To this day, certain lexical similarities can be identified between Hungarian and languages belonging to the Uralic and other related language families. For instance, the Hungarian word *szem* ("eye") corresponds to *sem* in Khanty and Mansi, and *silmä* in Finnish. Similarly, *vér* ("blood") in Hungarian has cognates such as *vir* in Ostyak, *ver* in Vogul, and *veri* in Finnish. These linguistic affinities have been further substantiated by scholarly research. The Hungarian word *tó* ("lake"), appears as *mo* in Selkup, which belongs to the Samoyedic language family, and as *Turku* in Nganasan. Scholars have also noticed a resemblance to the word *tűz* ("fire"), which is rendered as *mý* in Selkup and *myŭ* in Tavgian-Samoyedic (Janurik, 1978).

The Latin term *Hungarus* and its Indo-European derivatives Ungar or Venger originated from the *Onogur* tribes, a Turkic people who inhabited the northern Black Sea region during the 6th and 7th centuries (Csepeli et al., 1996: 247-248.). There is also another explanation for the origin of the ethnonym *Magyar* (Hungarian). An alternative explanation for the *Magyar* (Hungarian) traces it to one of the tribes that arrived in Pannonia in the late 9th century, namely, the *Megyer* tribe, whose name may have evolved into *Magyar*. Scholarly debate continues over the etymology of *Magyar* and the adjective *Hungarian*. Hungarians themselves refer to their homeland as *Magyarország* ("the country of the Hungarians). While some theories are speculative, for instance the word *Magyar*, deriving from the Virgin Mary, others have attempted more linguistically grounded explanations. In the late 18th century, Artur Schlözer derived it from a Mongolian word meaning "foreigner", while Pál Beregszászi suggested an Arabic origin, linking the term to a noun meaning "migrant" or "one who left his homeland." A significant contribution came from the prominent Hungarian orientalist and linguist A. Vámbéry. In his most famous work *A magyarság eredete (The Origin of the Hungarians)*, he distinguished between linguistic and ethnic origins. He argued that the ethnic identity of the Magyars was more straightforward to trace: following the fusion of Ugric and Turkic-speaking groups, the Turkic component began to identify as *Hungarians*. According to Vámbéry's analysis of historical and linguistic sources, the Hungarians who conquered Pannonia were consistently described in the same terms as other Turkic peoples. Arabic sources referred to the Hungarians as being of "Turkish race," and the Byzantines similarly described them as Hungarians Turks. Personal names used by early Hungarians, their military tactics, and even cultural expressions such as proverbs, according to Vámbéry, reflected a Turkic character or what he called a "spirit of the East" (Vámbéry, 1882: 169). This perception was further reinforced by diplomatic and religious symbolism. On the crown of St. Istvan part of which was sent by Byzantine Emperor Michael VII Doukas to the Magyars,

there is an inscription: (ΓΕΩΒΙΤΖΑC ΠΙCΤΟC ΚΡΑΛΗC ΤΟΥΡΚΙΑC (*Geōbitzas pistós králēs Tourkías*), meaning "Géza, the faithful king of the Turks". Emperor Michael VII referred to the Hungarian lands as the "land of the Turks", which was later adopted by Arab historians.

Although scholars generally agree on the main theses regarding the origin of the ancient Magyars, the question of why they retained their language and ethnic distinctiveness after settling in Central Europe remains unresolved. In principle, all peoples who migrated across the Black Sea steppes and Central Europe assimilated with the local population. According to archaeologists, from the 10th century onward, it is possible to record from burials the appearance of a steppe- nomadic population along the Central Danube that came from the northern Black Sea region (Stanojev, 1989: 109-113). The material culture of the early Hungarians developed under the influence of diverse regional impulses. The material culture the early Hungarians was rooted in objects brought from their previous eastern homeland; it was also significantly shaped by elements adopted from the indigenous populations they encountered in the Carpathian Basin, as well as from their new neighbors. (Révész, 2014: 85-90). Some artifacts, dating to the early 10th century in the Carpathian Basin, can attest to the influence of local cultures. These artifacts (such as a type of jewelry with pendants shaped like bunches of grapes) were absent from the material culture of Hungarian tribes prior to their arrival in Pannonia, but were found in burials in the 10th and 11th centuries, that is, after the Danube conquest. According to scholars, the Hungarian conquest did not bring violent changes for the indigenous Slav population, but rather peaceful acculturation.

Materials and research methods

Early Hungarian history was initially studied by historians relying on various written sources. However, due to the fragility and scarcity of these sources, researchers began incorporating humanistic disciplines, such as linguistics, archaeology, ethnography, and cultural anthropology into their studies. As a result, historiography gradually receded from the primary focus of writing early Hungarian history in the late 20th century, although the data provided by related disciplines were not necessarily suitable for a true historical reconstruction. The specific statehood of the steppe peoples, whose framework is even more flexible than the framework of the states of medieval Christian Europe, is gaining an increasingly important role in historical research.

This text is based on linguistic analysis from the works of Hungarian scholars from the 19th and 20th centuries. It should also be noted that archaeological evidence and toponymic names can be used to prove the origin of the Hungarian tribes and their identity split between the East and the West. Such a model, emphasizing the orientalism of the Hungarians, functioned clearly in the 19th century, and here we can use the works of István Széchenyi and Ármin Vámbéry. The primary sources for this text are the works of outstanding Hungarian and Polish medievalists, including Pál Engel, Gyula Kristó, Ryszard Grzesik, Károly Mesterházy, Gyula Moravcsik, and Samu Szádeczky-Kardoss; historians addressing the topics of nationalism and national identity, such as Tibor Joó, János Gyurgyák, and Gyula Székfű; as well as statements by 19th-century and contemporary Hungarian politicians, including István Széchenyi and Viktor Orbán, which illustrate the strong orientalist tendencies in Hungarian political life. The comparative-historical method was employed to analyze the findings of historians and medievalists, ultimately demonstrating that a pronounced orientation toward the East persists in Hungarian political discourse – a tendency that can be attributed to the historical origins of the Hungarian tribes in the Ural region of Asia.

