

THE NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH DESIGN FOR EARLY HUNGARIAN HISTORY

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Theories and concepts on the “prehistory” of the Hungarian people and on the Hungarian Conquest as a historical event are an intrinsic part of modern Hungarian identity. Historical and archaeological studies on these issues and the publication of new research findings are the perhaps most important priorities of Hungarian scholarship. There are few written sources on the history of the ancient Hungarians. At the same time, archaeology – a discipline with a dynamically growing corpus of finds – plays a key role in this field of research. This holds true even if the methodological criteria for the historical assessment of archaeological finds and their cultural contexts have become much stricter, especially regarding the ethnic attribution of archaeological assemblages. One of the perhaps most intriguing questions is which find assemblages of the archaeological material known from the vast region extending from the so called western Siberian ancestral homeland and the Urals to the Carpathian Basin can be linked to the centuries long migration of the ancient Hungarians in the early Middle Ages. Or, approaching this issue from another perspective, can the location of the ancestral homeland reconstructed earlier and the settlement territories mentioned in the written sources be convincingly reconciled with the archaeological record?²

One of the greatest difficulties in research on the ancient Hungarians is the overview, filtering and interpretation of the rich corpus of early medieval archaeological finds from the vast region between the Urals and the Carpathian Basin. The linguistic, palaeoenvironmental and archaeological record, and the ethnography of the population groups living in the area all suggested that the emergence of the ancient Hungarians could be located to western Siberia, also called the Hungarians’ ancestral homeland.³ During the long migration to the Carpathian Basin, the ancient Hungarians lived in various regions, where they encountered and came into contact with many different peoples. Three of the known settlement territories mentioned in the written sources have been studied in more detail: Magna Hungaria, Levedia and Etekköz, all of which lie on the territory of the former Soviet Union. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the virtually complete decline of academic contacts between 1990 and 2005, archaeological research on the history of the ancient Hungarians in Eastern Europe (and in Hungary too) became rather marginal.⁴ A handful of eminent

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² István Fodor: Östörténeti viták és álviták. In: *Csodaszarvas IV*. Ed.: Á. Molnár (Budapest: Molnár Kiadó; 2012) 125–146; Csanád Bálint: A 9. századi magyarság régészeti hagyatéka. In: *Honfoglalás és régészet. A honfoglalásról sok szemmel I*. Ed.: L. Kovács (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó; 1994) 39–46. Péter Langó: *Amit elrejt a föld... A 10. századi magyarság anyagi kultúrájának régészeti kutatása a Kárpát-medencében* (Budapest: L’Harmattan; 2007).

³ It must here be noted that this label is somewhat erroneous and misleading because the region assumed to be the Hungarians’ ancestral homeland is “only” the region known as the Zaural’e in Russian, i.e. the region immediately beyond the Urals. This region is linked by many strands to the forested steppe of Bashkyria and the Kama region on the western side of the mountain range. The typical Siberian geographic environment and the western Siberian plainland proper extends east of the River Tobol and east of the Chelyabinsk and the Kurganskaia administrative regions. Cp. <http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Завралье> (accessed 01.08.2012).

⁴ This is one of the reasons that our Russian colleagues have repeatedly pointed out a basic ignorance of the new eastern find material among Hungarian archaeologists, e.g., Геннадий. Е. Афанасьев: Где же археологические свидетельства существования Хазарского государства? *Российская Археология* (2001:2) 43–55.; Валентина Е. Флёрова: András Róna-

