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**A Critical Inquiry into the Latin Sources of the 10th-
century Hungarian Incursions**

Dissertation abstracts

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I.

The chronology of the Hungarian incursions to Western Europe was established by such emblematic 19th-century positivist historians as Leopold Ranke, Rudolf Köpke, and, perhaps more importantly, Georg Waitz and Ernst Dümmler, who finished and perfected the work of their predecessors. Being the editors and commentators of the MGH series, the above-mentioned scholars were the pioneers of the method of source-criticism. Although they evaluated the sources of the Hungarian campaigns mainly in the context of the events of East Francia, their reconstruction, let alone Károly Szabó's doubtlessly original investigation, has been used as the solid foundation of the monographs devoted to the Hungarian military campaigns in the last 150 years. While Gyula Pauler referred directly to the MGH handbook series *Jahrbücher des Deutschen Reichs* in 1900, János Karácsonyi and Bálint Hóman followed the dissertation of Rudolf Lüttich, published in 1910, in their summaries. Lüttich's monograph was the first concise study on the topic published in a foreign language, and included not only the sources of East Francia, but that of the West and Italy as well. József Bánlaky's chapters on the incursions in his voluminous military history were also based on thorough research, but the most comprehensive book, which attempted to interrogate as much charter evidence and other sources of local history as possible, is still Gina Fasoli's *Le incursioni ungarie in Europa nel secolo X* of 1945. Fasoli's somewhat modified chronology was applied in Szabolcs Vajay's admirable, but far from flawless study, which presented its material in the context of 10th-century diplomatic relations. György

Györffy had Vajay's chronology in sight in his chapters in the Concise History of Hungary published by the Hungarian Academy of Science, while Gyula Kristó, who developed an alternative interpretation to those of Vajay and Györffy, remained faithful to Lüttich. Elaborated by 19th-century German historiographers, the skeleton of the events has been altered by generations of scholars, which led to numerous unreflected contradictions.

Gina Fasoli already had the opportunity to exploit Albin F. Gombos' thematic source collection, the *Catalogus Fontium Historiae Hungaricae*. Although the three volumes of the *Catalogus* contain nearly all excerpts with reference to Hungarians before 1301, including those referring to the incursions, their hierarchy has not yet been established. It is, therefore, difficult to separate trustworthy accounts from distorted ones, no matter whether they appear in the disguise of history, hagiography or poetry. Moreover, the *Catalogus* can be expanded by several new items, even if of minor importance. My chief goal was to re-examine contemporary accounts (annals, chronicles, hagiographic narratives, charters), to decompose conflicting chronologies and to establish a new thread of events based on all accessible evidence.

From the outset I intended to reflect upon some tendencies of contemporary historiography. Modern historiographers in Europe are far less perceptible to 10th century Hungarian incursions as their medieval predecessors. The approach of the limited number of modern studies is different depending both on regional research traditions and the character of the surviving sources. Such tendency is that scholars tend to display the losses caused by the intruders as minimal, or at least to highlight the

restricted nature of the negative effects as opposed to the traditional disaster scenarios. Particularly French historians follow the strategy of dismissing the ‘Hungarian tradition’ of certain regions based on the by no means embellished narrations of the contemporaries, and the dubious tendencies of charter evidence and retrospective hagiographic literature. In order to highlight the virtues and problems of this sceptical approach I devoted a separate chapter to the Francophone historiography of the invasions. This is followed by a case-study on the contemporary and retrospective sources of the Hungarian campaigns in Burgundy, in which I argued against recent minimalist views.

Amongst the numerous scholarly works of Hungarian authors only Szabolcs Vajay’s above-mentioned monograph had an impact abroad, doubtlessly due to the fact that it was published in German. Although most of his results withstood the test of time, his chief theory on the alleged alliance between the Carolingians and the Hungarians is definitely incorrect, as I demonstrated in another case-study.

II.

