

IUS VALACHICUM

THE VALACHIAN WAY OF LIFE IN STORIES ABOUT DOMESTIC ORIGINS IN THE HUNGARIAN MEDIEVAL CHRONICLES

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ABSTRACT. *The Valachian way of life in stories about domestic origins in the Hungarian medieval chronicles* In the paper I analyze the description of the way of life of the Hungarians and the local inhabitants of the Carpathian Basin during the Hungarian Conquest in the Hungarian chronicles: *Gesta Hungarorum of the Anonymous Notary of King Béla (III)* and *Gesta Hungarorum of Master Simon of Kéza*. The originally homeland of the Hungarians, called Scythia, was described as a rich land full of pastures and rivers inhabited by happy nomadic people. They left their land because of a fame and found on Tisza and Danube a similar country. According to the chroniclers they met between others the Vlachs who were characterised in a pastoral context by them. They lived in the same semi-nomadic way of life, as the former Hungarians, however, they occurred in Transylvania only in the 12th century, when the Hungarians changed their semi-nomadism to sedentarism. Therefore the semi-nomadic way of the Valachian life was noted as their identification factor by the high-medieval chroniclers.

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People were interested in the past of their social groups and their leaders from the Antiquity. One of the branches of chronicle writing fulfilled such expectations of the medieval audience, namely *origines gentium*, the art of the chronicles which presented the very beginnings of people and their rulers¹. As a literary genre, it usually belonged to the *gesta*, which concentrated on some acts of individual or collective heroes². The first Hungarian chronicles also belong to this chronicle branch³.

¹ Recently cf. G. Wolf, *Einleitung*, In: G. Wolf, N. H. Ott (eds.), *Handbuch Chroniken des Mittelalters*, Berlin – Boston 2016, p. 11.

² T. Michałowska, *Leksykon: Literatura polskiego średniowiecza*, Warszawa 2011, p. 309–311.

³ L. Spychała, *Studia nad legendą dynastyczną Arpadów. Między pulpitem średniowiecznego skryby a „warsztatem” współczesnego badacza*, Wrocław 2011, pp. 12–14 with an extensive discussion on the character of the Hungarian medieval historiography.

The first Hungarian chronicle, which is preserved until nowadays, the so-called *Gesta Hungarorum* by the Anonymous Notary of King Béla III, is dedicated to the Hungarian Conquest of the Land. It describes heroic fights of the invaders against the inhabitants of the Carpathian Basin and Transylvania⁴. Only on the margin of this description, the fertility of the land was mentioned, as well as the local inhabitants, the opponents of the victorious Hungarians. We find similar description in the later chronicles, such as the Hungarian-Polish Chronicle from the turn of the 1230s, the Chronicle of Simon of Kéza from 1282–1285, and in several chronicles from the 14th and 15th century, which derived from the common basic text prepared in the times of Charles Robert Anjou and the first years of Louis the Great (mid-14th century)⁵.

To evaluate the scarce chronicle information about the Vlachs in the false context of the origins of the Hungarian presence in the Carpathian Basin, we must discuss the geographical and economic situation of the region. In my further remarks, I will take into consideration the descriptions of the former and new territories inhabited by the Hungarians and the inhabitants of the Carpathian Basin, focusing particularly on the Vlachs. Moreover, it will be an opportunity to present some comments on the Hungarian economy of the 9th and 10th centuries, reconstructed from other sources, such as several geographical treatises written by Arabic authors, archaeological excavations, and ethno-linguistic data⁶. Because no differences appear in the picture of Scythia or the people who inhabited the Carpathian Basin between the *Gesta Hungarorum* of Master Simon of Kéza and the Chronicles derived from the so-called the *Chronicle Composition* of the 14th^b Century, we will limit our discussion to Kézai's text.

The *Gesta Hungarorum* by the Anonymous Notary⁷ starts with a description of Scythia based on the *Regino of Prüm's Chronicle*⁸.

