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# Fascicolo 22. Aprile 2025 Storia Militare Antica e Bizantina (6)

a cura di Marco Bettalli, Elena Franchi e Gioacchino Strano



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Direzione, Via Bosco degli Arvali 24, 00148 Roma

Contatti: direzione@nam-sigm.org; virgilio.ilari@gmail.com

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Bronze statue (2nd/3rd century AD) of the genius of a legion.
Enns (Upper Austria). Museum Lauriacum.
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# Magyar 'raids' and Frankish invasions: A new perspective

by Christopher Szabó

ABSTRACT. This article aims to refute the centuries-old claim that the Magyar incursions into Western Europe and the Balkans in the tenth century were merely for plunder, a view based on outdated ideas of poor nomads whose societies were held together by chiefs handing out prestige goods to their followers; thus, being forced to constantly raid their richer, settled neighbours. Recent scientific discoveries put these offensive operations in a broader context of invasions by the East Franks and threats from Bulgars and Byzantines, showing Magyar actions to be planned and prepared military campaigns and introducing background information from recent scientific discoveries that show the Magyar Principality was a state and not a mere collection of nomadic tribes living off plunder and tribute.

KEYWORDS: MAGYARS, PLUNDERING, CAMPAIGNING, BATTLES, STATE-FOUNDING

#### Introduction

rchaeological finds and new techniques of applied science have revealed that earlier models of a tribal nomadic Magyar society in the ninth and tenth centuries are erroneous. The Magyars had agriculture, viticulture and a diet which contained much more than only milk and meat, as has been claimed for nomads. Iron smelting and smithing, using processes advanced for the time, were widespread, as well as a level of gold-and-silver work that was world class has shown that the old idea of a nomadic group of 'wild tribesmen' going on raids to make ends meet is outdated and needs revision. In addition, discoveries of fortresses, permanent villages and defensive dyke-type structures, which would be impossible for a people constantly on the move, have undermined the 'nomadic' model further. Evidence of materials obtained by trade added to the picture of a complex society, which had a pastoral nomadic element, but

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Zsolt Petkes, Balázs Sudár, B. *Hétköznapok a honfoglalás korában: Magyar Őstörténet* 5. Helikon Kiadó, Budapest, 2017, pp. 90-97.

was not as a whole nomadic. Researchers have found evidence of a steppe state which remained united under the same family for over four centuries.<sup>2</sup>

This steppe-type state had internal, but also external policy goals and it is in this context that the Magyar campaigns should be understood. Furthermore, the periodisation of these actions is usually taken from the end of the ninth century to either 955 or 970. It will be argued here that the correct periodisation of the campaigns is from 862 to 1054. These dates reveal a new people establishing a steppe-type state in Europe and the attempts by the Holy Roman Empire (HRE) to destroy it, as it had the Avar Khaganate a century before. The idea that the Magyar campaigns had only plunder as their aim is no longer seen as viable among scholars within Hungary, and this article aims to inform a wider audience and hopefully bring about a revision in line with the new information.<sup>3</sup>

# Magyars or Hungarians?

The Magyars became a steppe tribal confederation sometime in the ninth century, and later native sources refer to them as *Hetumoger* or Seven Magyars.<sup>4</sup> They became a steppe-type state around 850, electing Álmos to be their ruler.<sup>5</sup> They migrated to the Carpathian Basin in the 890s, and took political power, but remained a minority in comparison to the earlier Avars, according to archaeological and archaeogenetic analysis.<sup>6</sup> The Avars were called Uangar, Venger and various forms of the word *Onogur*.<sup>7</sup> By the foundation of the Hungarian Kingdom

<sup>2</sup> György Szabados. 'Egy Steppe-állam Európa közepén: Magyar Nagyfejedelemség.' Dolgozatok az erdélyi érem-és regiségtárából. Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, Kolozsvár, 2013, pp. 128-129.; Ervin Gáll. 'A periférikus 10. századi erdélyi medence.' 25/8 Korunk. Komp-Press, Kolozsvár/Cluj 2014, pp. 87-93.; Charles Bowlus. 'The Early Hungarians as Mercenaries.' In J. France (ed), Mercenaries and Paid Men. The Mercenary Identity in the Middle Ages. Cit.,, p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> Ervin Gáll, *A hatalom forrása és a magyar honfoglalás – Hódítás és integráció. A korai magyar történelem egy* régész *szempontjából.* Magyarságkutató Intézet. Budapest. 2019.

<sup>4</sup> György Szabados. 'Egy Steppe-állam Európa közepén: Magyar Nagyfejedelemség.', cit., p.125.

<sup>5</sup> See Szabados, cit., p. 126.

<sup>6</sup> Maróti K, Maár K, Neparáczki E, Kovács B et al, 'The genetic origin of Huns, Avars, and conquering Hungarians,' *Current Biology* 32, Elsevier, Inc. 2022, online.

<sup>7</sup> Terézia Olajos, 'A Kárpát-medencei onogurok történetéhez.' Acta Universitatis Szegediensis (75). Szeged, 2013, pp. 521-532.

(1000 A.D.) the Magyar element had probably mingled with the *Onogur* people so much that the Magyars (in Latin sources) referred to themselves as *Hungari* but continued to call their language Magyar. This paper will refer to them as Magyars.

# Society

The society of the Magyars had as its most basic unit the *nemzetség*; or clan. Debate continues on whether there were confederations of clans forming tribes, or only clans. The *De Administrando Imperio* (DAI) of Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus speaks of the Magyars having seven clans (or tribes), adding that 'Kabars' joined them.<sup>8</sup> He states these are – in the Hungarian spelling – *Nyék*, *Megyer*, *Kürtgyarmat*, *Tarján*, *Jenő*, *Kéri* and *Keszi*. Twelfth and 13<sup>th</sup> Century Hungarian chronicles know nothing of tribes but speak of seven 'captains' and 108 clans.<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> Descent from a real or fictive ancestor was important, as were blood treaties.<sup>11</sup> State organisation is considered further below, but some type of levy or tax, whether in kind or in labour, likely existed. There are dozens of place names that agree with Constantine VII's list. Thus, in the Carpathian Basin, there are for example 33 *-nyék*; 45 *-megyer*; 25 – *kürt*, 25 *-gyarmat* and so on.<sup>12</sup> Some examples could include, Kürtfalva, Balassagyarmat and Nemeskér.

Because the DAI is considered a reliable source, plus the toponyms, most scholars consider the Magyars to have comprised seven tribes (as their old name – *Hetumoger* – shows). In addition, breakaway groups of Khazars, known as Kabars, joined. The word is likely Hungarian for 'stir' (*kavar*), as they rebelled against the Khazar Kingdom, and were formed into one tribe. Their later fate is unknown, except for toponyms ending with '-*kozár*'). Precisely how the 108

<sup>8</sup> Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. *De Administrando Imperio,(DAI)*, Ed. Gy Moravcsik. Trans. R.J.H. Jenkins. Harvard University, Washington D.C.,1985, pp. 171-179.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymus. *Gesta Hungarorum*. Hungarian translation by Dezső Pais. (Magyar Helikon, Budapest, 1977), p.24.

<sup>10</sup> Simon de Kéza. *Kézai Simon Mester Magyar Krónikája*. Trans. Károly Szabó. Mór, Pest, 1862, p.5.

<sup>11</sup> Gyula László, A *Honfoglaló Magyar Nép Élete*. 1944.Facsimile Edition, Múzsák Kiadó, 1988, pp. 190-192.