The lack of sources significantly hinders the study of the early history of the Finno-Ugric peoples and the Hungarian community that emerged from among them. The ancient Hungarian ethnic group divided into three ethnic branches. The first group settled in what would later be known as Magna Hungaria and was encountered by Hungarian monks on the Volga River in 1236. The second migrated to Central Asia, while the third settled in the river regions of Eastern Europe, specifically in the area known as Etelköz (between the Don and the lower Danube). Due to the lack of documentary evidence, we cannot determine the precise dates of these separations or the political structures of the first two groups. Consequently, historical study is limited primarily to the third group, the direct ancestors of the modern Hungarian nation. In Etelköz, this ethnic group established a form of statehood around the year 850. The first monarch, Álmos, founded a political structure that can be characterized as a steppe state or steppe empire.

The above-mentioned lack of historical sources necessitates the use of alternative methods to prove the connections between the Hungarians and both Eastern and Western civilizations. These methods include the examination of Hungarian vocabulary to identify loanwords and their origins. The paper employs a variety of research methods, including descriptive, structural, comparative linguistic approaches. The comparative-linguistic method was used to analyze the peoples with whom the Hungarians came into contact during their migration from the Urals to Central Europe. The analytical and descriptive methods were applied to study available historical sources from the Turkish states and Byzantium, alongside 19th- and 20th-century scholarship on Hungarian origins. The conclusion of the research is that the duality inherent in Hungarian identity left lasting impact on the socio-political development of the Hungarians over the centuries.

In this sense, the Avar Khaganate can be seen as a precursor to the Hungarian Kingdom. In addition, remnants of the Avar population in Pannonia, particularly in the Tisza valley, contributed to the ethnogenesis of the Magyars, through their integration with the Árpád people (Szádeczky-Kardoss, 1996: 21-30, 29). By the time the Hungarians arrived in Pannonia, the Hungarians had likely already acquired some experience in state-building. Scholars suggest that they may have developed this capacity during their time under the Khazar Khaganate. It is also quite likely that they adopted elements of administrative organization from the Carolingian model through contact with Slavic groups in Pannonia, evidenced by the Slavic origins of Hungarian terms such as *megye* – county, *ispán* – župan, *tiszt* – commander (officer), and *asztalnok* – stolnik (naperer). Over time, however, early Hungarian rulers combined these external influences with contemporary Western European practices. Notably, they introduced a military system based on a land-holding knightly class and maintained a side-king squad composed partly of foreign warriors (Hóman et al, 1935: 316, 474).

Research background

At the beginning of the 10th century, the ancestors of the Hungarians spent a significant period in Central Europe, during which they dismantled the Great Moravian State and launched plundering expeditions to the south and west. Their barbaric activity was halted by Emperor Otto I whose efforts contributed to the Hungarians' transition to a sedentary lifestyle and permanent settlement. Medieval chronicles sometimes identified the Magyars with Turkic tribes. One of the key regions in their migration to Pannonia, Etelköz, scholars associate with the Turkic word *eti*, meaning "river" (Engel, 1994: 3). Etelköz has been positioned in recent years by scholars along the central Dnieper River. Medieval chronicle One of the migration

to Pannonia, Etelköz, is linked by scholars to the *etil*, (Engel, 1994: 3). Recent scholarship places Etelköz Dnieper River. Archaeological finds in this area, such as burials containing horse skulls and limbs placed near human remains, exhibit striking similarities to those found in the Ural foothills. Archaeological evidence indicates the emergence of a cohesive culture in the Carpathian Basin during the 10th century. This culture has been characterized as a 'broad, homogeneous unit, with contacts extending to the steppes of Eastern Europe and beyond' (Mesterházy, 1994: 29-31), although some of its features appear to have developed locally. The formation of this new culture complex coincided with the migration of the Hungarians. In the Etelköz region, significant transformations occurred in the socio-political organization of the Hungarian tribes. Prior to this period, the population had lived independently, under the federal rule of seven "vajdas" (chieftains). Among them was Árpád, a dominant figure and, according to family tradition, a descendant of the Hun king Attila. It is likely that the blood pact, a steppe tradition dating back to Scythian times, was not a consensual act, but rather the result of Álmos' military ascendancy. Álmos' personal abilities and the political heritage of his lineage enabled him to assume sole leadership. Given that he is believed to have been born around 820, he likely attained supreme authority by the mid-9th century.

Analysis

The ancestors of the Hungarians were exposed to the major world religions in their eastern homeland; however, their primary belief system was shamanism, which functioned as a means of interpreting the surrounding world. Their religious beliefs were enriched with elements adopted from Iranian, Turkic, and other peoples encountered during their migrations. Only shamans possessing extraordinary abilities were able to communicate with supernatural beings, typically by entering a trance state to request assistance or convey messages. Among the ancient Magyars, it was customary, either symbolically or literally, to open the skull, as they believed the human soul resided in the head and needed to be liberated. Archaeological excavations of cemeteries from the period of the Hungarian conquest of Central Europe reveal numerous elements of religious belief and superstition. To protect the dead from malevolent spirits, the ancient Magyars would place sharp, pointed objects on the chest of the deceased, an act likely rooted in the belief that the dead could return as evil entities. In an effort to prevent such occurrences, bodies were sometimes bound and buried face down, a practice intended to inhibit the 'return of souls.'

