

## CHAPTER 4

# A Race of Turks

'The Magyars are a race of 'Turks,' writes the early tenth century Arab geographer, Ibn Rusta.<sup>1</sup> Another Arab, Mahmud Gardezi, writing about 1050 but quoting from a source dating from around 913, repeats this and adds, 'These Magyars are a handsome people and of good appearance and their clothes are of silk brocade and their weapons are of silver and are encrusted with gold'.<sup>2</sup>

We have already seen that when the Magyars are first clearly identified in Byzantine literature, they are repeatedly referred to as Turks (Chapter 2). That this term was not a mere misnomer but was based on the general appearance, customs, social and political organisation and martial habits of the Magyars of that period, is clear from the various descriptions given by ninth and tenth century Byzantine writers.<sup>3</sup>

These Arab and Byzantine descriptions were so fundamentally different from the humble origins attributed to the Magyars by the protagonists of the Finno-Ugrian theory and were so irreconcilable with the way of life of the Ob-Ugrians, that Hungarian historians of the nineteenth century treated the Finno-Ugrian line promoted by the linguists with considerable reservations.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, László Szalay in his definitive *History of Hungary* published in 1852, firmly declared that Hungarians were a 'Turkish nation', which originally resided in Central Asia, between the Altai Mountains and the Caspian Sea.<sup>5</sup> Henrik Marczali, writing in the *History of the Hungarian Nation*, published in 1895 to commemorate the first millenium of the Magyars in the Carpathian Basin, declared that the tradition of relationship between Hungarians and Huns was based on 'healthy historical sense' and asserted that investigations as to the origins of a language, although important, did not throw light on the origins of a nation. He regarded the early Hungarians as a Turkish-Ugrian mixture, with the Turks as the dominant element.<sup>6</sup>

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This Turkish leaning of Hungarian historians received considerable impetus from the writings of Armin Vámbéry, a noted Hungarian orientalist, who devoted a lifetime to demonstrating a cultural and ethnic as well as linguistic relationship between Turks and Magyars.

In his principal work, *Der Ursprung der Magyaren* (Leipzig, 1882), Vámbéry pointed out the Turkish etymologies of Hungarian personal, tribal and clan names found in Byzantine and mediaeval Hungarian sources and after dealing in some detail with the Turkish aspects of ancient Hungarian culture, customs, military tactics and social and political organisation, devoted some two hundred pages to a careful analysis of the Turkish features of the Hungarian language. He asserted that the phonetics, grammatical relationships and vocabulary of Hungarian were all closer to the Turco-Tartar languages than to the Finno-Ugrian group and maintained that almost two-thirds of the Hungarian vocabulary was more intimately connected with Turkish and could be better explained etymologically from the latter than from the Finno-Ugrian languages. He argued that Hungarian words of Turkish origin were not loanwords but that Hungarian had a double or mixed character, as a result of which it could be equally classified as a Finno-Ugrian or a Turco-Tartar language.

Vámbéry stressed that the Turkish elements in the Hungarian language were so deep-seated and of such basic nature that they could not have been acquired by subjugation and cultural influence on the part of a Turkish people, but postulated an intensive mixing between a Turkish and a Finno-Ugrian people at an early stage of Hungarian prehistory. As to the ethnic origin of Hungarians, he considered them a basically Turkish people which came into extended contact with Finno-Ugrians, resulting in an 'ethnic amalgam' in which the Turks remained the culturally, socially and politically dominant element.

These propositions of Vámbéry were violently attacked by Hunfalvy, Budenz, Szinnyei and other members of the Finno-Ugrian school. Due to the preoccupation of that era with the study of linguistics in the field of prehistory, the controversy mainly raged on a linguistic level and the very important non-

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linguistic considerations raised by Vámbéry were largely ignored. Whilst Vámbéry may have been himself to blame, at least partly, for this trend in the dispute, as he had clearly attempted to attack the linguists on their home territory, it is nevertheless much to be regretted that his numerous non-linguistic arguments supporting the Turkish ethnic origin of the Magyars were simply swept aside. As it happened, the linguists carried the day and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences lent its complete support to the protagonists of the Finno-Ugrian ethnic theory (see Chapter 3).