<sup>12</sup> János Gömöri, . "Lovasnépek" kohászata Pannóniában'. IN: Az Őshazától A Kárpátokig. Ed: Viktor Szombathelyi. Panoráma, Budapest, 1985, pp. 329-330.

clans divide into the seven tribes is unknown (if the number is even correct, there being no corroborative material).

In the decades following the migration, centres of power developed, with most of the (known) centres initially in the Eastern part of the Hungarian Great Plain, while in the 950s and 970s, one developed in the East and one in the West.<sup>13</sup> These centres were built around a fortification. Most scholars accept that the decimal system was widely used, in both civil and military matters.<sup>14</sup>

This society, not surprisingly, had a very advanced horse culture and had mastered horse management. Kálmán Nagy, a former Hungarian Hussar officer studied the Magyar breeding and riding techniques and concluded that small herds of 20-40 horses were kept (except by those of the highest rank) and these were free ranged and only placed in protection in the harshest weather.<sup>15</sup> It is a mistake, however, to think that these horses were not fed hav or grains, as these were widely used. This bred a very tough horse, which could stand the rigours of campaigning, as would be proved in the great distances covered in subsequent military campaigns. 16 Horses were used for herding, hunting and war. Cattle were an important part of the diet, also not common among steppe nomads, who herded horses, sheep and goats rather than cattle. Sheep were also very important for their meat, skins and wool. At least one sheep breed, the Racka, survives, as do Hungarian Grey longhorn cattle. Other animals included goats and pigs, which László said proved that the Magyars were not typical nomads, as pigs are not able to roam the steppe with sheep and goats. Finally, both hens and eggs have been found in 10th Century graves, again underlining the settled character of much of the Magyar culture.<sup>17</sup>

While most Western historians regard the Magyars as nomads, contemporary Arab-language sources, including Ibn Rusta and Marwazi both state of the Magyars: 'They have (a lot of) sown fields.' Besides these written sources, archaeol-

<sup>13</sup> György Szabados, cit., pp. 134.5.

<sup>14</sup> Cit., pp. 32-41.

<sup>15</sup> Kálmán NAGY. A honfoglalás korának hadtörténete. Heraldika Kiadó, Budapest, 2007, p.56.

<sup>16</sup> Cit., pp. 55-60.

<sup>17</sup> Gyula László, A *Honfoglaló Magyar Nép Élete*, cit., pp. 328-334; Petkes and Sudár. *Hét-köznapok a honfoglalás korában*, pp. 59, 60.

<sup>18</sup> István Zimonyi. 'Muslim Sources on the Magyars in the Second Half of the 9th Century:

ogy has proven them to have had both scythes and sickles, as well as ploughs. Archaeobotany has given an insight into what was grown, and this includes millet, wheat, rye and barley, as well as peas. A later Medieval staple, known as *abajdóc* (rye mixed with wheat) has also been found, as have food remains burned into pottery during a 10th century fire.<sup>19</sup> Along with grains and cereals, many kinds of fruits, notably apple and cherry seeds have been found together with pruning knives, indicating the existence of viticulture. Some kinds of minor agriculture were also practiced by pastoralists, especially using fast growing grains like millet.<sup>20</sup>

The idea of a purely nomadic society is not viable in light of these discoveries. Muslim sources mention the Magyar custom of fishing, although they give no details.<sup>21</sup> Regino of Prüm says they hunted and fished.<sup>22</sup> Hunting was used for military training as László has explained. He mentions that even priests took part in medieval hunting and falconry, and were chastised for it by the Catholic Church, who saw these activities as not conforming to the 'poverty of Christ'. (This indicates how common bows and falcons were in the country.)<sup>23</sup> Archaeology has revealed a wealth of different trades and skills, including pottery, leather work of various kinds (to make the horse leathers, straps, men's and women's belts and boots.<sup>24</sup>) These trades can be done by nomads along with minor crafts like bone and woodwork. However, the work of blacksmiths, silversmiths, goldsmiths, saddle makers and carters, have also been discovered.<sup>25</sup> Clothing appears to have been primarily homemade, but there was also an export market. They used alum tanning and also some forms of vegetable tanning. Magyar leather was particularly fine and was a major export.<sup>26</sup> Flax and hemp, linen and cotton

<sup>&#</sup>x27;The Magyar Chapter of the Jayhani Tradition,' In *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages*, 450–1450, Ed: Florin Curta. Brill, Leiden, 2016, pp. 306-308.

<sup>19</sup> Zsolt Petkes and Balázs Sudár. *Hétköznapok a honfoglalás korában: M. Ő. 5*, pp.87-97.

<sup>20</sup> Zsolt Petkes and Balázs Sudár. M. Ő. 5. Cit., pp.18-19.

<sup>21</sup> István Zimonyi, 'The Magyar Chapter of the Jayhani Tradition', cit., p.8.

<sup>22</sup> Regino. *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe: The Chronicle of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg.* Trans. S. Maclean. Manchester University Press. 2009, p. 205.

<sup>23</sup> Cit., Gyula László, p 314.

<sup>24</sup> Petkes and Sudár. Hétköznapok a honfoglalás korában: cit., pp. 152-161.

<sup>25</sup> Cit., pp. 189-194.

<sup>26</sup> Balázs Sudár, and Zsolt Petkes, A honfoglalók viselete: Magyar Őstörténet 1. Helikon,

were also worn, as was leather, furs and felt.<sup>27</sup> Felt for clothing items was very common, as this material was waterproof and was used to cover yurts as well as for personal clothing, which is still used in Hungary. 28 Silk was much sought after, and some 20 silk remains have been found in archaeological digs. These are mainly Byzantine samite, but there are also some finds from Persia.<sup>29</sup> Written sources also mention wealthy Magyars wearing silk: Al Gardezi, for example, writes: "The Magyars are handsome and pleasant-looking, and their bodies are bulky. Their clothes are brocade, and their weapons are plated with silver and embedded with pearl." (Other translations have 'gold'.)<sup>30</sup> Contemporary sources talk of Magyar vehicules which they used not only for carrying equipment, supplies or plunder, but also as wagon laagers, according to Ekkehard IV in his history of Saint Gallen. This meant cartwrights and other specialists existed among them and in later times these wagons were known to be lightweight and efficient. (The English word 'coach' comes from the toponym *Kócs*) and according to László, Magyar wainwrights already knew how to make spoked wheels at this time.<sup>31</sup> They had excellent saddlers, the tradition of which lasted into the 1930s. László found sufficient wood remains to state that the saddle boards were made of aspen, a softwood, the pommel and cantle were of linden, a hardwood. The seat was of leather.32

# Iron Smelting and Smithing

The Magyars used much the same techniques as other peoples of the time to smelt bog iron in bloomeries, the forerunners of the blast furnace. The above-mentioned town of Nemeskér was the site of a number of bloomeries, and one of the bloomery types is called the 'Nemeskér Type' by archaeologists.<sup>33</sup> One of the

Budapest, 2015, pp. 112-118.

<sup>27</sup> Zsolt Petkes and Balázs Sudár. A honfoglalók viselete:, cit., pp.104-108.

<sup>28</sup> Cit., 119-125.

<sup>29</sup> Cit., pp. 106-107.

<sup>30</sup> István Zimonyi. *Muslim Sources on the Magyars in the Second Half of the 9th Century*, IN: East and Central Europe in the Middle Ages. Brill, Leiden, 2016, p.43.

<sup>31</sup> Zsolt Petkes and Balázs Sudár,. Hétköznapok M.Ö. 5, cit., pp. 50, 51 and László, p. 360.

<sup>32</sup> László, A Honfoglaló Magyar Nép Élete. Cit., pp. 346-7.