According to historian Tibor Joó, the Hungarian nation was created not by blood, not by language, not by statehood, but by a purely spiritual factor. Medieval Hungary thus emerged as a faithful heir to the Eurasian nomadic empires, multilingual, rich in diverse customs, and home to different peoples living peacefully under the rule of the descendants of a nomadic kagan (Joó, 1941: 54-55). If there ever existed an ancient tradition asserting that the Hungarian nation was formed through the unification of seven tribes, no concrete traces of such a narrative have survived.

The most numerous settlements were established in river valleys. For example, in Batjanica on the Danube (in the territory of Vojvodina in Serbia), burial sites of warriors buried with their horses have been discovered. To date, no prince's burial site has been discovered (Thaly, 1898: 9-11). Previously, there was an opinion among researchers that Hungarians, like other steppe peoples (Huns, Avars, etc.), buried their princes in secret, alone and in concealed locations. Nevertheless, chronicles written 200-300 years after the time of the conquest record that Prince Árpád was buried near Óbuda, and later King St. Stephen commissioned

the construction of a church near his burial site. In recent years, two artifacts have been discovered that undeniably contain elements of the original Hungarian script, known as Old Hungarian runes. The first was excavated from a burial site near Kalocsa in Homokmégy, dating back to the period of the Hungarian conquest; and parts of a quiver found in the grave are believed to bear runic inscriptions. In 1999, a fragment of a clay blowpipe, inscribed with runes was discovered during excavations in Somogy County.

Byzantine sources, most notably Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetus' *De Administrando Imperio*, consistently refer to the Hungarians of this period as 'Turks' (οἱ Τοῦρκοι). In his work, Emperor Constantine also mentions the 'Meger clan,' identifying it as a component of the broader group of Turkic tribes. likely due to the presence of Turkic aristocratic elements among the Meger clan at the time, with their leader himself bearing the title 'Prince of the Turks.' The 11th century Persian historiographer Gardizi described the Hungarian tribes as a faction of the Turkic peoples. According to him, these tribes, numbering approximately 20,000, under the leadership of their chieftains conquered Slavic populations, imposed heavy tributes on them, and treated them as captives (Zimonyi, 2014). The Hungarians also supposed to have adopted from the Turkic-Bulgarian tribes the institution of dual leadership: one leader (the *gyula*) held political authority, while another (the *kende* or *kündü*) fulfilled religious functions. After the conquest of Pannonia, this dual structure was abolished and Prince Arpad consolidated both roles (Alföldi, 1933: 28). According to Hungarian researchers, the title of *kende* was borrowed from the Khazars, who had temporarily subjugated the Hungarian tribes (Ligeti, 1979: 268-269).

Hungarus identity

From the second half of the 14th century, members of non-Hungarian elites obtained noble privileges and were gradually assimilated into the Hungarian nobility. As Szekfű notes "There was no question of deliberate deprivation; it was all a natural, long-term process and a consequence of the political and social changes that took place within the Hungarian nation" (Szekfű, 2002: 492-493). The formation of the state Hungarian in the 10th century was itself a lengthy and complex process. In a sense, the establishment of territorial and central administration established the framework for forging a nation from an assemblage of different tribes. Historiography shaped by the Counter-Reformation often interpreted the founding of the state as a miraculous transformation. "Was it not a true miracle that, at the behest of the just-crowned and not yet very popular king, there was a conversion to the faith of Christ of the uncultured and stubbornly pagan Magyars?" wrote Count Széchenyi in the mid-19th century (Kornis, 1943: 16-17).

He renewed national institutions without violating their proper historically constituted character. St. Stephen transformed the Hungarians, a formerly nomadic and warlike people, into a settled population inhabiting the Danube and Tisza valleys, surrounded by the Carpathian Mountains. From his reign onward, the historic mission of the Hungarians shifted from pursuing external conquests to defending the kingdom. Undoubtedly, the Hungarians arrived in Europe with a pre-existing form of tribal organization, which later influenced the structure the Christian-era state. For these groups, what mattered not the language or ethnic identity of the various tribes, but the shared political purpose represented by loyalty to rulers such as the Avars or the Huns. The eventual abandonment of these ancient concepts of state governance, along with the adoption of Western political and linguistic ideas, contributed ideals to the erosion of the traditional Danubian framework, which proved unable to withstand the pressures of modernity (Joó, 1941: 190-193). Even in the interwar period, the value of

the *Hungarus* concept were recognized, in particular for its tolerance towards diverse ethnic communities.

Over time, the totemic symbols of the tribes disappeared. The most common motifs of the ninth and early tenth centuries – the griffin, wolf and deer – gradually became rare in later Hungarian heraldic iconography and symbolism. The hawk, or *turul*, persisted longer as a symbol associated with the ruling house. However, it too was eventually overshadowed by the double cross and, around 1200, by the red- and- white striped shield (Bertényi, 1983: 66-67). The tribal names were gradually phased out, and are now preserved only in a mid-10th-century Byzantine source and in toponymic evidence. They no longer appear in later personal nomenclature or in the accounts of the Hungarian chronicles. It is believed that the Old Turkish language, possibly spoken by the tribal elite, merged into Hungarian speech and survived until the early 11th century (Bartha, 1975: 49-50). A similar process occurred with the Proto-Bulgars and the Avars, who underwent Slavization.