My first goal of revising chronology has been realised in the frame of a critical handbook of sources. I evaluated all items in context of the relevant historico-philological problems. My most important model was Wilhelm Wattenbach’s handbook, the *Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen im Mittelalter bis zur Mitte des dreizehnten Jahrhunderts*, published first in 1866, which surveyed contemporary sources of medieval German history region by region. On the basis of the most recent secondary literature, the

20th-century continuations of the *Wattenbach* revalued and complemented the description of each source. As opposed to the generalist attitude of this series, the focus of my study required a more specialised analysis, which would have involved examining both contemporary and retrospective sources. The most comprehensive book in this field, which I also regarded as a model, is Albert d'Haenens' excellent *Les invasions normandes en Belgique au IX^e siècle* (1967). Although controversial, this is an exemplary monograph on the medieval historiography of the Norman invasions in the present-day territory of Belgium. However, due to the limit on the thesis' length, I could not devote as much attention to each source as they would have deserved. This explains why I had to omit the systematic analysis of retrospective sources, including Ekkehard IV's congenial anecdotes, and my observations on the 'incursion-novel' of the early Hungarian Latin historiography. Only the traditions of the Reichenau abbey received a separate chapter, owing to the fact that they offer valuable contribution to the revaluation of the chronology. Unfortunately, only in the case-study on Burgundy could I present all retrospective sources. These limits compelled me to leave out those sources of which much has been written in Hungarian (*Annales Fuldenses*, Regino, Johannes Diaconus, Thietmar von Merseburg, *Dado Letter*), moreover, in some cases accessible in a full-length Hungarian translation with erudite introduction and notes (Liutprand, Widukind). I did not neglect their accounts, but scrutinised them together with sources much less in the spotlight.

III.

I set the critical analysis of the contemporary Latin sources of 10th-century Hungarian campaigns as the chief goal of this dissertation. As nowadays Western European literature is characterised by a minimalist attitude, I considered it of utmost importance to highlight the fact that the necessary caution towards our sources does not justify their total dismissal. The best example is served perhaps by the medieval traditions of the monastery of Savigny in Burgundy, where an authentic 10th-century ‘Hungarian-tradition’ can be verified through charter evidence behind the allegedly suspicious ‘Hun-tradition.’ In the case of the Reichenau historiography, we could witness the process through which early accounts on Hungarian attacks were reshaped into ‘Hun-traditions’ and became essential components of monastic and urban identity. The dramatic story of the brothers, whose endeavour to abduct their sister from the monastery of Buchau resulted in their death in a skirmish, found its way to Hermann of Reichenau’s *Chronicon* through annalistic and possibly oral sources as well. The violent death of the brothers was soon attributed to the Hungarians, not irrespective of the fact that it also happened in 902. The narrative was later connected by late medieval authors to the Huns and Charlemagne, who were more significant for the medieval cultural memory. A comparable formation is noticeable in another passage of Hermann: his taciturn report on the destruction of Basel by the Hungarians was enriched by similar colours during the later centuries of the middle ages.

Szabolcs Vajay's 1968 monograph is the most influential book dedicated to the Hungarian incursions and also of the most original vision. On the basis of primary evidence, however, one has to refute Vajay's arguments in favour of the alleged alliance between the last Carolingians and the Hungarians, as I showed in the third chapter of my thesis.

With the systematic scrutiny of our sources, I managed to settle several chronological questions, while in other cases evidence turned out to be indecisive. The problems raised by the entry of the year 863 in the Swabian annalistic tradition or the Hungarian defeat at the river Fischa and the mysterious circumstances of the death of Kusal belong to the latter case. However, my attempts at correcting or specifying our picture of these campaigns proved to be successful in even more cases. Inquiry into Swabian annalistic tradition and Hermann von Reichenau's *Chronicon* posed the possibility that the final subjugation of the Moravians happened in 905 rather than in 902. The destruction of Basel, again recorded by Hermann, was placed on 21 January 917 in Hungarian historiography only due to a scribal error. By comparing different witnesses of the Lotharingian annalistic tradition I showed that the 911 campaign had not affected Burgundy and the Hungarians had crossed the Rhein only for a short time yet, far in the North near Andernach. Bavarian annals reinforce my view that the Hungarian defeat at Wels happened in 945, which was followed by another defeat in 948 in Nordgau and a victory at a place called *Lova* in 950. Henry I of Bavaria gained victory east of the Enns on 20 November 950. As opposed to the previous consensus, the 893 entry of the *Annales Hersfeldenses* on a Bavarian-

Hungarian military conflict represents genuine contemporary Frankish tradition. In cases of the incursions into France our principal guide was Flodoard de Reims, who regularly proves to be our best counter-check in other European campaigns as well. Contrary to the view of Hervé Mouillebouche I showed that in 935 the Hungarian marauders appeared not only in the royal Burgundy (*Gallia Cisalpina*), but in the ducal one in the territory of West Francia too. Contemporary annalistic sources, particularly the long-forgotten *Notae Senonenses* clearly demonstrate that the invaders did ravage the territory of Sens in 937. As opposed to the old view, on 21th February of the same year they reached not Laon but the city of Metz.