Truth, however, shows a strange resilience at times and some twenty years after Vámbéry seemed to have been well and truly defeated, some of his propositions received cautious support from an unexpected quarter. Zoltán Gombocz, an eminent Hungarian linguist of the Finno-Ugrian school, published a treatise in 1912<sup>7</sup> in which he analysed the Turkish loanwords in the Hungarian language. He concluded that approximately two hundred and thirty basic words relating to domestic animals and animal husbandry, agriculture, buildings and household equipment, trade utensils and handicrafts, clothing and wearing apparel, social and political institutions and relations, parts of the human body, illnesses, religion, writing, numerals, time, nature, hunting and fishing, plants and the animal world and also a number of verbs of everyday use, had been borrowed from a Turkic language closely akin to that of the Volga Bulgars, the present-day Chuvash.

He observed, however, that the language perpetuated by these loanwords was not the same as that of the Volga Bulgars but was a language now extinct which only survived in the loanwords preserved in Hungarian.<sup>8</sup> We shall later return to this finding as it is of immense significance in tracing the ancestry of the Magyars.

Gombocz demonstrated the great antiquity of this Turkish stratum in Hungarian by showing analogous phonetic changes undergone by both true Hungarian words and the adopted Turkic vocabulary.

Gombocz further noted that the Hungarian verb roots which agreed with Turco-Bulgar verb roots had been taken over with-

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out the addition of any Hungarian suffixes, contrary to Hungarian verbs borrowed from Latin, German and various Slavic languages.<sup>9</sup> He explained this phenomenon with phonetic and morphological correspondences between Hungarian and Old Turkic,<sup>10</sup> but this explanation was not universally accepted and at least one writer has since suggested the bilingualism of the ancient Magyars (already noted by Constantinus Porphyrogenetus) as the true cause for the natural acceptance of these Turkic verbs in Hungarian.<sup>11</sup>

Gombocz originally did not draw any conclusions from his findings which could have offended the Finno-Ugrian school and ascribed the adoption of the Old Turkic vocabulary analysed by him to mere cultural relations without any intensive mixing of populations.<sup>12</sup> Later on, however, he turned to a study of the Hungarian national traditions relating to the brotherhood of Huns and Magyars and attributing these to contacts with the Turco-Bulgars, concluded that elements of the latter must have contributed to the ethnic formation of the early Hungarians, resulting in a fusion of two races. He suggested that this amalgamation had taken place in the Caucasian region in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries A.D. and sought to support his theory by the presence of Alan loanwords in Hungarian.<sup>13</sup>

These conclusions of Gombocz were rightly hailed by Hóman as 'marking the end of the exclusive reign of Finno-Ugrian linguistics in the field of Hungarian prehistory'.<sup>14</sup> Although he had started out as a Finno-Ugrian linguist himself, Gombocz clearly laid the linguistic foundations for a new school of Hungarian prehistory which declared with increasing boldness the Turkish ethnic affiliations of the Magyars.

The breakthrough was achieved nearly twenty years later by Gyula Németh, the eminent Hungarian Turcologist. In his work *A honfoglaló magyarság kialakulása* (Budapest, 1930), Németh dealt exhaustively with the role played by the Turco-Bulgars in the formation of the early Hungarians. He stressed the significance of Turco-Bulgar loanwords in Hungarian and, after pointing out several historical data regarding the stay of the Magyars in the Caucasian homeland of the Bulgars, confirmed in many respects by early Hungarian chronicles and the national tradi-

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tion, he embarked on a detailed analysis of the tribal system and tribe names of the Magyars of the Conquest period. He concluded that the Hungarian people resulted from an amalgamation between one large Finno-Ugrian and six to eight smaller Turkish tribes which came about prior to the sixth century A.D. In his opinion, the Turkish element had the dominant role in the organisation and leadership of the people so formed.