⁴ R. Grzesik, *Blasi and Pastores Romanorum in the Gesta Hungarorum by an Anonymous Notary*, "Res Historica", 2016, t. 41, p. 25–34.

⁵ Recently cf. brilliant analysis by L. Spychała, *op. cit.*, *passim*; cf. also D. Bagi, *Gallus Anonymus és Magyarország. A Gesza magyar adatai, forrásai, mintái, valamint a szerző történetészlelete a latin Kelet-Közép-Európa 12. század eleji latin nyelvű történetírásának tükrében*, Budapest 2005, p. 39–42; Idem, *Królowie węgierscy w Kronice Galla Anonima*, Kraków 2008, p. 33–36 (with a better presentation especially for the Polish reader).

⁶ Gy. Györffy, *István kiry és műve*, 3rd ed., Budapest 2000, p. 397–526; Idem, *Święty Stefan I. Król Węgier i jego dzieło*, transl. T. Kapturkiewicz, Warsaw 2003, p. 475–624; I. Zimonyi, *Muslimische Quellen über die Ungarn vor der Landnahme. Das ungarische Kapitel der Ġaiḥānī-Tradition*, Herne 2006.

⁷ L. Spychała, *op. cit.*, p. 27–33 describes the complicated and still discussed relationship of Anonymus, the lost *Gesta Ungarorum* and the later chronicles.

⁸ F. Kurze (ed.), *Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon cum continuatione Treverensi*, Hannoverae 1890, p. 131–132 (Internet on Website: <http://www.dmgh.de/de/fs1/object/goToPage/bsb00000772.html?pageNo=131&contextType=scan&contextSort=sortKey&sortIndex=010%3A070%3A0050%3A010%3A00%3A00&contextOrder=descending&zoom=1.00&context=scythia> [accessed August 10, 2016]). It is worth to mention that the medieval ethnographical geography followed the antique categories. Scythia belonged to one of them. Cf. A. Kotłowska, R. Grzesik (eds.), *Testimonia najdawniejszych dziejów Słowian. Seria łacińska*, vol. 1: *Starożytność*, s. v. Scythia (In preparation).

Scythia is then a very great land, called Dentumoger, over towards the east, the end of which reaches from the north to the Black Sea. On the far side, it has a river with great marshes, called the Don, where sables can be found in such extraordinary abundance that in that land not only nobles and commoners dress in them but also with which even ox-herds, swine-herds and shepherds adorn their raiment. Gold and silver abound there and in the rivers of this land precious stones and gems are found⁹.

We read further about the people Gog and Magog neighbouring Scythia and we learn that the Scythians were and still are an independent people. Magog was an ancestor of Attila and of next Hungarian rulers. Who were the Scythians? Let us listen to the chronicler again:

The Scythians, as we said, are a more ancient people, of whom historians writing of the deeds of the Romans said as follows:

That the Scythian people were most wise and gentle; they did not work the soil nor barely knew any sin among them. And they did not have homes built by craft but rather tents made of felt. They ate meat and fish and milk and honey and they had much spice. And their clothes were of the pelts of sables and other wild beasts. They held gold, silver and gems as common as stones, which they found in the rivers of this land. They desired no one else's goods, for they were all rich, having many animals and sufficient victuals. And there were no adulterers, for every man kept only his wife¹⁰.

Scythia seems to be a steppe country and its inhabitants are seen as typical nomads. We can observe here a typical stereotype of a good barbarian, present in the European consciousness from the Tacitus' time¹¹. The richness of the country is idealized and underlined by the use of a topos which I have proposed to define as the