Through the analysis of Southern Italian annals it has been revealed that the Hungarians arrived at Apulia not on 4th February 922, but somewhat later on the 25th of February. The sole account of the 904 incursion to Italy was preserved by the annals of a notorious 18th-century forger; therefore it can be deleted from the chronology. The second appearance of the Hungarian mercenaries near Rome (surely in the service of King Hugh) must have happened around 932. The 947 action against the Byzantine Otranto in Southern Italy may have been a conscious intimidation of the Byzantines and bound to be in connection with Bulcsú's visit in Constantinople in 948.

Contemporary necrologies enabled me to make some further observations. To all probability, the necrology of the monastery of Remiremont preserved the names of those monks who were killed in the Alsace monastery of Murbach. Here find we the first case where the Hun-Hungarian identity emerges in the context of everyday literacy as part of

legal writing. The scribe who copied the *Necrology of Merseburg* may have erred when he recorded the names of the victims of the battle of Pressburg to 29th June (*III. Kal. Iul.*) instead of 5th July (*III. Non. Iul.*), therefore there is no reason to see the combat as an event lasting for several days. We read in the editions of the *Wissenbourg Necrology* that duke Lel died on 15th August, but this easily misinterpretable entry is more likely to refer to the death of a Christian ruler, Saint Stephen. The necrology of the cathedral church of Vercelli states that the clergy of the dome was massacred on 8th of December; probably this is the date when the Hungarians killed bishop Liutward of Vercelli, who is regularly mistaken for his contemporary, bishop Liutward of Como, who died on 24th June several years later.

The *gesta* of Folcuin is one of the excellent primary sources of the rebellion against Otto I in 954. It also permits us to make an educated guess about the motivations of the Hungarian army. He allows us to think that after the reconciliation of the rebels and the king, the Hungarian troops found a new commissioner in person of Count Reiner III of Hainault, which would explain the siege of the monastery of Lobbes and the city of Cambrai, the two being enemies of the count. Hagiographic accounts preserved precious information about the 10th-century afflictions of ecclesiastical institutions. In Flodoard's *Historia Remensis Ecclesiae* we find that the community of Saint Germanus of Montfaucon happened to reside in their Rhine estate Wesseling with the relics of Saint Baldrick when the Hungarians appeared in the neighbourhood. The *Dado Letter*, which discusses the origin of the marauding Hungarians, was surely written in the Montfaucon community, but the unpleasant experience with

the pagans could strike the canons of Saint Germanus in Wesseling either in 917 or 919. The hagiographic *topoi* can undermine the trustworthiness of the *vitae* and *miracula*, but I have to stress that in cases of such contemporary narratives as the *Vita Sancti Fridolini* and the *Vita Sancti Landoaldi* the visit of the Hungarians appears as a circumstance of authentication, which could have easily been checked by a contemporary member of the audience. The biography of Saint Wiborada and the 10th-century historical notices of Saint Gallen prove that the stereotypical nature of these texts is not enough to question the fact that the Hungarians sacked Saint Gallen and helped Wiborada to martyrdom. A highly formulaic episode of the *Translatio et miracula Sancti Marci* attests that the memory of a famous Christian shrine in the Carpathian Basin was kept alive in the 10th-century abbey of Reichenau. This sanctuary cannot be else but the church of Saint Hadrian in Mosaburg/Zalavár, where the saint's relics were venerated until the Hungarian conquest.

By a thorough examination of charter evidence I clarified the chronology of the grand campaign to Italy in 899–900. As the charter of the monastery of Altino clearly attests, the ravage of the area of Venice must have taken place on 29th June 899 and the military operations finished until the next year's mid-Spring. As a consequence, the Italian campaign cannot be used as evidence at the dating of the *Hatto* and the *Theotmar Letters*, which were surely written after 4th February 900. The authenticity of the two letters is often disputed, but, as we saw, criticism is not well-founded.