<sup>33</sup> János Gömöri. 'The bloomery museum at Somogyfajsz (Hungary) and some archaeometallurgical sites in Pannonia from the Avar - and early Hungarian period.' *MJoM, Metal*-

largest sites was found at Somogyfajsz next to Lake Balaton. Gömöri in 1984 estimated the total production in the 10th Century at 20 tons. Since then, very large numbers of finds have been made, so 20 tons should be considered a minimum.34 A near-contemporary source, the Antapodosis of Liudprand of Cremona, confirms the Magyars' weapon-making ability. Following a reconnaissance of northern Italy in 898, he writes: 'They returned to their own lands and passed the whole bitter period of winter making

ter period of winter making weapons, sharpening swords, teaching war manoeuvres Fig.1. 10<sup>th</sup> Century gilded silver sabretache cover from to the young.'35 It can be Galgóc. Hungarian National Museum. Online. stated that the Magyar

Grand Duchy was self-sufficient in iron production, and this further weakens the 'wandering nomad' hypothesis.

Smithing took place in villages, reflected in toponyms such as *Kovácsi*, 'Smith' *Csatár*, 'Armourer' or *Vasas* 'Smelter', many of which go back to the Avar era.<sup>36</sup>

lurgija – Journal of Metallurgy. Volume 12, 2006, Special Issue: Archaeometallurgy, p. 186.

<sup>34</sup> János Gömöri, 'Lovasnépek' vaskohászata Pannoniában.' In: *Az őshazától a Kárpátokig*. Ed. V.Szombathy. Panoráma, Budapest, 1985, p. 315.

<sup>35</sup> Liudprand of Cremona. *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*. Trans.P. Squatriti. Medieval Texts in Translation. Catholic University of America Press. 2007, p.80.

<sup>36</sup> István Fodor In: *The Ancient Hungarians. Exhibition Catalogue. Ironworking.* Hungarian National Museum, Budapest, 1996, p.63.

There is even a 'Vas Castle County' (Iron County) since the 11<sup>th</sup> Century. Magyar smiths produced everything from sickles, scythes and ploughshares, through to fire-strikers, axes, sabres and a vast number of arrowheads.<sup>37</sup> The old Hungarian word *ötvös* is a reference to alloys and is said to come from the verb *önt* 'pour'.<sup>38</sup> The term means both goldsmith and silversmith and gilded silver was widely used in 10th Century Magyar art. Magyar gold-and-silversmiths made artefacts 'out of sheet metal with embossed decoration, as well as in cast, openwork versions.'<sup>39</sup>

Clearly, as archery was key to Magyar warfare, skilled bowyers were needed and indeed, some 300 bow fragments (mainly bone or antler bow stiffeners) have been found. 40 Once the antler and bone parts had been identified as bow stiffeners, it became clear that the Magyar bow was part of the Asiatic composite bow 'family', with an average draw weight of 100 pounds that could cast an arrow up to 300 meters. 41 The bowyers needed great skill to combine horn, wood, sinew, and antler or bone into a powerful bow that was weatherproof by the standards of the time. Composite bow making is well-known so will not be described here suffice to say that it took about a year to complete one, thus many bowyers probably made many parts of the bow at one time, working with assistants, to complete a large number of these weapons at the end of the process. 42 Researchers suggest a workshop in the region of Szeged in Hungary's Great Plain, due to certain markings on antler grips and 'horns'. 43

Magyar-type arrowheads have been found by the thousands and numerous types have been isolated, with six main types and dozens of others. The most common type is a flat, diamond shape, but some have square or triangular cross-sections designed to penetrate armour. <sup>44</sup> Toponyms referring to archers (and presumably bowyers and arrow smiths) are found in Medieval Hungary's Western and

<sup>37</sup> Petkes and Sudár. Hétköznapok: Cit., pp. 171-174.

<sup>38</sup> G. ZAICZ. (Ed). *Etimológiai Szótár. Magyar szavak és toldalékok eredete*. Tinta Könvkiadó, Budapest, 2006, ö,ő.

<sup>39</sup> Hungarian National Museum. Permanent Exhibition. *Between East and West/Hungarian Conquest Period*. 2023. Online.

<sup>40</sup> Péter Bencsik and László Borbély. A IX-XI századi magyar íj. Liter-Godollő, 2014, p.3.

<sup>41</sup> Zsolt Petkes and Balázs Sudár. Honfoglalók fegyverben. M.Ő. 3.Helikon Kiadó Budapest, 2015, pp. 61-94.

<sup>42</sup> Cit., pp. 80-99.

<sup>43</sup> Cit.

<sup>44</sup> Cit., pp. 116-118.

Northern border regions and to a lesser extent, Transylvania. These names reflect forms of the word  $l\ddot{o}v\ddot{o}$  'shooter' in Hungarian and are referred to as *sagittarius* in Latin-language documents.<sup>45</sup>

# Essentials of a Steppe State

Research over two centuries in Central Europe, Russia, China, Mongolia and more recently in Inner Asia has shown that steppe states had three main elements that held them together. Peoples who did not have these, tended to create tribal alliances only, and failed to stand the test of time, such as the Pechenegs. These essentials were:

- 1. A divinely chosen ruler and subsequent dynasty.
- 2. The use of blood treaties to cement both the formation of the state and relationships within and with foreign entities.
- 3. A ruling council made up of the most powerful in the state.

The Kazakh scholar Kazmyzhanov wrote: 'Participation in the will and instruction of *Tengri* (the Sky) ... is the first attribute of political power.' This element was key in the foundation and maintenance of steppe polities and is too often overlooked. As Sanping Chen has pointed out, the Xiongnu title for God was Cheng-Li, which sounds suspiciously similar to the later Turkic *Teng-ri*, described by Chen as 'the universal sky-god'. He adds that the Chinese concept, originating on the steppe, of the 'Son of Heaven' was also widespread among the Türks. This concept of a 'divinely chosen ruler' was very strong among the Magyars, and is well attested in Medieval Hungarian works as well as in folklore.

Blood treaties between groups or individuals in steppe culture are recorded as early as the fifth century B.C. by Herodotus and early Chinese sources including Chin and Tang Dynasty China.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Helga Kovács. "Határvédelemre utaló helynevek az Árpád-korban." Unpublished MS. Faculty of Humanities, Department of Linguistics, Debrecen University, 2010, pp. 15-17.

<sup>46</sup> Agyn Khairullovich Kazymzhanov and Keith Owen Tribble. 'The Political Tradition of the Steppe.' *Nationalities Papers. The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity.* 26:3 Cambridge University Press,1998.

<sup>47</sup> Sanping Chen. "Son of Heaven and Son of God: Interactions among Ancient Asiatic Cultures regarding Sacral Kingship and Theophoric Names." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.* Vol. 12, No.3. Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp.307-308,

<sup>48</sup> Herodotus. The Histories, Trans. A. De Sélincourt. Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1977, p.293.