These views, which Németh had already expressed in some of his earlier writings, were received with great satisfaction by Hungarian public opinion which had always been lukewarm towards the Finno-Ugrian theory.<sup>15</sup> The Magyars were by instinct more attracted to the martial Turks than the humble Ugrian relatives foisted on them by the linguists. The new doctrine of dual descent of Hungarians was adopted with equal enthusiasm by historians (although for more scientific reasons)<sup>16</sup> and even Géza Bárczi, the eminent Hungarian linguist, conceded that 'from the ethnic point of view [the Magyars] became strongly mixed with Turkish elements, so that . . . around the time of the conquest of their actual country, the Finno-Ugrian kernel was perhaps no more than a minority'.<sup>17</sup>

The intervening forty-odd years have brought little change in the basic essentials of this new theory and it is now generally accepted that a Turkish people or peoples contributed strongly to the ethnic formation of the early Hungarians, resulting in a people of dual ancestry.<sup>18</sup> The location of the ethnic melting pot in which this fusion of two races took place has been the subject of much speculation, being put by different writers in various places ranging from Central Asia to the middle Volga and the Caucasus. All these theories were based on conjecture and none of them has found universal acceptance. It is worth noting, however, that the leading contemporary Hungarian prehistorian, Gyula László, has come out increasingly strongly in favour of a Caucasian *Urheimat*, at least as regards the Turkish component of the Hungarian people.<sup>19</sup>

The period and duration of the Turco-Ugrian ethnogenesis has also been variously estimated but the general tendency has been to lengthen its duration and to put its commencement further and further back in point of time. A recent work by two Hun-

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garian linguists, Loránd Benkő and Samu Imre, suggests that it probably lasted a thousand years and took place between the fifth century B.C. and the fifth century A.D.<sup>20</sup>

It is interesting to note that the doctrine of formation of the early Magyars from a fusion of Finno-Ugrian and Turkish elements is still strongly based on linguistic study, although historical data and the national tradition are also invoked in its support. There are many other indications, however, pointing to the important and probably dominant role played by a Turkish people in the ethnic formation of Hungarians. It may be now useful to review these briefly.

Anthropological studies of grave finds from the Conquest period in Hungary, carried out by Bartucz, Nemeskéri and Lipták, have demonstrated that the numerically strongest element among the Magyar conquerors was of the Turanid type, a racial type characteristic of Turkish peoples.<sup>21</sup> According to Bartucz, this element comprised at least 35 to 40 per cent of the early Hungarians. All three authors mentioned agree that people of the Turanid type formed the leading social stratum of the Hungarian conquerors. Recent studies by Lipták have also shown that this leading Hungarian stratum was anthropologically related to the leading classes of the Volga Bulgars in the tenth century.<sup>22</sup> It is not irrelevant to note that this racial type is still fairly dominant among present-day Hungarians and is generally regarded as the true 'Hungarian type'.<sup>23</sup>

We have already referred to the conclusion long accepted by historians that the social and political organisation and military tactics of the early Hungarians were characteristic of a Turkish people. More recently, Ferenc Eckhart has established by a careful analysis of old Hungarian legal customs and institutions, some of which have survived into the twentieth century, that these, too, were typical of the culture of Turkish peoples in the second half of the first millenium.<sup>24</sup>

Hungarian folklore and ethnography show predominantly old Turkish elements.<sup>25</sup> This is true even of present-day Hungarian folklore, which suggests that what we are dealing with here is not a mere survival of borrowed cultural motifs but the continued cultural activity of a living people. Archaeological finds

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testify to a remarkable similarity between the funerary customs, weapons and ornaments of the Magyars of the Conquest period and the Volga Bulgars.<sup>26</sup> To a lesser degree, these finds are also similar to the relics of Huns, Avars and Khazars which are all generally accepted as peoples of Turkish origin.<sup>27</sup>