⁹ M. Rady and L. Veszprémy (eds.), *Anonymus and Master Roger. Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum. Anonymus, Notary of King Béla, The Deeds of the Hungarians*, J. M. Bak and M. Rady (eds.), *Magistri Rogerii Epistola in miserabile Carmen super destructione regni Hungarie per Tartaros facta. Master Roger's Epistle to the Sorrowful Lament upon the Destruction of the Kingdom of Hungary by the Tatars*, Budapest–New York 2010 [henceforth: An. Eng.], pp. 5–7. Latin text *ibidem*, p. 4–6: “Scythia igitur maxima terra est, que Dentumoger dicitur, versus orientem, finis cuius ab aquilonali parte extenditur usque ad Nigrum Pontum. A tergo autem habet flumen, quod dicitur Thanais, cum paludibus magnis, ubi ultra modum habundanter inveniuntur zobolini ita, quod non solum nobiles et ignobiles vestiuntur inde, verum etiam bubulci et subbulci ac opiliones sua decorant vestimenta in terra illa. Nam ibi habundat aurum et argentum et inveniuntur in fluminibus terre illius preciosi lapides et gemme“. The mysterious name *Dentumoger* described the Hungarians from the area of the Don River (*Dentümogyer*). Cf. An. Eng., p. 5 n. 6; A. Kulbicka et al. (ed.), *Anonimowego Notariusza króla Béli Gesta Hungarorum*, Kraków 2006 [henceforth: An. Pol.], p. 28–29 n. 14.

¹⁰ An. Eng., p. 9; the Latin text., p. 8: “Scithici enim, sicut diximus, sunt antiquiores populi, de quibus hystoriographi, qui gesta Romanorum scripserunt, sic dicunt: Quod Scithica gens fuisset sapientissima et mansueta, qui terram non laborabant et fere nullum peccatum erat inter eos. Non enim habebant domos artificio paratas, sed tantum tentoria de filtro parata. Carnes et pisces et lac et mel manducabant et pigmenta multa habebant. Vestiti enim errant de pellibus zobolorum et aliarum ferarum. Aurum et argentum et gemmas habebant sicut lapides, quia in fluminibus eiusdem terre inveniabantur. Non concupiscebant aliena, quia omnes divites erant, habentes animalia multa et victualia sufficienter. Non erant enim fornicatores, sed solummodo unusquisque suam habebat uxorem”.

¹¹ K. Modzelewski, *Barbarzyńska Europa*, Warsaw 2004, p. 39–40 (In the context of sexual purity and neglect of richness).

Biblical topos of richness, where the abundance of gold and silver as well as precious stones and gems is emphasised. One should only add that this description of Eastern Hungary (*Hungaria Orientalis*) is similar to the one in the Hungarian-Polish Chronicle where the Biblical topos of richness is also used¹².

The description of Scythia in Simon of Kéza's Chronicle is more extensive and more erudite, based on the text of Iustinus, Regino and other chroniclers. However, the inhabitants were not characterized in a particularly positive light, as *devoted to leisure, given over to vanities, scornful by nature, libidinous and delight in raiding; in general they are more dark in colour than white*¹³.

Why would one want to leave such a prosperous land? The chroniclers knew, thanks to Regino of Prüm, that the reason was famine which let them to conquer the more western territories. Only the *Hungarian-Polish Chronicle* explained that it was the desire of fame demonstrated by the Hungarian leader, Aquila or Attila¹⁴. And what did they find in the Carpathian Basin? Fertile soil rivers full of fish and plenty of pastureland¹⁵. The Anonymous wrote that according to the Rus' princes informing the Hungarians in Pannonia

(...)flowed the most noble spring waters, the Danube and Tisza and other most noble springs, abounding in good fish, in which land there lived the Slavs, Bulgarians, Vlachs, and the shepherds of the Romans. For after the death of King Attila, the Romans said the land of Pannonia was pastureland because their flocks grazed in the land of Pannonia. And rightly was the land of Pannonia said to be the pastureland of the Romans, for now too the Romans graze on the goods of Hungary¹⁶.