There are also many examples of these treaties being used as state-founding instruments, according to Dr. Borbala Obrusánszky, who made a study of these treaties.<sup>49</sup> Hungarian chronicles from the twelfth century onwards refer to the founding of the Seven Magyars as the 'Blood Treaty' in which seven senior leaders chose Álmos to be their overall leader and nicked themselves, dripping the blood into a vessel of wine, and then all partaking of it.<sup>50</sup> The Blood Treaty has long been seen as the first element in Hungarian constitutional law.<sup>51</sup>

The last Grand Prince, Vajk, (r.997-1000) whose Christian name was Stephen, was also the country's first Christian king (r.1000-1038). In his Admonitions, Stephen wrote: 'The council appoints kings, decides the fate of kings, defends the homeland, quietens down contentions, wins victories, defeats invading armies, calls in friends, builds cities, destroys the fortresses of enemies.'52 The council was the forerunner of the medieval Hungarian parliament as well as its modern descendant. Walter Pohl states that there existed in Europe 'Non-Roman'-type states. He writes: 'These included: first, the kingdom of the Huns in the first half of the fifth century; then, the Avar khaganate; and finally, the Magyars/Hungarians in the tenth century.'53 Rogers says: 'A growing number of archaeologists, historians, and cultural anthropologists ...provide convincing evidence that the resource base, trade connections, and native social systems for the steppe pastoralists are diverse and self-sustaining.<sup>254</sup> In summary and considering the elements of a steppe state listed above, the Magyars, contrary to the widely held view in the West, were not a 'loose confederation', nor were their armies 'war bands', but constituted a 'Non-Roman' state.55

<sup>49</sup> Borbála Obrusánszky. Andaság és komaság. 'Századok.' Magyar Történelmi Társulat, Budapest, 2004, pp. 12-56.

<sup>50</sup> Attila Horváth, (Ed.) Magyar Állam-és Jogtörténet. University of Public Service, Budapest, 2014, p.35.

<sup>51</sup> Cit., p.25.

<sup>52</sup> Saint Stephen. *István király Intelmei. Gondolkodó Magyarok.* Ed. G. Szigethy. Magvető Kiadó, Budapest, 1982, p.9. (Author's translation.)

<sup>53</sup> Walter Pohl, "A non-Roman empire in Central Europe," in *Regna and Gentes. The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World*, (Ed.) by Hans-Werner Goetz, Jorg Jarnut, Walter Pohl, Leiden – Boston, 2003, p. 572.

<sup>54</sup> John Daniel Rogers. 'Inner Asian States and Empires: Theories and Synthesis.' Journal of Archaeological Research, Vol. 20, No. 3. Springer, 2012, pp. 216-17.

<sup>55</sup> Charles Bowlus. Franks, Moravians, and Magyars: The Struggle for the Middle Danube,

# **Diplomacy**

The Magyar occupation of the Carpathian Basin was prepared by alliances with the Great Powers of the time, the HRE and Byzantium. While the year 895 is generally accepted as the time of arrival of the Magyars, most Hungarian scholars now consider their occupation to have been a decades-long migration, supported by alliances. Two Hungarian scholars living in exile, Tamás Bogyay and Szabolcs de Vajay first put forward the idea that the Magyar incursions were preventative in nature or showed they were part of alliances. Both considered the Magyar military actions to have been carefully planned.<sup>56</sup> The idea of 'wild nomad raids' is no longer tenable among scholars in Hungary. The Magyars had all-cavalry armies and were organised on a decimal system (see 'Society'). In the past, it was assumed that they were all light horse-archers, but recent research suggests there were heavy cavalry, the retinues of the high-ranking nobles.<sup>57</sup> Magyar warriors used bows, lances, sabres and a cavalry axe called a fokos, a weapon similar to a tomahawk. The retinues were armoured and wore helmets and either lamellar or mail armour. The rest of the cavalry were light horse-archers, many of whom were pastoral herders and were well practiced with horse and bow. Military ranks, even today, reflect the commander of ten, tizedes, of a hundred, százados, a thousand, ezredes and the word for 'uncountable' is 'töméntelen' or 'without tömén', which is likely the old name for 10,000 men. Names of senior ranks included bátor and alap, reflected in place names like Nyírbátor and Tiszaalpár.<sup>58</sup>



Fig.2. Ninth-10th Century Magyar sabre with gilded silver fittings from Tarcal. Hungarian National Museum. Online.

<sup>788-907.</sup> Middle Ages Series, Eds: E. Peters and H. C. Lea. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1995, p.240

<sup>56</sup> Tamás Bogyay. Magyarország Története Távlatból. Mérleg, Budapest, 1993, p. 13.

<sup>57</sup> Digitális Legendárium. "In the Saddle, on Horseback - The art of war of the conquest-era Magyars." 1 February 2023, YouTube video, 15:33-18:30. Online.

<sup>58</sup> Cit. Digitális Legendárium: 17:16-17:24 minutes. Online.

Because of the configuration of their ready bow cases and quivers, they could switch between bows and hand-to-hand weapons. The Magyars used a closed, 'hourglass-type' quiver.<sup>59</sup> It is likely that armies took spare arrows as did other military forces of the day, especially considering the bow to be their main weapon. Emperor Leo VI wrote that the Magyars fought in a more organised and disciplined way than other steppe peoples. He added: 'In combat most of them bear double arms, carrying the lances high on their shoulders and holding the bows in their hands. They make use of both as need requires.'<sup>60</sup> Arab sources state that the Magyar leader 'rode out at the head of 20,000 horsemen'.<sup>61</sup> Magyar armies were self-sufficient in food, using preserved food and spare horse herds for milk and meat.<sup>62</sup> Water was plentiful in rivers and lakes in Europe.<sup>63</sup>

The Magyars are well-documented as using long-range reconnaissance, not common in Western European armies of the day. They also used terrain to advantage, (details below). The essence of Magyar tactics was manoeuvre, as is clear from their long withdrawal in 899 from Pavia to the Brenta River (c.260 kilometres), where they used a surprise morning attack to defeat Berengar I's much larger army. Like other steppe people, they worked to find an advantageous position from which to launch an attack, while weakening their opponents, as they did against the East Frankish levy in 910, where they used a feigned flight and ambush. They relied on ruses as well as outflanking and surrounding their enemies, using the bow to weaken the opposing line and only going to close combat when they already had the upper hand.<sup>64</sup> The Magyar's archery is best known through the Modena Prayer, *ab ungerorum nos defendas iaculis*, 'From the arrows of the Hungarians defend us', recorded before the year 900.<sup>65</sup> Contemporary sources, like the Byzantine emperor, Leo VI, wrote about their skill in mounted archery. 'When pursued they use their bows to great advantage', and: 'They devote a

<sup>59</sup> Zsolt Petkes and Balázs Sudár. Honfoglalók fegyverben. Cit., pp. 105-115.

<sup>60</sup> Leo VI. The Taktika of Leo VI. Leo VI. Trans: G. Dennis. Harvard University, 2010, Constitution XVIII: p. 453.

<sup>61</sup> Mihály Kmoskó. *Mohamedán Írók A Steppe Népeiről: Földrazji Irodalom I/1* (Ed.) Zimonyi, I. Balassi Kiadó, Budapest, 1997, p. 207.

<sup>62</sup> Kálmán NAGY. A honfoglalás korának hadtörténete, p.85.

<sup>63</sup> Cit.

<sup>64</sup> Cit., pp. 221-223.

<sup>65</sup> Cit., p. 210.

great deal of attention and training to archery on horseback.'66 Regino of Prüm in his Chronicle says of their fighting style: 'Killing a very few with the sword and many thousands with arrows, which they fire from their bows made of horn with such skill that it is almost impossible to avoid being hit by them.'67



Fig. 3. Reconstructed ninth-11th Century Magyar bow. Collection of Hungarikums. Online.