Several characters of the old Hungarian script, preserved by the Szekelys of Transylvania, are identical with the inscriptions of the Altai Turks dating from the sixth and seventh centuries A.D.<sup>28</sup>

The most ancient stratum of Hungarian folk music is, in its construction, methods and types of melodies, intimately connected with the musical traditions of Turkish peoples.<sup>29</sup> It may be safely stated that the musical idiom of the Hungarians is basically Turkish.<sup>30</sup> (This is conceded even by those who think they can discern faint traces of a 'Ugrian' stratum in Hungarian folk music.)<sup>31</sup> It is significant that the only Finno-Ugrian people whose music shows any substantial similarity with Hungarian folk songs are the Tsheremiss and they have been under the cultural influence of the Chuvash (the descendants of the Volga Bulgars) over a considerable period.<sup>32</sup>

Lastly, returning again to linguistic considerations, there is the well-established fact that in addition to their 'proper language' the Hungarian conquerors also spoke a Turkic idiom. This idiom which, as the bilingual use of old Turkic names suggests, was still understood by the Hungarian upper classes in the second half of the tenth century and perhaps even a century later,<sup>33</sup> was clearly the same Turkic language of which Gombocz discovered some two hundred and thirty words in present-day Hungarian. These words then cannot be regarded as 'loanwords' from an ethnic point of view, since they represent the patrimony of a people which merged with the 'Ugrian' branch of the ancient Hungarians and formed a substantial part of the nation so born.

As Gombocz has demonstrated, the old Turkic language from which these words were derived, was not the same as the language of the Volga Bulgars but was another variant related to the former. Consequently, in spite of the similarities between the

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early culture, social and political organisation and customs of the Magyar conquerors and the Volga Bulgars, the ancient Hungarians – or more specifically, the Turkish element among them – cannot be regarded as a branch of the Volga Bulgars but merely as a related but different people.

This view is confirmed by the rôle played by the wives of the sons of Belar in the Nimrod-legend (see Chapter 1). Assuming, as most historians do, that Belar represents the Bulgars or one of their branches, his people must have been clearly different from the Hungarians at the time of the events symbolised by the mythical rape. This part of the Hungarian national tradition therefore indicates that the Turkish component of the Magyar people could not have been identical with the Bulgars, although it was most likely ethnically related to them.

It now remains to find out who these Turkish Hungarians really were.



## CHAPTER 5

# The Hun Brothers

The Huns made a definite and traumatic entry into history when they crossed the Volga and invaded Southern Russia under their king Balamber around 375 A.D. Their meteoric rise, brilliant but savage campaigns and sudden collapse following Attila's death in 453 are only too well known. The contemporary 'news media', the Western and Byzantine chroniclers, have left us ample, although highly prejudiced, records of their exploits in the West. Much less is known about them in the East.

Most historians agree that the Huns previously lived in Central Asia, on the borders of the Chinese empire. There are several references in ancient Chinese sources suggestive of their presence. The sage Mencius, writing in the second half of the fourth century B.C., mentions a people called Hiu-yu. Other ancient Chinese texts which go back to the eighth century B.C., contain several references to Hien-yun and Huen-yu. Later on, still centuries before the Christian era, the name Hiung-nu makes its appearance. All these names are applied to fierce, nomadic horsemen in Inner Mongolia and its surrounding regions who formed and re-formed themselves into huge empires and were constantly embattling the Chinese. Eventually, the Great Wall of China was built to keep them out.<sup>1</sup>

Whether the people or peoples described by the Chinese under these various names were identical with the Huns has not been established beyond doubt. It is clear, however, that they were Turks. Chinese sources depict them as men with large prominent noses and strong beards<sup>2</sup> and according to Chinese dynastic histories, they spoke a Turkish language.<sup>3</sup> Archaeological investigations by Soviet scientists of graves in the Altai region show a large number of brachycephalic heads occurring since about 1200 B.C. which later reappear in Khwarezm and near the Aral Sea, and can be found again during the period of