A small number of tribal names and words of Turkic origin have survived in geographical names in Hungary. Names associated with the Pecheneg tribe (Hungarian *besenyő*) are found in such localities as Besenyőd, Ládbesenyő, Rinyabesenyő, Szirmabesenyő, Besnyő, and Sepsibesenyő. Names associated with the Oghuz (Hungarian: *úzek* or *oguzok*) include Úzpatak, Úzsalgó, Úzpeklény, and Úzvölgye (Pacsai, 2022). Other ethnonyms in place names are connected to the Halflings (*palóc*) and Cumans (*kun*), with names such as *Kunhegyes*, *Kunmadaras*, *Kunadacs*, *Kunágota*, *Kunfehértó* and the Palócföld region. The suffixes *Megyer* and *Gyarmat* are tied to Turkic names, specifically to the names of the Hungarian tribes that conquered Pannonia. One theory links the word *gyarmat* to the Old Turkish word *jormati*, meaning 'non nomadic, sedentary' (it survives today in the names of several places, such as Balassagyarmat, Fehérgyarmat, Füzesgyarmat, Kaposgyarmat, and Rábagyarmat). Other place names, containing the particle *bél* may indicate proximity to passes or saddle-shaped rock formations (examples include Bakonybél, Béláptfalva, Kassabéla, and Mónosbél) (Pacsai, 2022).

Basically, until the 18th century, the issue of nationality was not a prominent concern in Hungary, as the country existed as a unified community of destiny (*sorsközösség*). In this context, the language barrier was not considered a significant obstacle, especially within the framework of the feudal system. In feudal society, distinct states operated under separate legal statuses, and communication among various groups occurred through shared practices that did not require national homogeneity. The elite, for instance, communicated in Latin, while other groups maintained their own dialects. The medieval Kingdom of Hungary was characterized by ethnic diversity. Over the centuries, numerous foreign groups both from the east and the west settled in Hungary through either spontaneous or organized resettlements. Chronicles mention the arrival of Czechs, Poles, Saxons, Rhinelanders, Latins, Italians, Armenians, Saracens, Pechenegs, Cumans, and others, particularly during the reign of St. Stephen I (István) (1000-1038) and his successors. The newcomers found land suitable for settlement, and with the guarantee of the rule of law, they were granted privileges that were specific to the so-called "guest peoples." According to Ferenc Erdei, the eastern origins of the Hungarians contributed to a delay in social development, especially in the context of Hungarian peasantry and its socio-economic structures. The Hungarian system, with its tax regulations and economic framework, remained influenced by Eastern models well into the 19th century, even after the political reforms of 1848 (Erdei, 1980: 291-346).

The concept of the *Hungarus* nation was prominent from the early Middle Ages until the late 17th and early 18th centuries (Százaz, 1988). This concept, rooted in a legalistic and supranational vision of political attachment, became especially influential in the 18th

century, particularly before the rise of modern ethno-linguistic nationalism. In this context, Hungarus identity referred to membership within the Kingdom of Hungary, which was seen as a hierarchical entity within the feudal system. Hungarian consciousness (often referred to in scholarly works) was especially pronounced among German and Slovak evangelical intellectuals and was less about ethnic unity and more about a shared political and legal affiliation with the Kingdom.

According to Andor Tárnai, it was especially visible between 1690 and 1770, and was associated with an old Latin saying about the lands of Pannonia, which became a prominent expression used to praise the Kingdom as a unique and incomparable land: *Extra Hungariam non est vita. Si est vita, non est ita* ("there is no life outside of Hungary") (Tárnai, 1969: 48). One of the notable figures of this era was Bél, who proud of his Slavic-Hungarian roots and educated in the German tradition, celebrated the Hungarian Crown and its historical significance in his writings. He wrote songs about Hungarian history and the Magyar language, and even published a Hungarian grammar for Germans (*Der ungarische Sprachmeister*, 1729). Additionally, Bél attempted to prove the existence of an ancient Hunno-Scythian runic alphabet (*De vetera literatura hunnoscythica exercitatio*, 1718). In his *Compendium Hungariae geographicum* of 1753, Bél wrote that Hungary was the most beautiful country in Europe, surpassing all others in terms of its ease and fertility. His statement contributed to the famous Hungarian saying, "Extra Hungariam non est vita, si est vita, non est ita" (Tárnai, 1969: 24).

The Hungarians' early political interactions with Byzantium predate their defeat at the Battle of the Lech River (955). By 948, a Magyar delegation had already visited the court in Constantinople. In 953, the Transylvanian chieftain Gyula was baptized, and with him returned to Hieratheos, a monk who obtained the title Bishop of Turkey by the Metropolitan of Constantinople, a title that was used until the time of St. Stephen I. Following his baptism, St. Stephen suppressed the centrifugal forces, such as those represented by Koppány relatives and Ajtony, the ruler of Banat (Szymański et al., 1979: 175-176).

The origins of Hungarian ethnic identity and sovereignty are closely tied to steppe traditions. The roots of Hungarian identity extend more than a thousand years into the history of the steppe peoples. Although the exact timing of the formation of the tribal community remains uncertain, it is clear that the Hungarian ethnic identity emerged long before the establishment of the Hungarian state. This connection to the steppe shaped the early development of the Hungarian people and contributed to the distinctiveness of Hungarian statehood and ethnic identity.