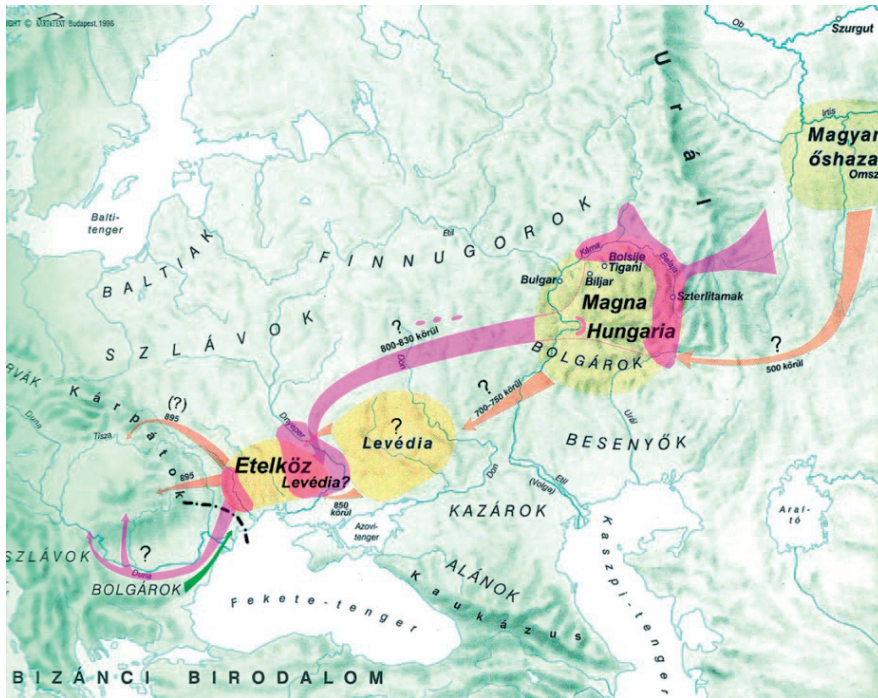


Fig. 1. The assumed migration route of the ancient Hungarians (yellow, map after Fodor – Diószegi – Legeza 1996) and the eastern cultural contacts (sites) of the Hungarian Conquest period material (mauve, after Türk 2011)

Russian, Ukrainian and Moldavian archaeologists, who were familiar with the archaeological material of the Hungarian Conquest period (the 10th century material in the Carpathian Basin), noted the possible relevance of certain find assemblages to ancient Hungarian history and also pointed out the possible cultural contacts in their publications. However, a secure identification requires an archaeological database⁵ covering the entire range of archaeological assemblages and their local cultural contacts with a firm chronological grounding to which the new Hungarian Conquest period assemblages from the Carpathian Basin and the new east european finds can be compared.⁶

Archaeological research on the ancient Hungarians is, understandably, inextricably bound up with the 10th-centuries heritage period archaeology of the Carpathian Basin. This is hardly surprising, given that the Hungarian Conquest period is the indispensable reference point for the two basic research designs in studies on the ancient Hungarians, namely the linear (from the Urals to the Carpathians) and the retrospective (the search for earlier eastern parallels starting from the 10th century assemblages of the Carpathian Basin).⁷ The archaeological record nowadays clearly indicates that the antecedents to the 10th century find assemblages of the Carpathian Basin can be found in the earlier, 9th century material of Eastern Europe. While it is now clear that the proportion of eastern find types in the Hungarian Conquest period material is not as high as was assumed a few decades ago, we also know of find assemblages leading all the way to the Urals that were deposited in the 10 century, i.e. after the generally accepted date of the Hungarian Conquest (AD 895), which are thus roughly contemporaneous with the Hungarian Conquest period material from the Carpathian Basin. Interestingly enough, these finds occur almost exclusively in the regions that can be considered as the possible settlement territories of the ancient Hungarians. The mapping of these finds and their historical

Tas. Hungarians and Europe in the Early Middle Ages: An Introduction to Early Hungarian History (Budapest, 1999) (реу.) *Российская Археология* (2003:1) 170–176.

⁵ For early, ground-breaking studies, see Béla Pösta: *Régészeti tanulmányok az Oroszfüldön I-II.* (Budapest–Leipzig: V. Hornyánszky – K. W. Hierschemann, 1905). István Erdélyi: *Scythia Hungarica. A honfoglalás előtti magyarság régészeti emlékei.* (Budapest: Mundus 2008). Владимир А. Иванов: *Древние угры-мадьяры в Восточной Европе.* (Уфа: Гилем, 1999).

⁶ István Fodor: Az őscseremis tarsolyelemz. In: *Ünnepi írások Bereczki Gábor tiszteletére.* Ed. A. Bereczki – M. Csepregi – L. Klima. *Uráliszikai Tanulmányok 19.* (Budapest: ELTE Finnugor Tanszék – Numi Tórem Alapítvány, 2010) 163–171.