As an equestrian people, the horse and its accoutrements were as vital to the Magyars as their ships were to the Vikings. It is not surprising therefore, that their saddles formed a 'perfectly balanced structure', according to the archaeologist who reconstructed them from grave finds in the 1930s, Professor Gyula László.<sup>68</sup> The saddle needed to be comfortable for the horse and the rider. This allowed the Magyars to achieve their remarkable cavalry campaigns covering distances of up to 1,500 kilometres each way, an equine achievement not equalled until the 19th Century in Europe. A well-fitted saddle was key to any cavalry campaign. Edwards states of European cavalries outside Hungary: 'Enormous wastage resulted from ill-fitting saddles'.<sup>69</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that all modern military saddles are variations on the Hungarian saddle, such as the British Universal Pattern saddle or the U.S. McClellan saddle.<sup>70</sup>

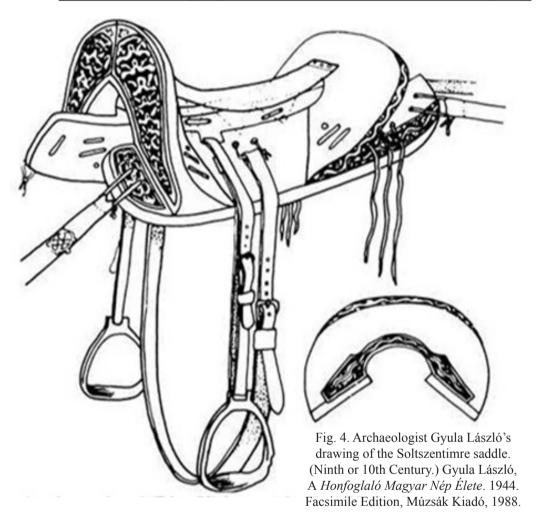
<sup>66</sup> Leo VI. The Taktika of Leo VI. Cit., p. 453.

<sup>67</sup> Regino. Trans.S. Maclean. *The Chronicle of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg*. Cit., p.205.

<sup>68</sup> Gyula László. A Honfoglaló Magyar Nép, Cit. p.347.

<sup>69</sup> Elwyn Hartley Edwards. *The Saddle. In Theory and Practice*. J.A. Allen, London, 1990, p.17.

<sup>70</sup> Cit., p.25.



The Magyar campaigns, either in alliance with one of the great powers of the time (as described above) or as punitive and preventative actions, have been downgraded by most Western historians to 'predatory raids'. The German authors use the terms 'raubzüge' or 'plünderungszüge' ('plundering campaigns') which remain standard terminology. These terms are misleading because the actions of a state aimed at holding and defending its newly won territory cannot be summed

<sup>71</sup> Charles Bowlus. 'The Early Hungarians as Mercenaries.' In J. France (Ed.), Mercenaries and Paid Men., Cit., p. 198.

<sup>72</sup> Rudolf Hiestand. *Pressburg 907. Eine Wende in der Geschichte des ostfränkischen Reiches?* In: Zeitschrift für Bayerische Landesgeschichte 57, 1994, Bayerischer Akademie, München, 1994, p.5.

up as 'predatory raids' or 'robber campaigns' because then all early medieval wars could be summarised as such. Charlemagne, often held up as a great military man, invaded the Avar Khaganate and his biographer wrote:

All the nobles of the Huns were killed in this war, all their glory passed away; their money and all their treasures that they had collected for so long were carried away. Nor can the memory of man recall any war waged against the Franks by which they were so much enriched and their wealth so increased.<sup>73</sup>

Does this mean Charlemagne's campaign against the Avars were a series of predatory raids? Charlemagne had a military concept (conquest) in mind, as did the Magyar state – survival. Therefore, even if Charlemagne's Franks were greatly enriched by plundering the Avar capital, their goal was a military one. In the same way, the goal of the Magyar campaigns was initially to help their allies (East Franks and Byzantines) and once these had turned on them, to destroy their armies (907-955) and stay on the defensive until 1030, and then repeatedly destroying invading armies of the HRE until 1054.

Unlike bandits and pirates, military actions need a state to provide an operational goal, in this case, the destruction of the enemy's ability to invade Hungary. Another difference between, for example, Viking raids, and Magyar military campaigns, was that the Magyar central power (two princes and the Grand Prince) organised them, prepared them diplomatically, and led them, with the exception of the Grand Prince, who did not leave the Carpathian Basin.

# On the Vikings, Abels says:

'According to the Annals of St-Bertin, these ... Vikings had established themselves the previous year near the River Somme. There they had come to an agreement with King Charles the Bald to drive off or kill a different band of Vikings, who had built a fortress on the island of Oissel in the Seine, from which they had conducted raids deep into the countryside.<sup>76</sup>

The annals referred to add that Charles the Bald supported these Vikings against those on the island:

<sup>73</sup> Eginhard. *The Life of Charlemagne*. Trans. A.J. Grant. In Parentheses Publications, Cambridge, Ontario, 1999, p.13.

<sup>74</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. US. Joint Publication 1-02, JP.3-0.

<sup>75</sup> Kálmán NAGY. A honfoglalás korának hadtörténete, pp. 133-135.

<sup>76</sup> Richard, ABELS. *Alfred the Great. War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England.* (Routledge, Oxford and New York, 2013). p.106.

To support the besiegers, Charles ordered a levy to be raised from his realm to bring in 5,000 lb of silver and a large amount of livestock and corn, so that the realm should not be looted.<sup>77</sup>

Danish historian Johannes Brøndsted wrote: 'This kind of offer was by no means rare among the Vikings, who were frequently willing to fight as mercenaries against their own countrymen.' 78

This never happened with the Magyars, but instead, those wishing Magyar military aid had to approach the Grand Prince, that is, the central authority. While many Vikings acted as mercenaries, the Magyars did not.

# Causes of Long-Range Magyar Campaigns

The reason for the change of policy within the Magyar Grand Duchy can be found in the about-face of the East Franks after the death of Arnulf of Carinthia on December 8, 899. His son, Louis IV (The Child), was a minor and came under the influence of the Church which disapproved of the 'heathen alliance'. Thus, when the Magyars sent emissaries in 900 to renew the alliance, these were arrested under the excuse of 'spying'.79 The Magyars responded by overrunning the Bavarian Ostmark (modern Western Hungary) and attacking Bavaria. There were some clashes with Margrave Liutpold's army, in which Liutpold had some success. But there were two further events that, without doubt, turned the allied Magyars into enemies. The first was the murder of the second man in the polity, Prince Kurszán (or Kusál) who attended a 'peace feast' on the boundary River Fischa in 902 (some sources say 904), 'in evil deceit' as the German chronicler put it. 80 Perhaps the East Franks hoped that Kurszán was the king and his death would cause confusion among the Magyars. It did the opposite. After moves and counter-moves, most of them local, King Louis and Margrave Liutpold raised the entire Bavarian force (Heerbann) and a royal Frankish army and invaded the outer frontier of the Magyar realm, aiming to capture the key fortress of Breza-

<sup>77</sup> The Annals of St-Bertin. (Manchester University Press, Manchester.) 1991, p. 95.

<sup>78</sup> Johannes, Brøndsted. *The Vikings. The Background to a Fierce and Fascinating Civilisation.* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, UK), p.49.

<sup>79</sup> Szabolcs DE VAJAY. S. De Vajay. *Der Eintritt Des Ungarischen Stammebundes in Die Europäische Geschichte.* (862-933). v. Hase & Kochltr Verlag, Mainz., 1968, pp. 31-2.