*Ornament for warrior's headwear. 9th century*

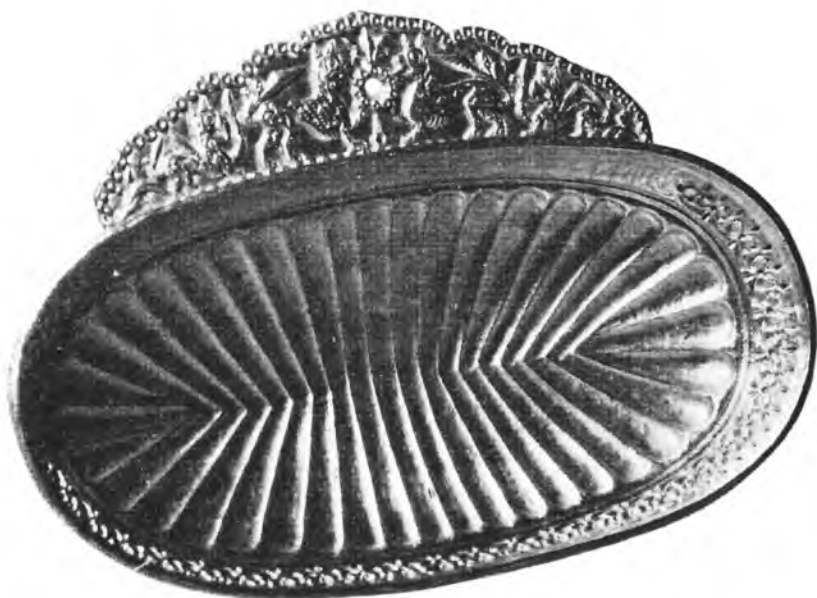


*Ceremonial sword of Hungarian ruler. 9th century*



*Gold drinking vessel from Treasure of Nagyszentmiklós,  
Hungary. 10th century*

*Gold fruit-plate from Treasure of Nagyszentmiklós,  
Hungary, 10th century*



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Hunnish occupation of the Great Hungarian Plain.<sup>4</sup> It is significant that these brachycephalic grave finds in the Altai region are surrounded by an almost exclusively dolichocephalic milieu.<sup>5</sup>

Archaeological comparisons of fibulas, belts, weapons and other objects found in graves show a remarkable unity of culture between the regions where the Hiung-nu once lived and the areas where the Huns later make their appearance. This is particularly attested by the striking similarity of the so-called 'animal art' in all these finds.<sup>6</sup>

Between 158 and 166 A.D., the Huns are mentioned in Chinese sources under their proper name as a people which have been driven out of western Mongolia and eastern Turkestan by the northern branch of the Hiung-nu and forced to move to the western part of Turkestan.<sup>7</sup>

There is therefore ample evidence of a crucible of Turkish peoples to the north and north-west of China from which the Huns emerge towards the middle of the second century of our era to commence their westward push which brings them to the Volga at around 375.

In a rare moment of unanimity, virtually all historians agree that the Huns were 'Turks and spoke an Old Turkic dialect.'<sup>8</sup> ✕

The Huns whose westward movement we have traced in broad outline, however, were not the only members of their race to appear on the pages of history. In his *Geography* written around the middle of the second century A.D., Ptolemy speaks of Huns living between the Bastarnas and Roxolans. His description of the habitations of the two adjoining nations places these Huns in western Ciscaucasia, near the upper reaches of the Kuban river and in the region east of the Sea of Azov.<sup>9</sup> Their settlements probably extended to the south-western banks of the lower Don.<sup>10</sup>

The presence of Huns in the region of the lower Don after the middle of the second century is also confirmed by the notorious legend concerning their origin from relations between Scythian witches and devils, which is recorded by Jordanes in his *Getica* and can be traced to Gothic myths dating from the period in question.<sup>11</sup>