¹² B. Karácsonyi (ed.), *Chronica Hungaro-Polonica*, pars 1 (*Textus cum varietate lectionum*), Szeged 1969, chapter 1, p. 10; R. Grzesik, *Pannonia Ziemią Obiecaną? Biblijna legitymizacja władzy nad Panonią w kronikach węgierskich*, in: Z. Abramowicz and J. Ławski (eds.), *Chrześcijańskie dziedzictwo duchowe narodów słowiańskich*, series II: *Wokół kultur śródziemnomorskich*, vol. 2: *Historia, język, kultura*, Białystok 2010, p. 325–333; reprint in: idem, *Hungaria – Slavia – Europa Centralis. Studia z dziejów środkowoeuropejskiej kultury we wczesnym średniowieczu*, Warsaw 2014, p. 107–115 (1 Reg. 10,2). Noteworthy, the description of Scythia is a creation of a prehistory (in the medieval sense) according to Dániel Bagi, while the arrival of the Hungarians to the Carpathian Basin and a story of a conquest is a historical story. Normally, the acceptance of Christianity is a borderline between the prehistory and history in the presentation of national/state origins. Maybe the anonymous *Gesta Hungarorum* was a “prehistorical chronicle”. However, we know that the Anonymous Notary planned to continue his story also in Christian times but he did not complete his task. D. Bagi, *Gallus Anonymus és Magyarország*, p. 65; Idem, *Królowie węgierscy*, p. 52; An. Eng., chapter 15, p. 44–45 and n. 2; An. Pol., p. 80–81 and n. 131.

¹³ L. Veszprémy and M. Rady (eds.), *Simonis de Kéza Gesta Hungarorum*. Simon of Kéza, *The Deeds of the Hungarians*, With a study by J. Szűcs, Budapest 1999 [henceforth: Kézai], chapter 6 p. 19. Latin text p. 18: “Gentes siquidem in eo regno procreatae otia amplectuntur, vanitatibus deditae, naturae dedignantis, actibus venereis intendentes, rapinas cupiunt, generaliter plus nigrae colore quam albae”. Cf. J. Szűcs, *Theoretical Elements in Master Simon of Kéza's Gesta Hungarorum (1282–1285)*, ibidem, p. XLVIII (primary edited: Budapest 1975).

¹⁴ *Reginonis ... Chronicon*, p. 132; An. Eng., chapter 1, p. 10–11 and n. 2; An. Pol., p. 36–37 and n. 29; Kézai, chapter 7, p. 24–25; *Chronica Hungaro-Polonica*, chapter 1, p. 10.

¹⁵ Such is the image of *Sclauonia-Ungaria* in the *Chronica Hungaro-Polonica*, chapter 3, p. 18–19.

¹⁶ An. Eng., chapter 9, p. 26–27; An. Pol. p. 56–59. The Latin text: “ibi confluent nobilissimi fontes aquarum, Danubius et Tyscia et alii nobilissimi fonts bonis piscibus abundantes, quarum terram habitarent Sclau, Bulgarii et Blachii ac pastores Romanorum. Quia post mortem Athile regis terram Pannonie

The chronicler sometimes underlined the pastoral character and fertility of the land in his *Gesta*. For instance, we read that the land of King Attila between the Danube, Tisza, Váh, Maros (Mureş) and Körös (Criş) was taken over by the leaders of the Romans to the Danube, *where they had stationed their shepherds*¹⁷. We recognize the fertility of the region of Alpár¹⁸ and of Transylvania of the Valachian Prince Gelou/Gyalu. Let us quote again the words of a chronicler; according to him the Hungarian Duke Tétény/Tuhutum reported that:

that land was washed by the best rivers, whose names and merits he listed, that in their sands they gathered gold and that the gold of that land was the best, and that they mined there salt and had salt crystals. The inhabitants of that land were the basest of the whole world, because they were Vlachs and Slavs, and because they had nothing else for arms than bows and arrows. Their prince, Gyalu, was not steadfast and did not have around him good warriors who dared stand against the daring of the Hungarians, because they had suffered many injuries from the Cumans and Pechenegs¹⁹.