<sup>80</sup> DE VAJAY. Der Eintritt Des Ungarischen Stammebundes, Cit., pp. 33-5.

lauspurc, or Pressburg, in 907. (Modern Bratislava.) The Magyars won a decisive victory, utterly destroying the invading Bavarian army, killing Liutpold and most of the Bavarian nobility and high clergy.<sup>81</sup> These three events, doubtless seen as atrocities by the Magyars, clearly led to a change in their plans, and they, realising they could not live in peace beside a power like East Francia, went onto the offensive

#### Overlooked battles

Many authors downplay or ignore Magyar battlefield victories, concentrating on one partial and one complete defeat they suffered in 933 and 955. However, neither of these was anywhere near Hungary and following their complete defensive victory in 907, it is necessary to consider their offensive victories and later, their successful defence of their land for a balanced view of what are misleadingly called 'Magyar raids'. In 908, for instance, a Magyar army crossed Bavaria to support the Elbe Slav Dalamintz tribe, who had called on them in 906. Striking from the south at Swabia and Thuringia, they were met by Thuringia's Duke Burchard, Count Egino and the Bishop of Würzburg, Rudolf I, leading an army of Franconians, Saxons and Thuringians near Eisenach. Again, the East Franks suffering a total defeat, with all three commanders killed.<sup>82</sup>

The Magyars won possibly their greatest victory in 910 near Augsburg, better known for their defeat in the area in 955. King Louis the Child, now a teenager, raised the 'general levy of the Franks', comprising forces from Swabia and the royal army.<sup>83</sup> The goal of this army was, in Liudprand's words, that King Louis was 'about to launch a war against the Hungarians.'<sup>84</sup> That this constituted a serious threat to the Magyar state was clear, as more troops were being raised than had invaded Magyar-Land in 907. Then, the Bavarians were the main force, while in this case, the Royal Levy, plus that of Swabia, Franconia and Lorraine were raised. The Magyars, as can be seen from the events, defeated them in detail, engaging first one gathered force, then the other. This can hardly be shrugged off as 'raiding'!

<sup>81</sup> Cit., pp. 41-43.

<sup>82</sup> Cit., p.41.

<sup>83</sup> John Keegan, J. A History of Warfare. Pimlico, London, 1994, p. 287.

<sup>84</sup> The Complete Works of Liudprand. Cit., p.75.

Liudprand describes the battle, stating the Magyars' appearance on the Lech River plain on June 12 was unexpected, indicating they had good intelligence. The chronicler records a long battle, with the Franks holding the upper hand, until the Magyars combined a feigned retreat with ambushes, and in Liudprand's words: 'The king himself marvelled that after being the victor he was now vanquished, and it was all the more burdensome for him because unexpected.'86 While King Louis survived the battle, the military commander, Count Gausbert of Swabia, was killed. The other force, of Franconians and Lotharingians, was crushed on the Rednitz River, inside the Duchy of Franconia. Gebhard, Duke of Lorraine was also killed. Thus, the Magyars defeated the East Frankish Royal army and that of Swabia, then the combined forces of Franconia and Lorraine in a matter of ten days: all this in the middle of Frankish territory. The *Continuator* of Regino's Chronicle wrote: 'The Franks fought the Hungarians on the frontier between Bavaria and Francia, and pitiably they either fled or were defeated.'88

Hardly any English-language histories discuss these truly important battles, which pitted Magyar armies against the most powerful military force in Catholic Western Europe. Their complete victories at Pressburg; the Eisenach; the Lech River and the Rednitz deserve to be closely studied, instead of ignored.<sup>89</sup>

The first decade of this East Frank-Magyar war can be seen as a complete success on the part of the Magyars, who simultaneously avoided the fate of the Avars and counterattacked the Franks. The military aspect of the next four decades can be summarised as the Magyars strategically taking the offensive, with their enemies, the East and West Franks, the Byzantines and Italians suffering attacks, but also on the home front, a stronger control of Hungary, definition of borders and gradual acceptance by their neighbours and former opponents. <sup>90</sup> The decade 900-910 saw independent Magyar military actions and victories, while the next decade 910-920, saw alliances, such as with Arnulf 'the Bad' of Bavaria and Berengar I of Italy. One example of these allied campaigns would be that of

<sup>85</sup> Cit., p.77.

<sup>86</sup> Cit.

<sup>87</sup> DE VAJAY. Der Eintritt Des Ungarischen Stammebundes, p. 49.

<sup>88</sup> Regino. Trans. Simon Maclean. *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe: The Chronicle of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg*. Cit., p.232.

<sup>89</sup> Charles Bowlus. 'The Early Hungarians as Mercenaries.' Cit.,p. The entire article is dedicated to this outdated idea. Also see Keegan, Keen, etc.

<sup>90</sup> Kálmán NAGY. A honfoglalás, pp. 136-173.

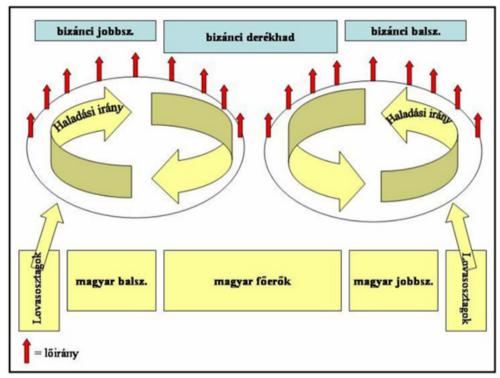


Fig. 5. Zs. Zólyomi. Hadmérnök. VI/1. (Ludovika Military Academy, Budapest, 2011), p.335.

Berengar I, who called on his Magyar allies against rebel dukes in 919.91

Magyar/steppe tactics are described by contemporary Arab author Al Masudi, in the battle of W.l.n.d.r, in 934 (a year after the much-touted defeat of a Magyar force in Saxony). In this clash, a joint Magyar-Pecheneg force defeated a Bulgarian-Byzantine army. The battle site is thought to be either Belgrade or Bulgarophygon (today's Babaeski, about 160 kilometres from Constantinople). After a day's inconclusive fighting, the Pechenegs attacked the Byzantine centre with non-stop archery by forming continuous circles on the left and right of the main force. The losses sustained were physically and psychologically unbearable for the Byzantines and they charged the centre of the joint steppe army. The Magyar main force fired one barrage of arrows and went to close combat.

Masudi reports the Magyars attacking from both flanks using swords, destroy-

<sup>91</sup> DE VAJAY. Der Eintritt, pp. 38-9 and 62-5.

ing the Byzantine-Bulgarian army. 92 (Of course, this does not mean the Magyars' defeat at Riade in 933 should be ignored, but neither should it be the only example of open battles in the 930s.) This was followed immediately by a Magyar invasion of Byzantium's Balkan provinces, reaching the walls of Constantinople. The Patrician Theophanes then made a five-year peace with them. 93

Magyar relations with Byzantium differed from those with the West. While Western envoys visited the Magyars, no high-ranking Magyar held discussions with the kings of East or West Francia or those of Italy. Such treaties as were made were done through intermediaries, with some exceptions, such as when Arnulf 'The Bad' fled to Hungary in 914.94 Arnulf, as Duke of Bavaria, returned to his throne in 917 with Magyar military assistance. In this case a high-ranking Western European leader made a treaty with the highest-ranking Magyars (renewed in 926), but he is the exception rather than the rule.

By way of contrast, Magyar leaders of the highest (Grand Princely) rank visited the Byzantine court in 948.95 These men were among the highest dignitaries of the land. Bulcsú, as Constantine Porphyrogenitos tells us, in the DAI, was the *karchas* (*horka* in Hungarian) and a prince of the Árpád House, the great-grandson of Árpád *Termatzous* in Constantine's rendering, *Tormás* in Hungarian. No officials of such high rank ever visited a Western court.96

Warfare also continued on and off between the Magyars and the Byzantines, initially because the latter attempted to use them for their own purposes, and later because both saw an enemy in the Bulgars. Relations were peaceful, as the second-highest ranking leader of the Magyars, the *gyula* led a force to Constantinople in 953 and was, like Bulcsú, baptised, but returned with a bishop, Hierotheos,

<sup>92</sup> János B. Szabó. *A középkor magyarországi könnyűlovassága. X-XVI század.* Attraktor, Gödöllő, 2017, pp. 110-112.