These Huns were living in the neighbourhood of Iranian tribes

\* It so happens that Old-Turkic languages

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subsequently identified as Alans, and their close connections with the latter are attested by the fact that both Huns and Alans keep cropping up as mercenaries in the Armenian army from the end of the third century.<sup>12</sup> The Huns, however, lived further to the south than the Alans and the area occupied by them clearly included portions of the Caucasus and, indeed, reached down into Transcaucasia. This is confirmed by Orosius and Ammianus who state that prior to attacking the Goths in 375, the Huns lived in 'inaccessible mountains' – which could only mean the Caucasus<sup>13</sup> – and also by the occurrence of Turkic names in the Caucasian region and archaeological finds in excavations near Gori in Georgia, the Iberia of old.<sup>14</sup>

Attacks by the Caucasian Huns against Persian territories are mentioned in contemporary sources from around 230 onwards, followed by alternating wars and alliances between Huns and Persians right through the third and fourth centuries.<sup>15</sup> The presence of Huns in the Persian army besieging Dura-Europos (in Syria) shortly after the middle of the third century is suggested by several Turkic names and designations on Persian *ostraka* (pieces of pottery with writing on them) found in the area.<sup>16</sup>

Armenian historical writings refer to wars between Huns and Armenians in the southern Caucasus as early as during the reign of Valarsaces (149-127 B.C.). Certain powerful fortifications in the Caucasian province of Albania, then Armenian territory, are repeatedly mentioned in early Armenian sources by the name of 'the Hun gates', the defence of which was entrusted to particularly reliable Armenian warriors. Huns appear as allies of the kings of Armenia from 227 A.D. onwards and Armenian sources make several references to them in the third and fourth centuries.<sup>17</sup> Although none of the Armenian histories in question is earlier than the fourth century A.D., and some were written at a considerably later date, their testimony cannot be disregarded.

These Caucasian Huns were clearly an advance party of the main body of the Huns which appeared at the Volga around 375.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, they must have been separated from their Central Asian brothers for centuries. There is, however, nothing unusual about parts of a nomadic people being so far removed

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from one another in time and space. From the sixth century onwards, Bulgars lived on the middle Volga, in the Caucasian region and in present-day Bulgaria, whilst a few centuries later we find substantial bodies of Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin, in Bashkiria and the neighbourhood of Persia. Similar instances could be given of Avars, Kumans, Petchenegs and other peoples belonging to the Turkish race.

It is now necessary to define the limits of the stay of the Huns in the Caucasian region in point of time. Altheim considers that they moved to the area in company with the Alans towards the end of the second century B.C.<sup>19</sup> The geographical position of these Huns and the early references to them in Armenian sources rather suggest that they may have preceded the Alans by a few years, if not more. In any event, they must have firmly established themselves in the Caucasus by the beginning of the Christian era.

We have no direct evidence of the actual departure of the Huns from the Caucasus. In 450, they are mentioned as assisting the Armenians in their uprising against the Byzantines. In 481, they are the allies of Byzantium in suppressing another Armenian revolt. Between these two dates, in 463 to be exact, the Saragurs, Ugors and Onogurs make their first appearance in the old territory of the Huns between the Caucasus and the Sea of Azov.<sup>20</sup> There is little doubt that these peoples contained strong Hunnish elements; they are repeatedly referred to in Byzantine sources as Huns or as peoples living in the company of Huns. After the end of the fifth century, Huns are no longer mentioned in the Caucasus proper but Byzantine sources continue to refer to them as inhabiting the area near the Sea of Azov and other parts of Southern Russia. At this point of time, the Caucasian Huns appear to lose their identity and their place is taken by the Onogurs, Saragurs, Ugors and Bulgars, all living in the northern Caucasian region and around the lower reaches of the Volga and the Don and moving northwards and westwards by successive waves. All the four peoples mentioned continue to be designated as Huns in various contemporary sources from time to time.

