

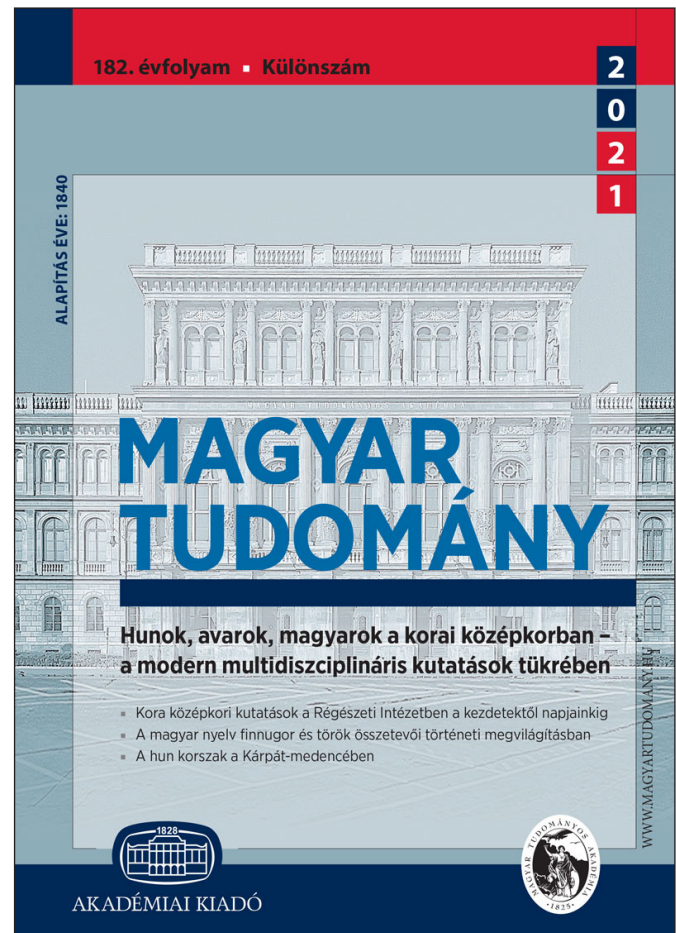
STATUS REPORT ON HUNGARIAN EARLY MEDIEVAL RESEARCH IN 2021 Review of the Special 2021 Issue of *Magyar Tudomány* (Hungarian Science)

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Increased societal demand and new findings related to early Hungarian historical research have prompted the researchers dealing with the Early Middle Ages from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Archaeology of the Eötvös Loránd Research Network's Research Center for the Humanities to prepare a status report on the state of the research and the most important issues currently affecting the field. A substantial motivation for this account has been bioarchaeology, and in particular the sub-discipline of archaeogenetics within this, which has had a turbulent effect on the research and has produced results that often resound with the general public. On the one hand, this has created an enormous new group of sources that must be evaluated by those studying the period, and on the other hand represents a challenge to properly interpret and publish these results. This report was published as a special issue of volume 182 of Magyar Tudomány (Hungarian Science) in 2021, compiled by Elek Benkő and Ádám Bollók.

The 2+14 essays found in the publication fall in to four major categories that are not divided equally in terms of the number of pages devoted to them. There are 38 pages dealing with the Hunnic period, 26 on the Avar period, 54 on early Hungarian history, and 32 on the beginnings of the history of the Hungarian people in the Carpathian Basin. One essay each discusses the institutional background of the research within the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and an outline of the research history. Perhaps the name of Andrea Vaday was missing from the presentation of the varied history and individuals of the Institute of Archaeology, which could have even warranted a separate publication. She taught about the Hunnic period (and the Sarmatian period) for many years in higher education, and made significant contributions to the definition of ceramic forms from the late Sarmatian period and the 5th century. Balázs Sudár related the results of the Hungarian Prehistoric Research Group from the past nine years in an itemized manner, and outlined the possibilities for the future of this research group that has arrived at a crossroads. The two introductory essays provide the reader with good insights into the early historical research workshops operating within the walls of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, thereby tracing the results achieved in the past decades by those studying the period.



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Four essays in the publication have been dedicated to introducing the Hunnic period. Quite fortunately, these first present the “question of the Huns” in a broader perspective, displaying it in its full complexity. Gergely Csiky begins his discussion of the Asian Huns with the clarification of fundamental questions such as, what the term “Hun” itself means, where this word may have originated, what it may have meant to those who used it, and how the use of the term changed. This is information of fundamental significance, and its understanding and appreciation is essential for further discussion of the topic. Of equal importance is the understanding or clarification of how a population of “differing origins, languages, and traditions” was organized into the Xiongnu Empire. One of the most interesting research challenges that arises from this is the contrasting research traditions between the Chinese and the Russian/Mongol scholars. The essence of this is that they do not agree on what the term “Xiongnu” represents, as Gergely Csiky’s expresses perceptively in his text on page 29. Following an introduction into the complexity of the topic, one gains a glimpse into the most recent trends in research on the Asian Huns. The uncovering of the archaeological evidence of a nomadic lifestyle occupies a central place in this, with a prominent role played by remote sensing (i.e. non-invasive methods) and archaeological field walks.

The other two essays discussing the Hunnic period are from the pens of Zsófia Masek and Zsófia Rácz, and are no less exciting. While remaining in the 5th century A.D., they travel to the west from Asia, through Eastern Europe, arriving at the Carpathian Basin. Fortunately, significant new finds from the Hunnic period have been discovered in recent years that provide nuance to the picture that has been formed of their society in this period. There is an increasing amount of information available on the customs, connections, and lifestyle of the people living at the time. The essay by Bence Gulyás closes the section dealing with the Hunnic period, surveying the primarily archaeological changes and cultural links in Eastern Europe during the 200 years that followed it.