It is obvious for us that the Vlachs were seen by the Anonymous in the pastoral context, although according to the chronicler they dealt also with gold- and salt mining. The impression that the Vlachs were recognized as shepherds by the Hungarian elites is deepened after reading very scarce Valachian information of Simon of Kéza. He informed us only three times in his *Historia Hunnorum*, which begins his *Gesta* and is, according to the recent opinion of the scholars, of his authorship²⁰. We read here that several people left Pannonia after the land had been conquered by King Attila, *the Vlachs, however, who had been their shepherds and husbandmen, elected to remain behind in Pannonia*²¹. We hear about the Vlachs again when Master Simon informs us that the Szeklers, the remains of the Huns, joined the Hungarians conquering the land and settled there. *However, this was not in the plains of Pannonia, but in the mountains, which they shared with the Vlachs, mingling with them, it is said, and adopting their alphabet*²². And the last message about the Vlachs in the context of the origins of Hungary, is that *The only people left there [after the withdrawal of the Huns] were*

Romani dicebant pascua esse eo, quod greges eorum in terra Pannonie pascebantur. Et iure terra Pannonie pascua Romanorum esse dicebatur, nam et modo Romani pascuntur de bonis Hungarie”.

¹⁷ An. Eng., chapter 11, p. 32–33; An. Pol., p. 66–67.

¹⁸ An. Eng., chapter 16 p. 44–47; An. Pol., p. 82–83. I omit the analysis of the story of a white horse, one of the main legitimization stories of the Hungarians, basing on the steppe character of the Carpathian Basin, cf. R. Grzesik, *Hungaria*, p. 99–100, 113–114, 118, 120.

¹⁹ An. Eng., chapter 25, p. 60–61; An. Pol., p. 100–101. The Latin text: “Quod terra irrigaretur optimis fluviis, uorum nomina et utilitates seriatim dixit, et quod in arenis eorum aurum colligerent et aurum terre illius optimum esset et ut ibi foderetur sal et salgema [in An. Pol. salgenia] et habitatores terre illius viliores homines essent tocuis mundi, quia essent Blasii et Sclavi, quia alia arma non haberent, nisi arcum et sagittas et dux eorum Geleou minus esset tenax et non haberet circa se bonos milites ut [An. Pol.: et] auderent stare contra audatiam Hungarorum, quia a Cumanis et Picenatis multas iniurias paterentur”.

²⁰ E. Mályusz, *Az V. István-kori Gesta*, Budapest 1971, passim

²¹ Kézai, chapter 14, p. 54–55. The Latin text: “Blackis, qui ipsorum [i.e. of the former inhabitants] fuere pastores et coloni, remanentibus sponte in Pannonia”.

²² Kézai, chapter 21, p. 70–71: “... non tamen in plano Pannoniae, sed cum Blackis in montibus confinii sortem habuerunt, unde Blackis commixti literis ipsorum uti perhibentur”.

*immigrants – Slavs, Greeks, Germans, Moravians, and Vlachs – who had been base-born servants of Attila when the king was alive*²³.

The Vlachs for Simon Kézai and for the later chronicles from the 14th and 15th century are shepherds, active in Pannonia and in the neighbouring mountains. They discovered their own script according to the chronicler, which they gave later to the Szeklers. As we all know, the reality was different – Kézai wrote about the Szekler runs²⁴. His opinion is based maybe on the observation – that the Valachian shepherds incised mnemonic signs while counting their sheep.

As we have seen, the Hungarian chroniclers described mainly the plain, steppe landscapes. It corresponded with the way of life of the old Hungarians. According to the economy historians, they were half-nomads during the conquest of the Carpathian Basin. As György Györffy demonstrated, it was the transitional form of economy standing between full nomadism and a settled way of life²⁵. While nomads spent their whole life in wanderings through the steppe and looking for pastures for their animals (mainly horses) and they had almost no agriculture, semi-nomads changed their settlements occasionally having standing settlements to which they returned for winter, and standing summer pastures. They could deal also with agriculture, although it played a secondary role in their life. Elemér Moór named this kind of agriculture the East-European model, in which the cereals were threshed by the running horses or oxen and no straw was collected for feeding animals during winter. This model existed also, according to him, in the Alföld Plain, where the Slavized Avars lived. Only in Transdanubia the Hungarians led a settled way of life and the Central-European model of agriculture with collecting cereals in storage houses, where they were flailed and straw was used to feed animals²⁶.