The Hungarian state, initially in the form of a principality and later as a kingdom, emerged somewhat later than its ethnogenesis. As György Szabados states, "...Hungarians are the only European nation existing to this day whose first state organization and ethnogenesis developed on the steppes, and with this eastern heritage they integrated into the intellectual and political world of the medieval [Latin] West and expressed their own state and ethnic characteristics in it" (Szabados, 2015: 159-170). Throughout its historical development, the Hungarian nation was marked by multi-ethnic character, a feature already emphasized by St. Stephen I, who saw ethnic diversity as a strength. In his admonitions, he warned against homogeneity, stating that homogeneous states are fragile and weak (the ruler left an important indication: *Nam unius lingue uniusque moris regnum inbecille et fragile est*) (Grzesik, 2016: 157).

The adoption of Western Christianity under St. Stephen did not imply a break with Eastern Christian traditions. Numerous Greek monasteries existed as early as his reign, including notable centers at Marosvár and Oroszlán and later establishments at Tihany and Visegrád,

founded by King Andrew I. The monasteries at Tihany and Visegrád were originally of the Greek rite. Later sources also confirm the existence of Pentele Monastery, once inhabited by Greek nuns, near present-day Dunapentele and named after Saint Panteleimon, as well as a monastery at Szávaszentdemeter, later transferred to Benedictine control in the mid-14th century.

The centralization of power under Prince Géza and King Stephen I curtailed the independent military activities of various tribes. However, the western orientation of their policies did not preclude ongoing contacts with Byzantium. In 1002, to counteract the threat posed by Gyula of Transylvania and to consolidate power in the south, Stephen formed an alliance with Byzantine Emperor Basil II, who was then engaged in conflict with Tsar Samuel of Bulgaria (Moravcsik, 1953: 66).

By the mid-11th century, King Andrew I (1046-1060), who succeeded the German-oriented Peter Orseolo (1046-1060), was baptized according to the Eastern rite (he is credited with settling Greek monks in Visegrád and Tihany) and pursued a distinctly pro-Byzantine policy. His son Solomon (1063-1074) allied with the German court, while his cousin Géza I (1074-1077) turned again to Byzantium, receiving his crown from Emperor Michael VII Dukas. The so-called "Greek crown," was later combined with the crown of St. Stephen, creating the Holy Crown of Hungary, decorated with enamel icons, one of which depicts Géza titled as "faithful king of the Turks." Although the precise impact of Byzantine law on early Hungarian legal development is unclear, Byzantine influences were undeniably present (Zhishman, 1864: 156-160).

There are also many links with eastern cultures that emerged in Hungary during the Árpáadian Age (e.g., strong Arpadian dynastic ties with Byzantium and Kievan Rus). Good relations reached a high point during the reign of Béla III, when an almost personal union was established between Hungary and the Byzantine Empire. After Béla, the next ruler King Andrew II also maintained strong ties to Constantinople. Linguistic evidence also underscores Greek influence, as a number of Greek loanwords entered Hungarian via Slavic intermediaries, including *apáca*, *apát*, *diák*, *eretnek*, *érsek*, *görög*, *kabát*, *kád*, *kaliba*, *kaloda*, *kamat*, *keresztény*, *kerevet*, *olaj*) (Moravcsik, 1942: 264-275).

The origins of the Grand Duchy of Hungary can be traced to the mid-9th century, with its initial territory located in *Etelköz*, a vast region east of the Carpathian Mountains. It existed there for approximately two generations before relocating to the Carpathian Basin around 895. From a Western European perspective, the political structure of the Kingdom of Hungary retained strongly oriental, particularly in the dominance of royal authority, even long after the official adoption of Christianity (Deér, 1938: 123-124).

From the Árpáadian period onward, Hungary served as a refuge for various ethnic groups, including the Jász (Alans), Bösörmény (Ishmaelites or Saracens), Cumans, and Pechenegs. Nineteenth-century historiography often asserted that these peoples were related to the Hungarians and originally spoke Hungarian, but linguistic and ethnographic research has since clarified their distinct origins: the Pechenegs and Cumans spoke Kipchak Turkic languages, while the Jász spoke a Northern Iranian dialect. Nevertheless, these steppe peoples shared cultural similarities with the early Hungarians and played a role in the ethnogenesis of the Hungarian people.

Prolonged migration and mobility fostered regular contact between different peoples, interactions often marked by tension and conflict. This nomadic way of life shaped the social and political organization of peoples such as the pre-Hungarian tribal confederation. The structure of such communities extended beyond the ethnically based formations typical of fishing and hunting societies. According to József Deér, two principles prevailed in this

process: the system of "superimposition" and the subordination of newly incorporated groups. Superimposition referred to the practice whereby, in the context of armed conflict, the victorious groups did not destroy the defeated but instead subordinated them as subjects. This process of social stratification, integrating the conquered as a distinct social layer, had already been employed by earlier nomadic groups such as the Huns and the Avars (Deér, 2003: 12-13).

St. Stephen's achievements include the establishment of the state structure, including the creation of counties (*comitatus*) responsible for tax collection, judicial functions, and military organization. In times of war, local officials, or *ispáns* (*župans*), held authority over regional militias and were also responsible for overseeing religious practices. Part of the pre-conquest social structure remained in the names of social groups. At that time, a social category was distinguished, the so-called *udvarnokok* (court folk), who were tried as freemen but lacked certain legal rights, such as the ability to testify against nobility (Sroka, 2015: 138-139).