⁷ István Fodor: *Verecke híres útján a magyar nép őstörténete és a honfoglalás* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1975). Péter Langó: *Amit elrejt a föld... A 10. századi magyarság anyagi kultúrájának régészeti kutatása a Kárpát-medencében* (Budapest: L'Harmattan; 2007).



Fig. 2. Buckle and belt mounts from Subotcy (Ukraine) (author's photo, 2011)

and archaeological assessment is at least as important as of the relevant eastern analogous finds that can be dated before 895.

In the case of a few assemblages, mostly stray finds, there is no way of telling whether these were deposited before or after 895. This problem, which can hardly be resolved using conventional archaeological methods based on the formal similarities or dissimilarities of various artefact types, again underscores the need for the widespread application of archaeometric analyses such as radiocarbon dating.⁸ In sum, at present we can only speak of the eastern cultural connections of the Hungarian Conquest period material.

A glance at the map of Eastern Europe reveals that there is a correlation between the earlier settlement territories of the ancient Hungarians and certain find assemblages from a series of 9th century sites between the Urals and the Carpathians that reflect contact with the early medieval finds from both the Carpathian Basin and the southern Urals region. We thus have a set of new data that we can link to the assumed migration route of the ancient Hungarians and we can also exclude the territories where finds of this type have not been brought to light despite intensive archaeological research (such as the northern Caucasus, which according to some theories should be regarded as the ancestral homeland). The most relevant new eastern finds have been reported from Slobozdeya⁹ in Transnistria and from sites along the Middle Dniester in the Ukraine, especially along the river's western bank, such as Subotcy (Fig. 2), Katerinovka and Korobchino etc., known as the Subotcy find horizon.¹⁰ These sites all lie in the territory that can be correlated with the *Etelköz* of the written sources. The radiocarbon dates for the Subotcy horizon fall into the later 9th century,¹¹ while the finds reflect contact with the neighbouring territories, especially the Slavic lands to the north, principally indicated by pottery imports. These contacts are also mentioned in the written sources.

The location of Levedia, however, still runs into problems. The archaeological record of the Don–Northern Seversky Donets region, which was earlier identified with Levedia, contains no traces whatsoever

⁸ In addition to dating, PIXE micro-beam analysis is a useful analytical procedure for sourcing the raw material of metal artefacts (L. Csedreki – R. Kustár – P. Langó: *Honfoglalás kori ezüst veretek vizsgálata mikro-PIXE módszerrel [Micro-PIXE analysis of gilt silver mounts from the Hungarian Conquest Period]*. In: *Környezet – Ember – Kultúra. A természettudományok és a régészet párbeszéde*. 2010. október 6–8-án megrendezett konferenciájának tanulmánykötete, ed. A. Kreiter – Á. Pető. – B. Tugya (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Nemzeti Örökségvédelmi Központ, 2012) 271–278). In the case of archaeogenetic studies, mtDNA and Y chromosome analyses can shed light on ancient population lineages. It must be repeatedly emphasized that the comparative material for archaeogenetic studies should be made up of 10th century, rather than modern samples if the aim is to search for the possible eastern relations of the 10th century population. New advances in this field can be expected from the study of the skeletal remains of individuals born in the east, but buried in the Carpathian Basin. It is also clear that the selection of skeletal samples of this type can only be achieved through radiocarbon dating.

⁹ Татьяна А. Щербакова – Елена Ф. Тащи – Николай П. Тельнов: *Кочевнические древности Нижнего Поднестровья (По материалам раскопок кургана у г. Слободзея)*. Археологическая библиотека, выпуск IV. (Кишинёв: Институт культурного наследия АН Молдовы, 2008).

¹⁰ Алексей В. Комар: *Древние мадьяры Етелькеза: перспективы исследований*. In: *Мадьяры в Середньому Подніпров'ї. Археологія і давня історія України. Випуск 7*. (Київ 2011) 21–78.