The diplomatic sources of the peninsula are often quoted when it comes to surveying the impacts of the invasions. Such assessment

however, is only possible if there are onomastic and archaeological evidence at hand as well. The debate on the Slavic toponyms of Friaul shows that a great variety of interpretation is possible. As for the cities, one rightfully can assume that, in case of Aquileia, the destruction of the settlement and its charters emerges as a common place in the *arengas* of the 10th-century donations to the patriarchal see, not irrespective of the fact that the patriarchs resided in Cividale at that time. Such doubt, however, does not occur in other cases in Italy; opposing Albin Gombos' minimalist view, charters provide ample evidence in favour of the Hungarian presence behind the walls of Padova, Bergamo, Vercelli, Reggio and perhaps Piacenza as well.

In the territory of West Francia only one doubtlessly authentic 10th-century diploma mentions ravaging Hungarians. This taciturnity is certainly not in accordance with the real losses caused by the raiders, even if the Hungarian incursions did not have a decisive impact on this region. Of the 10th-century Iberian documents only the charter of the re-consecration of Santa Coloma de Farners can be accepted as a reference to a Hungarian raid.

One part of the handful of German charters offers an insight into the Bavarian efforts to defend their borderland, while the other, mainly Rhenish and Westphalian diplomas allude to the damages brought about the Hungarians. The argument provided by the charter of the monastery of Herford from 927 is only one of those in favour of the assumption that the successful campaign of the Hungarian army, concluded by Henry I's tributary obligation, actually took place in 926. Apropos of this date correction I expressed criticism towards Gyula Kristó's well-known

thesis. Kristó thought that the central authority imposed on the tribes lost its cohesive nature in the first half of the 10th century, and, therefore, the military campaigns and the negotiations aiming at the enforcement of the tribute were conducted on the level of the tribes rather than that of the grand duke's court. Kristó held the view that in the first half of the century "the tribes' own policy manifests in launching 'tribal' campaigns." In order to prove the existence of these independent 'tribal' campaigns he developed an argument based on chronology, namely that in some years from 917 military enterprises were launched both to Western and Southern targets. However, the chronology outlined in this dissertation clearly contradicts Kristó's reasoning, and, as a consequence, questions the most important argument in favour of the independent 'tribal' policy before 955.

The campaigns to the West before 907 are often addressed as military operations that helped to secure the Hungarian supremacy over the Carpathian Basin. Similarly conscious motives could determine the tribal alliance's later relations towards the East Frankish Kingdom. The campaigns of 915, 919, 926 and 937 covered the whole territory of East Francia, involving Swabian, Saxon and later Lotharingian targets. As opposed to Gyula Kristó, I maintain the view that these campaigns fit into a pattern of conscious strategy. These were far from random actions; although pillaging and taking sides in the Christians' conflicts were part and parcel of their daily routine, their real goal, similarly to the Mongol hordes three centuries later, was to provoke a decisive battle with the final victory on their side. The battle at the Brenta in 899 is clearly the best example of this strategy, which secured the regular tribute of the Italian

kings for decades. Perhaps 926 was the most successful year of the Hungarian campaigns: the occasional protection racket was substituted by a constant 'tax of peace' in the territory of East Francia. After this year, military actions stopped for seven years both to East and West Francia and the Hungarians distinguished themselves only as mercenaries in the service of the Italian kings. Consequent to the defeat of the Riade in 933 the tribal alliance's chief goal could not be else but to re-enforce the same dependency upon the German territories. In 937, in order to bring Otto I to his knees, they launched an overall attack similar to that of 926: after having crossed Swabia, the Hungarian army invaded Saxony unexpectedly from the West, but the new king easily drove them to the Western ends of his realm compelling the intruders to chance their luck in West Francia. They suffered defeat again in 938, while the positions of the Liudolfings solidified: this was the last campaign to Saxony. The memory of success and tribute did not fade away easily but the campaigns of 954 and 955 showed that the Western neighbour cannot be overcome in its core regions, far away from the Carpathian Basin.

IV.

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