There are two essays in the second section, written by Tivadar Vida and Gergely Szenthe, and they attempt to provide a guide to the some 400 years between the Hunnic period and the “Hungarian Conquest” period (the 10th century). In terms of what they focus on, they discuss the topics and main problems of the early/middle and late Avar periods respectively by including the most recent results and interpretive models. It is refreshing to read Gergely Szenthe’s explanations in relation to the find materials of the late Avar period. The author breaks free from the framework for interpretation that had remained static for several decades, although according to his own admission, his ideas are still in need of elaboration and further support in several aspects. Tivadar Vida’s essay presents how archaeological genetics “broke into” the research on the Avar period and how this has brought (or will bring) revolutionary new results. It is no exaggeration to say that a biosocial archaeological revolution is taking place in the field in connection with this. The new group of sources provides outstandingly important data that supplements and modifies the profile provided by archaeology about the communities that existed. The greatest opportunities come from the examination of the internal relationships of the entire communities, just as László Révész correctly notes in a later section of the publication in connection with the materials from the Hungarian Conquest period.

The third section of the publication discusses the early history of the Hungarian people from the perspectives of linguistics, historiography, archaeology, and archaeogenetics over 54 pages. László Klima’s essay, which is linked thematically to Balázs Sudár’s introduction, surveys the historical findings of linguistics as well as the limitations of the research in connection with the Hungarian language. Marianne Bakró-Nagy reviews the historical layers of Hungarian-Turkic linguistic connections and explains them in an understandable manner.

János B. Szabó and Balázs Sudár present the limitations of (re)utilizing historical sources in early history. They refer several times in a critical manner to the detrimental effect of stagnant interpretations and the “typically Hungarian close-mindedness” (in comparison with foreign attitudes). They discuss the utility of sources discovered through certain “associated” disciplines for historical interpretation, and through this shed light on the limitations of analysis using linguistics (e.g. the problem of adopting new languages), ethnography, and archaeology (the problem of ethnic analysis). After reviewing the types of problems, they touch upon the opportunities and responsibilities that face historiography. These include the re-reading and

reinterpretation of known sources, the highlighting of findings from recent years through the reevaluation of Byzantine and Muslim sources, and the significance and possibilities of reviewing sources that are not directly related to the Hungarians.

The essays of Attila Türk and László Révész are worth reviewing together, even though a presentation of archaeogenetic findings is wedged between them. This is because they introduce archaeological find materials that are very closely related to one another and they are researching the connections between them. The differing views of the two researchers in the assessment of certain issues can be clearly discerned by reading the two articles one after the other. Attila Türk's essay provides an overarching survey of the increasingly exciting research, Eastern European expeditions, and Hungarian-Russian or Hungarian-Ukrainian cooperation in discovering early Hungarian archaeological relics. It is clear that discovering, publishing, and providing as detailed an analysis as possible of the more recent finds is essential to uncovering their connections to the 10th century archaeological finds from the Carpathian Basin. Attila Türk's essay guides us through all the Eastern European sites where it is possible to look for and likely find the earliest evidence of the Hungarian people. However, ethnic identification based on archaeological evidence is impossible in practice for this period. In connection with this, László Révész alludes to the unfortunate existence of the phrase "possibly Hungarian," as the finds given this designation represent objects that are widespread throughout the elite of the time. The profile is in fact extraordinarily similar to the types of objects that were distributed over wide areas in the early Avar period. In his essay, László Révész concentrates on the archaeology of the 10th (and 11th) century, summarizing the observations and the dynamics of society that can be based on the materials from communities (primarily from cemeteries) that have been determined to be from the Hungarian Conquest period. At the beginning of his essay, he touches upon the problem of the early dating of the "conquest," and later summarizes the observations from the time of the establishment of the Hungarian state, outlining the possible models.

The essay by the researchers from the Institute of Archeogenomics of the Eötvös Loránd Research Network's Research Center for the Humanities – Anna Szécsényi-Nagy, Bea Szeifert, Veronika Csáky, and Balázs Gusztáv Mende – is found between the articles by Attila Türk and László Révész. In this, they review the most recent and most exciting Hungarian archaeological genetics research findings from the last few years. They refer to the genetic variation revealed in recent years from the perspective of a limited region for research, for example the area of the Xiongnu Empire, which has made the search for "interpretations of origins" more difficult and less meaningful.

The fourth and final section includes Ádám Bollók's essay on the first encounters of the Hungarian people with Christianity and Kornél Szovák's review of the knowledge about the origins of the Scythians, as well as the aforementioned article by László Révész. It is possible through Ádám Bollók's essay to get an idea of the strategies for the conversion of realms during the period, how Christianity may have appeared in the Carpathian Basin, and what purpose the first "Christian objects" may have served. Kornél Szovák guides us towards the emergence of the consciousness of Hun-Hungarian and Hungarian-Scythian identity that appears in the chronicles in differing ways, and strives to trace the origins of these ideas as well as point out the contradictions within them.

The special issue of *Magyar Tudomány* volume 182 provides an outstandingly valuable status report on the state of research into Hungary in the Early Middle Ages. It is particularly important that this publication, created at the request of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and through the efforts of the colleagues at the Institute of Archaeology of the Eötvös Loránd Research Network's Research Center for the Humanities, has successfully included researchers from several institutions. The main points of emphasis are clear and the greatest attention is paid to those topics that most frequently arise amongst scholars and laypeople interested in the early history of the Hungarian people. At the same time, it is also clear that the publication that has been compiled only provides a basic outline of the period's individual research questions. A more comprehensive introduction to the period would require a work of greater length that encompasses the histories and archaeology of all peoples related to the early medieval history of the Carpathian Basin. Let us trust that an effort such as this will not be long in coming.