¹¹ Attila Antal Türk: *A szaltovói kultúrkör és a magyar őstörténet régészeti kutatása*. In: *Középkortörténeti tanulmányok 6. A VI. Medievisztikai PhD-konferencia (Szeged, 2009. június 4–5)*, ed.: P. G. Tóth – P. Szabó (Szeged: Szegedi Középkorász Műhely, 2010) 261–306, Fig. 5.

of a population arriving from the Ural region between the 6th and the 8th centuries. At the same time, there is barely any resemblance between the Hungarian Conquest period finds and the 8–10th century assemblages of the Saltovo-Mayatskaya culture distributed in the region traditionally identified – mainly in the Hungarian research – with Levedia. This culture was earlier interpreted as the archaeological correlate of the entire territory of the Khazar Khaganate, and thus also of Levedia, which was part of the khaganate. The Saltovo culture, which was earlier divided into so-called regional variants in view of the considerable divergences in its material,¹² is no longer regarded as a big uniform archaeological culture as originally defined by Svetlana A. Pletněva.¹³

Hungarian scholars differ over the interpretation of the Saltovo culture and its cultural impact on the ancient Hungarians.¹⁴ It is now clear that some of the find types, such as the clay cauldrons, that were believed to have their counterparts in the Saltovo culture cannot be derived from that culture or that they are objects which are known also from the territories neighbouring on the Saltovo culture's distribution either as imports or as local copies (for example in the Volintsevskaja culture and in the so-called ancient Mordvinian burial grounds). Saltovo type finds could thus have reached the ancient Hungarians from areas other than the Saltovo heartland and thus their presence in the archaeological heritage does not necessarily imply that the ancient Hungarians had once lived on the territory of the Saltovo culture.¹⁵

In fact, the Hungarian Conquest period finds and the 9th and 10th century archaeological material of the Etelköz region reflect much closer contacts with the 8th–9th century (and, of course, 10th century) assemblages of the southern Urals and the Middle Volga region. New finds bearing an uncanny resemblance to the Hungarian Conquest period material are known from the Samara area in the Middle Volga region¹⁶ and

¹² Светлана А. Плетнёва: От кочевий к городам. Салтово-маяцкая культура. *Материалы и исследования по археологии СССР 142*. (Москва: Наука, 1967).

¹³ The distribution of the archaeological material known from the two eponymous sites would only warrant this label for the so-called Alanic or forested steppe variant (*Геннадий Е. Афанасьев: Где же археологические свидетельства существования Хазарского государства?* Российская Археология [2001:2] 43–55); the connections of the other regional variants with the Saltovo culture have been convincingly refuted by Russian and Ukrainian scholars (Алексей А. Иванов: К вопросу об этнокультурной характеристике захоронений в “курганах с ровиками” Нижнего Дона и Волжско-Донского междуречья. In: *Хазары*. [Москва: ДЖОЙНТ-Сефер 2002] 36–38; Владимир В. Колода: Салтовская культура на Харьковщине: очередной юбилей (итоги и перспективы исследований). In: *Салтово-маяцка археологічна культура: 110 років від початку вивчення на Харківщині: збірник наукових праць, присвячених проблемам та перспективам салтовознавства, за матеріалами Міжнародної наукової конференції «П'ятнадцять Слобожанські читання»* Ред.: Г. Є. Свистун. [Харків: ОКЗ «ХНМЦОКС», 2011] 21–31; Валентина Е. Флёрва – Валерий С. Флёрв: Дагестанский вариант салтово-маяцкой культуры: правомерность выделения. Крупновские чтения по археологии Северного Кавказа 21 [Кисловодск: Институт археологии РАН, 2000] 137–141). Owing to the above considerations, the labels “Saltovo culture” and “Saltovo cultural-historical complex” are regularly employed in the Russian and Ukrainian archaeological literature even by scholars who do not challenge the cultural primacy or the leading role of the Khazars (e.g. Алексей В. Комар: Предсалтовские и раннесалтовский горизонты Восточной Европы. *Vita Antiqua* 1999:2 [Київ: Київський національний університет імені Тараса Шевченка, 1999] 111–136). For a comprehensive discussion, see Attila Antal Türk: A szaltovói kultúrkör és a magyar őstörténet régészeti kutatása. In: *Középkortörténeti tanulmányok 6. A VI. Medievisztikai PhD-konferencia (Szeged, 2009. június 4-5)*. Ed.: P. G. Tóth – P. Szabó (Szeged: Szegedi Középkorász Műhely, 2010) 261–306.