In my opinion, the Vlachs, who were characterized by the Hungarian chroniclers in the context of the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin, lived in the same semi-nomadic way as former Hungarians did. The difference is that the Vlachs lived in the mountains and dealt mainly with pasture of sheep, while the Hungarians from

²³ Kézai, chapter 23, p. 72–75. The Latin text: “... Sclavis tantummodo, Graecis, Teutonicis, Messianis et Vlachis advenis remanentibus in eadem, qui vivente Ethela populari servitio sibi serviebant”. The editors interpret the antique name Messiani as the Moravians.

²⁴ I. Kniezsa, *Ungarns Völkerschaften im XI Jahrhundert, Archivum Europae Centro-Orientalis*, vol. 4, 1938 (in Internet: file:///C:/Users/HP/Documents/Teksty%20obce/Kniezsa%20Istv%C3%A1n,%20Ungarische%20V%C3%B6lkerschaften.%20archivum_europae_1938_01-03_241-412.pdf [accessed August 10, 2016]), p. 353-354 thought that this Runic alphabet proved that the Szeklers accepted Hungarian very soon because the letters for ‘f’ and ‘h’ are present, which are foreign to the Turkish languages. A. Tarnai, „A magyar nyelvet írni kezdik”. *Irodalmi gondolkodás a középkori Magyarországon*, Budapest 1984, p. 10 and p. 36 n. 3; A. Róna-Tas, *Székely rovásírás*, in: Gy. Kristó, P. Engel, F. Makk (eds.), *Korai magyar történelmi lexikon (9.–14 század)*, Budapest 1994, p. 625–626.

²⁵ Gy. Györffy, *István kiry és műve*, p. 403; Idem, *Święty Stefan I*, p. 481. Cf. also W. Schenk, M. Hardt, *Nomadismus*, in: *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, vol. 21, Berlin – New York 2002, p. 262–265.

²⁶ E. Moór, *Die Ausbildung der Betriebsformen der ungarischen Landwirtschaft im Lichte der slawischen Lehnwörter*, “*Studia Slavica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*”, 1956, vol. 2, p. 31–117.

the late 9th century preferred to live in the plains. The second difference was that their settlements widespread in the whole arch of the Carpathians as the so-called Valachian colonization. And the last difference, which was not obvious for the late medieval chroniclers: they appeared in Transylvania very late, probably in the 12th century, when the Hungarians just created their own Central-European state²⁷. The Vlachs let recognize the Hungarians their own semi-nomadic past, but their way of life differed so much from the 13th century Hungarians that it was noted by the chroniclers as Valachian identification factor.

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²⁷ It is the standing polemical point between the Hungarian and Romanian historiographies. According to me, the arguments of Hungarian philologists, such as István Kniezsa, that the Romanian place-names in Transylvania derived the Hungarian and earlier Slavic names, are conclusive. Cf. I. Kniezsa, *op. cit.*, p. 361–369. The Romanian point of view from this period: C. C. Giurescu, *Istoria Românilor*, vol. 1: *Din cele mai vechi timpuri până la moartea lui Alexandru cel Bun (1432)*, ed. by D. C. Giurescu, București 2000 (1. ed. 1946), p. 230–232 (credibility of the Anonymus' story, Romanian names in Transylvania in the 11th century). The divergence between the Transylvanian Hungarians (cattle and horse-breeders) and the new Romanian settlers (mountain nomads) is underlined by Gy. Kristó, *Nichtungarische Völker im mittelalterlichen Ungarn*, Herne 2008, p. 238–239 (the entire description of the Romanian/Valachian settlement, p. 210–241).

- slowiańskich*, series II: *Wokół kultur śródziemnomorskich*, vol. 2: *Historia, język, kultura*, Białystok 2010, p. 325–333.
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