It is worth noting that the authority of the *župans* extended beyond local jurisdictions, particularly because the number of counties in the early Middle Ages was far fewer than in the modern period. From the outset, Hungary's population played a defensive role against eastern nomadic incursions. Such a function was fulfilled by the Szeklers and various western towns (e.g. Kapuvár, Órség) were established with military and defensive functions in mind. Of the 47 counties existing in the 10th-11th centuries, nearly half had strategic defensive roles. Additionally, the Hungarian kingdom inherited servile settlements, a system already present in Great Moravia and mirrored in Piast Poland (Sroka, 2015: 141). Approximately 300 Hungarian village names reflect servile origins, with over half being of Slavic etymology.

The early rulers of Hungary, Prince Géza, recognized that the survival of their state – positioned between the Byzantine Empire and the West Frankish realm – depended on abandoning the nomadic lifestyle and replacing the traditional pagan beliefs of the Hungarian people with Christianity. In 996, following the death of Bavarian Prince Henry the Wrangler, a dynastic marriage was arranged between the Bavarian prince's daughter Gizella, and Géza's son, Stephen. This union marked the beginning of Hungary's integration with the West. It is unlikely that Gizella was brought into a nomadic prince's tent; rather, the union may have included a formal agreement stipulating the enforcement of Christianity, if necessary, through force. Upon Géza's death in 997, Stephen assumed power and immediately faced military resistance from proponents of the old pagan order, notably Koppány, a relative who embodied the pre-Christian traditions brought by the Magyars into Europe (Kristó, 1995: 335-358). A decisive battle in 997 between Stephen and Koppány's forces was described in contemporary sources as a conflict between Hungarians and Germans, indicating the involvement of Bavarian troops on Stephen's side. With the support of Emperor Otto III, Pope Sylvester II bestowed the royal crown upon Stefan. Although the coronation symbolically united the kingdom, Stephen continued to wage military campaigns to assert control over the entire Carpathian Basin. Between 1003 and approximately 1028 he fought against the tribal leaders of eastern Hungary, namely Gyula (his maternal uncle) and Ajtony ultimately binding the kingdom to the West.

Despite Hungary's expansionist ambitions, including attempts to seize Croatian territories, diplomatic relations with Byzantium were also maintained. A significant dynastic alliance occurred in 1105 when Piroška, daughter of Saint Ladislaus of Hungary, married John II Komnenos. Upon her arrival in Byzantium, she took the name Irene and ascended to the throne in 1118. Her memory was preserved in several Byzantine sources, and she was venerated as a blessed figure by the Orthodox Church (Makk, 1993: 129-133).

Historical accounts suggest that, until the beginning of the 13th century, Hungary's economic ties were more deeply rooted in exchanges with the East than with Western Europe. Parallel to the integration of Hungarians into the Western Christian community and the transformation of a semi-nomadic society into a settled and feudal order, everyday life of the Magyars, especially the domains of family and domestic life, became arenas of cultural conflict between Eastern traditions and Western norms. The Hungarians had to relinquish their Eastern way of life and gradually adopt Western practices. Nowhere in Europe was such a cultural transition more difficult and painful. The Magyars, along with paganism, had to forgo long-standing customs passed down through generations. These included rituals of ancestral reverence conducted at the family hearth – practices meant to honor and appease the spirits of forebears whose remains had been left behind in the East, and whose disapproval could bring misfortune both within the family and among the increasingly Christianized community.

Results

The old ways of life, destined for extinction after the adoption of Christianity, continued to haunt the Hungarians for generations. This legacy was embodied in the figure of Koppány, a pretender to the throne, who lamented the loss of Hungary's Eastern heritage and sought to restore the ancestral pagan way of life to a people now turning westward (Domanovszky, 1939: 345-347). According to legend, King Stephen defeated Koppány's army near Veszprém, however, the rebel was not captured, and his loyal warriors escaped with their wounded leader. In the 19th century, Koppány experienced a kind of renaissance in Hungarian national memory. Cast in opposition to Saint Stephen, he came to symbolize ancient Hungarian virtues for nationalist thinkers, who regarded him as a more authentic hero than the Christianizing king, especially in the context of resisting Habsburg influence. Koppány was portrayed as a tragic national figure, deaf to the call of modernity, yet faithful to his ancestral identity.

Even after adopting Christianity, Despite the formal adoption of Christianity, many Hungarians continued to adhere to pagan burial customs brought from the eastern steppes. These included funerary feasts, the interment of weapons, horse skulls, and bones alongside the deceased, and the ritual killing of slaves, practices rooted in a belief that the dead would require servants in the afterlife. Although the Church could not eradicate these deeply rooted traditions, it gradually reinterpreted them within a Christian framework. brought from the eastern steppes. Instead of being sacrificed, slaves were manumitted and assigned to the service of the Church, ostensibly for the salvation of their former master's soul.

Over time, totemic tribal symbols faded from use. The most common motifs of the ninth and early tenth centuries, such as the griffin, wolf and stag- largely disappeared from Hungarian heraldic iconography and symbolism. The *turul* (a mythic hawk) which had long been associated with the ruling dynasty, persisted longer, but even it was gradually eclipsed by Christian and state symbols, including the double cross and, by around 1200, the red-and-white striped shield (Bertényi, 1983: 66-67). Tribal also disappeared; they survive only in a few Byzantine sources from the mid-tenth century and in toponymic evidence. They are absent from later personal nomenclature and the Hungarian chronicles. This raises the question: did the Hungarians possess such a robust identity that they were able to preserve it from the Migration Period to the present? Few peoples of the steppes achieved this, among them, the Oghuz and the Ottomans, founders of what became Ottoman Turkey.