¹⁴ Cp. István Fodor: Bolgár-török jövevényszavaink és a régészet. In: *Magyar őstörténeti tanulmányok*, ed.: Antal Bartha – Károly Czeglédy – Andras Róna-Tas. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1977) 79–114; Csanád Bálint: A szaltovó-majaki kultúra avar és magyar kapcsolatairól (On the Avar and Hungarian relations of the Saltovo-Mayak culture). *Archaeologiai Értesítő* 112 (1975) 52–63; László Révész: Szempontok a honfoglalás kori leletanyag időrendjének meghatározásához a keleti párhuzamok alapján. *Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve – Studia Archaeologica* 4 (1998) 523–532.

¹⁵ For a detailed discussion, see Attila Antal Türk: A szaltovói kultúrkör és a magyar őstörténet régészeti kutatása. In: *Középkortörténeti tanulmányok 6. A VI. Medievisztikai PhD-konferencia (Szeged, 2009. június 4-5)*, ed. P. G. Tóth – P. Szabó (Szeged: Szegedi Középkorász Műhely, 2010), 261–306.

¹⁶ Дмитрий А. Сташенков: Памятники мадыарского круга в Самарском Поволжье In: *Международный конгресс средневековой археологии Евразийских степей Конференция «Идель-Алтай: истоки евразийской цивилизации»*. Отв. ред.: Ф. Ш. Хузин. (Казань: Академия наук Республики Татарстан, Институт истории им. Ш. Марджани, 2009) 228–229.

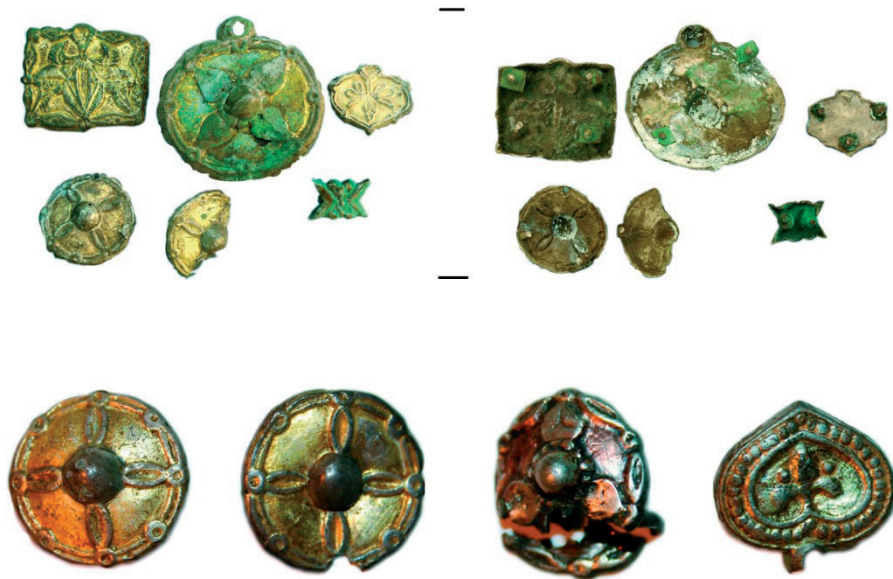


Fig. 3. New analogous finds to the Hungarian Conquest period material from the Chelyabinsk area (author's photo, 2010)

on the eastern side of the major Uralian pass, in the Chelyabinsk area (Sineglazovo, Uelgi: Fig. 3).¹⁷ The archaeological record seems to confirm earlier suggestions that Levedia was not an independent settlement territory of the ancient Hungarians, but was part of the probably easterly areas of Etelköz (Fig. 1).