<sup>93</sup> Constantine Porphyrogenitus. *De Administrando Imperio, (DAI)*, Ed. Gy Moravcsik. Trans. R.J.H. Jenkins. (Harvard University, Washington D.C.,1985), p.56.

<sup>94</sup> Tibor Joó. 'Árpád-kori emlékek Regensburgban és Passauban', In: A Herman Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve. XXVII. (Herman Ottó Múzeum. Miskolc, 1989), p. 326.

<sup>95</sup> Kristó Gyula-Makk Ferenc. *A kilencedik és tizedik század története*. (Pannonica, Budapest, 2001), p.128

<sup>96</sup> De Administrando Imperio, (DAI), p. 179.

<sup>97</sup> Jonathan Shepard. 'Byzantine Writers on the Hungarians in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries', In: *Emergent Elites and Byzantium in the Balkans and East-Central Europe*. (Routledge, Oxford-New York, 2016), pp. 100-114.

to convert 'Turkia' to Christianity. Relations varied between Hungary and Byzantium, in the next few centuries, but were generally peaceful. Hungary's first Christian king, Stephen I, assisted Emperor Basil II in ending the First Bulgarian Empire in 1018. 99

In the next decade, in alliance with Hugh of Provence, a Magyar army defeated a Moorish force from the fortress of Fraxinetum in southern Provence in 942. 100 They then crossed the Pyrenees, and laid siege to Lerida in the Caliphate of Cordoba. 101 The siege failed, but they captured an important commander and forced the Caliphate to pay ransom. 102 Here they crossed both the Alps and the Pyrenees, covering some 1,500 kilometres each way, a feat likely not equalled in European cavalry warfare until the Napoleonic Wars. As can be seen from the foregoing, the list of key Magyar victories in open battle is long and the study of these long-range cavalry campaigns is unhappily missing from medieval histories, diminishing the understanding of cavalry warfare in Europe, not to mention the activities of the Magyar Grand Duchy.

In total, there were at least 45 major campaigns sent out of the Grand Duchy between 898 and 970, of these 24 were aimed at the main threat, the German lands; seven against Italy; another seven against West Francia; two against Iberia and five against Byzantine territories, including Italian lands. <sup>103</sup> Some five were unsuccessful, while some 40 campaigns achieved their goal. <sup>104</sup> In the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, Hungary also successfully defended itself against invasions from the HRE. <sup>105</sup> They won six large-scale open battles, partially lost one and totally lost another. Open battles, both defensive and offensive, of which ten are victories, against Europe's most powerful armies cannot be described simply as 'raids'.

<sup>98</sup> Kristó-Makk. A kilencedik és a tizedik század. Cit. pp. 129-130.

<sup>99</sup> Gyula, Moravcsik. *Byzantium and the Magyars*. (Adolf Hakkert Publishers, Amsterdam, 1970), p.62.

<sup>100</sup> Ferenc Makk: 'a fraxinetumi csata'. In: Bölcsészettudományok 6. pp. 237-246. 2014.

<sup>101</sup> Cit

<sup>102</sup> Károly Czeglédy. "Új arab forrás a magyarok 942. évi spanyolországi kalandozásáról". Magyar Őstörténeti Tanulmányok. Körösi Csorna Társaság, MTA. Budapest, 1985, pp. 130-131.

<sup>103</sup> Kálman Nagy. A honfoglalás, p. 168.

<sup>104</sup> Cit.

<sup>105</sup> László Veszprémy. 'A II századi magyar-német háborúk.' *Korunk*. III Folyam, 2019 március. Korunk Akadémia Komp Press, p. 6-14.

# Defensive battles

Following the well-known Magyar defeat at the Second Battle of the Lechfeld near Augsburg in 955, they adopted a defensive posture towards the West but carried on their attacks against Byzantium until 970. That King Otto I, later Emperor Otto the Great, did not defeat 'the Magyars' in 955 but only an expeditionary force is underlined by the fact that he never tried to invade Hungary, despite following an expansionist policy which involved invading many other lands, including West Francia, the Elbe Slav lands; Bohemia and Italy. 106 While Otto did not attempt an invasion of Hungary, his brother, Duke Henry I of Bavaria, carried out a minor invasion of the border region, which appears to have made very little impact on either side. 107 It is thought-provoking to note that Pope John XII, in his feud with Otto in 962, sent letters to Byzantium and Hungary asking for military aid. 108 Why would the pope turn to a people who were utterly defeated, lacking the ability to reach Italy and fight for him? Further, it was Otto who first sought peace with the Hungarians in 973, sending Bishop Bruno of Verden to Hungary. 109 Following this mission, 12 Magyar nobles arrived at the German court in Ouedlinburg, but no-one of the highest rank. 110

The first serious invasion of Hungary since 907 took place under the Salian Emperor Conrad II in 1030. His army, which included contingents from Luxembourg, Lorraine and Moravia was repulsed by Hungarian King Stephen I due to strong border defences and Hungarian cavalry manoeuvre.<sup>111</sup> The Niederaltaich

<sup>106</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg. *Chronicon*. Ottonian Germany. Book Two. Trans. David A. Warner. (Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 89, 123.

<sup>107</sup> Widukind of Corvey. *Deeds of the Saxons*, Trans with notes. Bernard S. Bachrach and David S. Bachrach Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press 2014, Book Two, 93 briefly mentions "two victories" over the Magyars by Henry in 950, but nothing of the invasion. The other source is the Hildesheim Annals. Bethany Hope Allen, The Annals of Hildesheim, master's Thesis, University of New Hampshire, Durham, 2007, p.64. The Annals say: for the year 950: "In 950, a great war was waged between the Bavarians and the Hungarians."

<sup>108</sup> Liudprand of Cremona. *Chronicle of Otto's Reign*. Trans. F.A. Wright. Routledge, London, 1930, pp.219-220.

<sup>109</sup> István Zombory, Pál Cséfalvy and Maria Antoinietta Di Angelis. *A Thousand Years of Christianity in Hungary*. Hungarian Catholic Bishops Conference, Budapest, 2001, p. 29.

<sup>110</sup> István Nemeskürty. *Magyar Századok. Gondolatforgácsok a nemzet életrajzához.* Szabad Tér Kiadó, Budapest 2009, Ch 1 paragraph 1.

<sup>111</sup> László Veszprémy. 'A II századi magyar-német háborúk', p.6.



Fig. 6. Illustration on page 61 of the *Chronicon Pictum* showing the sinking of Emperor Henry III's ships at Pressburg. (Public Domain. Wikimedia Commons)

Annals say: 'Emperor Conrad...however, returned from Hungary without an army, without having achieved anything, as his army was pressed by starvation and was captured at Vienna.'112 Following a violent interregnum, Saint Stephen's cousin King Andrew I, was soon subject to an attack by Gebhard, Bishop of Regensburg in 1050. Andrew replied with a raid of his own, and the emperor, Henry III, prepared for a major invasion of the Hungarian Kingdom.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Cit.

<sup>113</sup> Cit., p.10.