The Holy Crown was the source of legitimacy for landholding in Hungary (*Sacra Corona radix omnium possessionum*). Hungarian land ownership belonged to the Holy Crown in such a

way that nobles did not have full rights to the land they occupied. Thus, while a knight could be a landholder (*földbirtokos*), he was not a landowner (*földtulajdonos*) in the full legal sense (Szabó, 1997: 269). Hungarian law also prohibited the transfer of land to nobles of foreign descent. The sanctity of the crown derived from the tradition that the first king crowned with it did so on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, symbolically dedicating the state and its crown to the Virgin. As such, the Holy Crown came to be regarded not merely as an object or symbol of power, but as a living, sacred person, a mystical embodiment of the community and the state. According to the doctrine of the Holy Crown, its divine and sacral essence could not be transferred to any other object, person, or community, including the nation itself.

Although the doctrine originated in the Middle Ages, the crown's symbolism evolved in modern and contemporary periods. Although in the 18th and 19th centuries, it came to represent the unity of the Hungarian state. After 1920, its symbolic function grew stronger; even under Communist regime, the crown remained a potent symbol of national identity. This explains the determination of the Communist authorities to recover it from the United States, where it had been held after being seized by American forces at the end of World War II. In national ideology, the crown also came to symbolize Hungary's historic mission to integrate the diverse peoples of the Carpathian Basin and to maintain peace and civilization in the region. Its power remains potent in contemporary Hungary: in 2000, the crown was transferred from the National Museum to the Parliament building, where it ceased to be treated as a mere artifact and became an active emblem of state authority. In 2012, its symbolic importance reached an almost mythical level when a Siberian shaman was invited to perform a purification ceremony in the Hungarian Parliament, an event authorized by state officials (Kaplan et al., 2002).

The East or the West: Hungarian contemporary discourse on identity

Paradoxically, it was during the period of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy (1867-1918), when Hungary was closely aligned with Western Europe, that some of its elite began to turn toward the East. This was partly due to the influence by European "Orientalism," but a key factor was a renewed interest in the eastern origins of the Hungarian people. This rediscovery influenced strategies of nation-building in the latter half of the 19th century. At that time, two concepts of nationhood emerged in Hungary. The first was the "nation-state" concept, which conceived the Hungarian nation as encompassing all ethnic groups within the kingdom, not only the Magyars. It emphasized legal citizenship as the defining element of national belonging. The second was the concept of the "cultural nation," which defined the nation as a resident community unified by shared language and ethnicity. This approach valorized folk traditions, which were believed to preserve vestiges of ancient Oriental culture. A further factor shaping national identity was a growing sense of isolation – an emotional undercurrent that had intensified since the Ottoman conquest. This "loneliness" was compounded by fear of more powerful Western nations (including Austria) and by anxieties over the ideologies of Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism. These pressures deepened Hungary's search for a unique identity straddling East and West. At the turn of the 20th century, a sense of ethnic isolation led Hungarians to seek support in the East, where they searched for remnants of ancient Hungarian identity. This intellectual movement gave rise to "Turanist" ideas (Szendrei, 2010: 17).

Turanism offered hope to nations that felt threatened or lacked a strong sense of kinship, envisioning either inclusion in a larger cultural community or the ambitious creation of a great Eurasian empire. Within the ongoing debate on Hungarian identity, Hungary's

intermediary position between East and West took gained symbolic significance. Eastern values became associated with traditionalists and conservatives, whereas modernists and advocates of political activism aligned themselves with Western ideals. In 1905 the, poet Endre Ady described Hungary as a "ferrying country," moving continuously between the two poles of East and West.

Hungary's historical connections with both Western and Eastern civilizations were disrupted by the Turkish conquest of the Balkans, and subsequently Hungary itself, following the Battle of Mohács (Dvorník, 1947: 470-473). During the Ottoman occupation, it was not Islam but the Reformation and, later, the Counter-Reformation, both originating in the West - that determined Hungarian culture, thought, and identity. Nonetheless, the political orientation of the Transylvanian Principality sought to maintain ties with the East.

In modern Hungarian identity, which has been shaped since modern times, several dichotomies persist: the West is associated with enlightenment, progress, and civilization, while the East is often equated with backwardness, poverty, and provincialism. However, a broader interpretation sees the East as representing tradition, religiosity, ethnic roots, and historical continuity, while the West symbolizes decadence, over-civilization, excessive individualism, and a market-driven culture (Hofer, 1996: 7-22).

From the 18th century to the present, the debate on national identity in Hungary has remained a central issue. Efforts to develop a coherent national strategy have often been reactive, focused on preserving institutional and cultural continuity, rather than proactively articulating long-term visions. Only a few historical figures, such as Saint Stephen, King Mátyás, Gábor Bethlen, and István Széchenyi, are recognized for their forward-thinking leadership (Pomogáts, 2005: 7-8). After the political regime change in 1989, the issue gained new urgency as Hungary sought to redefine its foreign policy and regional relationships. These relationships, shaped by shared geographic, political, and cultural conditions within the Carpathian Basin, had to be reconsidered in light of historical legacies (Baranyai, 2001: 103).

As early as the late 18th century, there was a polemic between advocates of modernization (e.g., György Bessenyei, János Batsányi) and defenders of national tradition (e.g., József Gvadányi, András Dugonics). Subsequent decades saw debates over cultural and linguistic reform (led by Ferenc Kazinczy), and in the 1930s, a prominent controversy arose between populist writers and urban intellectuals over national identity and political reform. This longstanding intellectual rivalry continues to shape Hungary's contemporary political landscape, dividing it into two dominant ideological camps, appearing with two distinct visions of the country's development (Pomogáts, 2005: 9).