The chronology of the finds from the southern Urals and the Dnieper region suggests a relatively rapid migration of the ancient Hungarians no earlier than the beginning of the 9th century, as was earlier suggested by Soviet-Russian and Ukrainian research.¹⁸ While it is uncertain what exactly triggered the migration – an issue that can hardly be resolved using conventional archaeological methods – an attack by the Petchenegs (the so-called first Petcheneg-Hungarian war) as assumed earlier by historians, seems a logical scenario.¹⁹ The threat embodied by the nomadic Petchenegs may also explain the scarcity of ancient Hungarian finds between the Volga and the Dnieper, and also why evidence for a more permanent settlement is only known from the Dnieper region, from sites mostly lying on the river's western bank. Knowing the mobility of

¹⁷ Сергей. Г. Боталов – Андрей А. Лукиных – Елена В. Тидеман: Погребальный комплекс могильника Уелги – новый средневековый памятник в Южном Зауралье. *Челябинский Гуманитарный Научный Журнал* 2011:2 (15) 104–114.

¹⁸ pl. Дмитрий А. Сташенков: Памятники мадьярского круга в Самарском Поволжье In: *Международный конгресс средневековой археологии Евразийских степей Конференция «Идель-Алтай: истоки евразийской цивилизации»*. Отв. ред.: Ф. Ш. Хузин. (Казань: Академия наук Республики Татарстан, Институт истории им. Ш. Марджани, 2009) 228–229.

¹⁹ The fairly densely settled lands of the Volga Bulgars in the Middle Volga region seem to confirm a date in the early 9th century. An attack from the south or the south-east, from the grassy steppe, meant that there was no escape route towards the north and that the safest bet was to cross the Volga.

Regarding chronological issues, it must here be noted that the presence of Turkic speaking population groups can be assumed from the late Hun period onward in the Middle Volga–southern Ural region and that these groups arrived in several successive waves until the 9th century. Ср. Евгений П. Казаков: Новые археологические материалы к проблеме ранней тюркизации Урало-Поволжья. *Татарская археология* 4–5 (1999:1–2) 23–38. This seems to be confirmed by the disappearance of the archaeological assemblages closely related to the Saltovo complex (such as the Novinki- and Uren' type find horizons) by the turn of the 7th–8th centuries at the latest. It is difficult to determine when the ancient Hungarians first appeared in this region. The hand-thrown, cord-impressed pottery tempered with crushed mussels of the Ural region typical for the Kushnarenkovskaia (6th–8th centuries) and the Karaiakupovzkaia cultures (8th–9th centuries) has been reported from several sites (including settlements) in the Samara area Ср. Дмитрий А. Сташенков: Памятники мадьярского круга в Самарском Поволжье In: *Международный конгресс средневековой археологии Евразийских степей Конференция «Идель-Алтай: истоки евразийской цивилизации»*. Отв. ред.: Фаяз Ш. Хузин. (Казань: Академия наук Республики Татарстан, Институт истории им. Ш. Марджани, 2009), 228–229.

nomadic peoples and especially of nomadic armies, moving to a distance of no more than a few hundred kilometres away was hardly a feasible solution.²⁰

It is to be hoped that new early medieval finds from Eastern Europe, which can shed light on the cultural context that shaped the Hungarian Conquest period assemblages, will give a new impetus to archaeological studies on the ancient Hungarians. The systematic study and detailed recording of the many, sadly often neglected assemblages in various Eastern European museums are essential to these studies. This work was begun as part of a four-year, OTKA funded project in September 2012. It would be equally important that Hungarian archaeologists again participate in eastern excavations and in the prospection for new sites, and thus become part of the academic mainstream, a step that would also be welcomed by Russian and Ukrainian archaeology. The Archaeology Department of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University has made the necessary preparations for a joint Hungarian-Russian archaeological expedition from 2013 in the Ural region as part of a research project on the archaeology of the ancient Hungarians, the first of its kind after a gap of thirty years.

RECOMMENDED READING

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TÜRK, ATTILA ANTAL

A magyar őstörténet és a szaltovói régészeti kultúrkör. Doktori (PhD) disszertáció tézisei. Szeged, 2011.

²⁰ As the Avars came to learn in their conflict with the Turks.