For his 1051 invasion, Emperor Henry III – considered by many as one of the most powerful HRE emperors -- assembled a great army at Regensburg, bringing troops from all his realms, including the German duchies, Bohemians, Poles and men of Lombardy.<sup>114</sup>

This mighty force invaded Hungary in three columns: North of the River Danube under Dukes Welf III of Carinthia and Bretislav I of Bohemia; a fleet under Bishop Gebhard on the river carrying supplies and additional troops; and the main force under the emperor invaded from Carinthia, entering Hungary in northern Transdanubia. <sup>115</sup> However, King Andrew ordered a scorched earth policy, so the emperor's army arrived near the capital, Székesfehérvár, almost starving. Meanwhile, Hungarian and Pecheneg light cavalry harrassed the columns with night-and-day mounted archery, and wore the imperial army down. <sup>116</sup> Gebhard's supplies never reached Henry due to a ruse which tricked the bishop into withdrawing to Bavaria.

Prince Béla came behind the main force with Hungarian knights and eventually the imperial army threw away its shields and armour as it fled north from Székesfehérvár through hills, known as Vértes, (armoured) because of all the shields and other items thrown away by the knights. Subsequent, smaller invasions were repulsed. This invasion was a key moment in the history of the Hungarian Kingdom and an important test for its defences. Unlike neighbouring Bohemia and Poland, which were subjected to repeated incursions and partial or complete conquests from the empire, Hungary confirmed its independence in these defensive campaigns.

This author believes that separating the long-range external campaigns of the Magyars/Hungarians from the earlier and later attacks of the East Franks/HRE is myopic and causes a type of optical illusion in terms of cause and effect.

<sup>114</sup> József Bánlaky. 2. 'III. Henrik negyedik hadjárata Magyarország ellen 1051-ben.' In: A Magyar Nemzet Hadtörténelme. (Grill, Budapest, 1942), Hungarian Electronic Library. Online.

<sup>115</sup> Józef Bánlaky, Cit.

<sup>116</sup> Józef Bánlaky, Cit.

<sup>117</sup> László Veszprémy. 'A II századi magyar-német háborúk', Cit., pp. 10-13 and Bánlaky, Cit.

# Magyar Plunder and Looting

Contemporary sources are full of Magyar plunder and tribute, and archaeologists have found some 15 tons of silver, both from these sources and from trade. Liudprand's work is typical: 'The nation of the Hungarians, greedy, rash, ignorant of almighty God but well versed in every crime, avid only for murder and plunder.' Regino of Prüm, while condemning the pagan Magyars' plundering, took a softer line while commenting on the "Babenberg Feud". He wrote of Adalbert of Babenberg: 'He .... destroying everything with slaughter and pillage... returned to the fortress of Babenberg with his men loaded down with booty and prodigious plunder.' Plant of Magyars' plunder.

Hungarian coin finds from Western Europe underline the small part played by plunder in the Magyar expeditions. Despite the largest number of campaigns being led against Germany, only 7 percent of coins originated from there. Of the rest, 21 percent were from West Francia, and as many as 67 percent from Italy. If the Magyars' estimated 15 tons of loot were their sole object, then they failed miserably. Comparing the Vikings' plunder and tribute, estimates vary, but a Swedish source puts it at 100 tons (admittedly over a longer time). According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, in 1007 alone, some 36,000 pounds, or 13,4 tons, were paid to them by King Aethelred II to buy peace. Halsall points out that levying tribute on a defeated foe, as well as plunder, laying waste the land and other brutal practices were commonplace in the Carolingian realms. Halsall describes another reason that could explain why the Magyars, as part of a given military campaign, burned and looted: 'Harrying territory, burning houses and crops, killing or dispersing livestock, ripping up vines ...struck at the political legitimacy of the opposing realm. A king or lord was, after all, supposed to

<sup>118</sup> László Veszprémy. 'A honfoglalás és kalandozás kora.' In: *Magyarország hadtörténete I. A kezdetetkől 1536-ig.* Ed. László Veszprémy. (Zrínyi Kiadó, Budapest 2017), p.19.

<sup>119</sup> Liudprand of Cremona. *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*. Trans. P. Squatriti. (Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 2007),p. 56.

<sup>120</sup> Regino. S. Maclean. *The Chronicle of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg* .Cit, pp.229-30

<sup>121</sup> László Veszprémy. 'A honfoglalás és kalandozás kora', p.19.

<sup>122</sup> Rune Edberg. *Runriket Täby-Vallentuna – en handledning*. Stockholms läns museum, Stockholm, 2007, p. 11.

<sup>123</sup> Robert COHEN. "The Land Tax in England, 991-1162." Ph. D thesis, University of Oxford, 2018, p.20.

defend his subjects, followers or clients and their property from these sorts of depredations.' <sup>124</sup> Comparing near-contemporary Frankish attitudes to those of the Magyars, the Grand Duke, or any other high-ranking leader, would derive great honour from imposing tribute on the German or Byzantine emperors.

Another argument against the idea that these long-range expeditions were solely for plunder was raised decades ago by Bálint Csanád, and this has been followed up by Erwin Gáll. He points out that looking from the Carpathian Basin, the campaigns did not go where the real wealth was, in the north and east:

If they were only for the intent of looting, the campaigns would also have been conducted in other directions (for economic considerations). From the 8th century on, the transcontinental trade system has developed significantly (along the northern part of the Silk Road, as well as the north-south waterway of the Volga River). As illustrated by the amount of Arab coins coming to the northern parts of "Eastern Europe" and Scandinavia, trade with Scandinavia, the northern Slavs, the Volga Bulgarians and the Arab world intensified. <sup>125</sup>

# Summary

The question therefore is not 'did the Magyars plunder and demand tribute', but rather, 'were their attacks exclusively done for this purpose'? The scientific discoveries mentioned above show clearly that the Magyars were not tribes of wandering nomads and therefore, had no need to live off plunder only.

The Magyar tribal/clan confederation formed a state on the steppe and resolved to move to the Carpathian Basin in the mid-to-late ninth century. This society changed drastically in the tenth century, with most Magyars mixing with the majority population in the basin, the Avars. The widespread use of agriculture in ninth and tenth century Hungary, the existence of large-scale iron smelting and smithing, tanneries and other trades, shows even more clearly the complexity of their society. Their contribution to transportation has gone unremarked, but they had outstanding saddlers, wainwrights and cartwrights as well as excellent bowyers, arrowsmiths and swordsmiths and all the trades needed to live a mixed agricultural-pastoral lifeway. It has been shown that they traded as far away as

<sup>124</sup> Cit., p.18.

<sup>125</sup> Ervin Gáll. The Source of power and the Hungarian conquest – subjugation and Integration (English summary. Magyarságkutató Intézet, Budapest, 2019) p.323.

Crimea and Persia, again indicating that they had no need to 'raid' from the relatively poor West. The Magyar military campaigns, both defensive and offensive, showed a very high standard of horsemastership which remained part of the country's culture, and their battle tactics were highly complex and gave them the upper hand in most of their encounters with Western European armies, both offensively and defensively. The most important aspect of the long-range Magyar campaigns to the West and south is not that they plundered or laid waste the land, but that the Magyars were able to keep their enemies outside their new home in the 123 years between 907 and 1030. By keeping the expansionist powers, like the HRE, outside their lands, the Magyars were able to convert to Christianity in peace and establish a Christian Hungarian kingdom that incorporated both Roman and steppe ideas of statehood and that was strong, independent, and stable for six hundred years.

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Cristo appare a San Mercurio e a Santa Caterina di Alessandria nell'atto di calpestare Giuliano l'Apostata la cui morte, supplicata da San Basilio difronte ad un'icona di San Mercurio, fu attribuita all'intercessione del santo. Icona del laboratorio di Georgios Klontzas, Creta, ca 1560/70.

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