In recent years, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has frequently invoked the East-West dichotomy to characterize clashing political cultures and value systems. He is not the first Hungarian statesman to do so; since the Middle Ages Hungarian chroniclers and leaders have referred to the nation's Asian origins to define its national character and geopolitical role. The Enlightenment introduced a hierarchy that privileged Western culture, but since the Reform Era of the 19th century, both Eastern and Western influences have remained integral to Hungarian identity discourse.

During this Reform Era, Count István Széchenyi argued in his pamphlet *A kelet népe* ("The People of the East") that emphasizing Hungary's Eastern roots could expose the flaws of liberalism and challenge the blind adoption of Western political values (Gerő, 1995: 22-23). He contrasted the pejorative view of Asia held by liberals with a more positive interpretation of Eastern origins. Széchenyi wrote: "The Hungarian nation has no less a vocation than to represent (...) its own uniqueness, hidden in an Asian cradle that has never been developed,

never matured" (Széchenyi, 1985: 16). The work *A kelet népe* created a platform for dialogue between medieval Hungarian historical traditions and Enlightenment-era political theory. The title referred not only to the eastward origins of the Magyars but also to the newcomers' aspirations to attain the standards of Western cultural and economic development. In this way, Széchenyi juxtaposed the competing paradigms of tradition and modernization (Gyurgyák, 2007: 48-50).

Széchenyi's political rival, Lajos Kossuth placed his hopes in England and France during the 1849 revolution, appealing to their democratic principles. Referring to the symbolic struggle between East and West, Kossuth made a futile appeal to England and France to intervene against the Habsburg-Russian coalition, portraying Russia as the embodiment of Oriental despotism and positioning Hungary as the easternmost bastion of Western values, defending Europe against Russian aggression. (Fejtő, 1973: 347).

Following the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, Turanist ideologues advocated for a rupture with the West, which they accused of betrayal and cultural decay "moral rot flowing from Western philosophy". They called for solidarity among all Turanian peoples to unite and oppose "Semitic corruption" and "Aryan decadence" (Laruelle, 2015: 181). The interwar revival of Turanism, particularly after Mussolini's ascent in Italy, reflected Hungary's geopolitical alienation and the search for new allies in the East and in Asia. The core sentiment underlying Turanist ideology during the interwar period was the perception that Europe had treated Hungary with injustice and cruelty in the aftermath of the Treaty of Trianon, and the West had forgotten that the Magyars had long served as defenders of Western civilization. Confronted with perceived ingratitude, injustice and historical amnesia, the Hungarians turned away from the West and instead sought alliances in the East, aligning with their presumed Eastern origins.

Hungary's elite interest in the East, stems from disillusionment with liberalism and Western cultural values. This narrative is exemplified by the Speaker of the House of Representatives László Kövér, that "the psyche of the Hungarian nation comes from the East," adding that Hungarians are "the westernmost nation of the East" and remain loyal to their "eastern brothers." Such statements prompt reflection on whether this Eastern orientation can be reconciled with Hungary's historic role as a Christian bulwark and bastion of European civilization. In opposition to the liberal, individualist West, Hungary's nationalist and conservative right espouses values rooted in tradition, religion, and community.

During the communist era, some Hungarian intellectuals advocated for a "third way" between East and West. In the aftermath of the 1989 regime change, one author questioned Hungary's future alignment, warning against losing cultural distinctiveness. He wrote: *"It would not be a miracle, therefore, if Hungary, between the West and the East, sought its own Hungarian and Central European way, its own solutions, preserving and maintaining its own values and characteristics, but it would be unnatural if it did not do so, if it did not strive for this. Although now some people are suggesting: let's stop this centuries-long effort [to preserve their Asian traditions – note T.K.] this constant search for a way forward, and let's melt peacefully into the great Atlantic"* (Bíró, 1992: 68).

In September 2018, Hungary participated as a guest of honor in the sixth summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, alongside Uzbekistan. This organization includes Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In addition to Hungary, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan hold observer status in this body. In his address, Prime Minister Orbán declared: "The Hungarian language is a unique and strange language, linked by its origin to Turkic languages. We have always closely followed the cooperation between the countries of

the Turkic language family. We are among you [Turkic peoples- note T.K.] the people who moved the farthest west and also converted to Christianity. So, we are a Christian people living in the West, standing on the foundations of the Hunnic-Turkic.” He added that Hungarians consider themselves descendants of Attila (Hungary’s Growing, 2018).

Conclusion

The Asiatic and early medieval origins of Hungarian statehood have had a lasting impact on the historical, social, political discourse along the Danube throughout the centuries. The ancestors of the Hungarians migrated over several centuries from regions east of the Ural Mountains. The ancestors of the Hungarians and even into the twentieth century, discussions surrounding the nation’s future and its political institutions continued to invoke symbols rooted in this ancient heritage. Prior to the 18th century, ethnic conflicts were relatively rare in Hungary. The ancient history of the Hungarians, their multi-ethnic statehood influenced them to identify with more than one ethnic group as exemplified by figures such as the Zrínyi family, numerous intellectuals, and the polymath Mátyás Bél.

The politically enfranchised class, known as the "noble nation" (*natio hungarica*), cultivated a broad civic identity that often transcended ethnic boundaries, fostering loyalty to the Hungarian crown among various social and ethnic groups. This civic identification with the Hungarian state typically coexisted with individual ethnic identities, rather than replacing them. The awareness of an Asian origin, a symbolic marker of otherness, persisted in Hungarian political and cultural thought well into the 20th century. This notion eastern ethnogenesis periodically resurfaces in public discourse and is frequently mobilized for ideological or political purposes.

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