We have already identified the Ugors and Saragurs as two separate branches of the Magyars and the Onogurs as the an-

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cestors of the Bulgars (see Chapter 2). Since all these peoples emerge at the same time and in the same place when and where the Caucasian Huns suddenly disappear and as a contemporary records unanimously refer to them as Huns, it is virtually beyond argument that they represent the descendants of the Huns who formerly lived in the Caucasus. Indeed, as far as the Onogurs and Bulgars are concerned, this is accepted by the overwhelming majority of historians.<sup>21</sup> The same concession is generally not made concerning the Hungarians; indeed, the contrary is often asserted. However, in view of the demonstrable fusion of a substantial body of Turco-Bulgars with the 'Ugric' ancestors of the Magyars (see Chapter 4) and the generally acknowledged identity of the Turco-Bulgars with the Huns, it seems to the writer that any objection to the ethnic relationship between Huns and Hungarians is merely a matter of semantics.

This ethnic relationship is confirmed by the unanimous testimony of early Hungarian and foreign sources and is also supported by the overlapping of the areas which Huns and Magyars can be shown to have occupied in the Caucasian region between the second century B.C. and the fifth century A.D.

We can therefore declare without hesitation that the Turks who impregnated the early Magyars with their racial and cultural characteristics were Huns and that they were the Huns of the Caucasus.

This Hun-Magyar ethnogenesis must have been an essentially peaceful process. Gombocz has pointed out that the Turco-Bulgar loanwords in Hungarian all relate to peaceful activities, such as animal husbandry, agriculture, domestic implements, trade and commerce and the like, and there is not a single expression among them connected with warfare.<sup>22</sup> The Magyars therefore must have voluntarily allied themselves to the Huns when the latter arrived in the Caucasus, and were thereupon probably incorporated in the Hunnish political organisation as one of its constituent bodies with more or less equal rights. This supposition is entirely consistent with the processes of empire-building prevalent among horsemen of the steppes at the time.<sup>23</sup> The legendary brotherhood of Hunor and Magor certainly negates any suggestion of savage oppression or conquest.

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The fusion between Hungarians and part of the Caucasian Huns must have been complete by the end of the fourth century A.D. Soon after that time, we find the Ugors as a completely self-contained people and masters of their own destiny. We have already demonstrated that they were identical with the Magyars who eventually settled in the Carpathian Basin (Chapter 2). There seems little doubt that by the time the Ugors emerged north of the Caucasus in the fifth century, the Hunnish element among them was completely amalgamated with the rest and the entire people spoke Hungarian. This is confirmed by the fact that this Hun-Magyar amalgam was able to produce an offshoot in Bashkiria, the language of which was still pure Hungarian in the thirteenth century.

Furthermore, the fact that the name Ugor<sup>\*</sup> occurs in a composite form in the names of other peoples making their appearance at the same time, namely the Saragurs and the Onogurs, and that it keeps recurring as a suffix in the names of other Hunnish fragments, such as the Kutrigurs and Altigurs, during the next two centuries, suggests that prior to the dissipation of the Caucasian Huns, the people identified as Ugor achieved a degree of pre-eminence among them and possibly provided leaders and upper classes for the others. To be called an Ugor, then, was a mark of distinction for these Huns even while they were still inhabiting their Caucasian territories and when they left there, this was the name they adopted in place of their original designation. Such a change of name is again entirely in accordance with the practices of Turkic and related peoples of which several instances can be given.<sup>24</sup>

The ancient town of Gori on the river Kur in Transcaucasia in the vicinity of which archaeological finds have been unearthed suggesting the presence of the Huns there early in the Christian era (see above), was probably the focal point of this Ugor territory and its very name appears to represent an earlier form of Ugor.

Further proof of completion of the Hun-Magyar ethnogenesis by the end of the fourth century is furnished by the Szekelys of Transylvania. This branch of Hungarians which occupies the valleys of the south-eastern Carpathians and adjoining areas of



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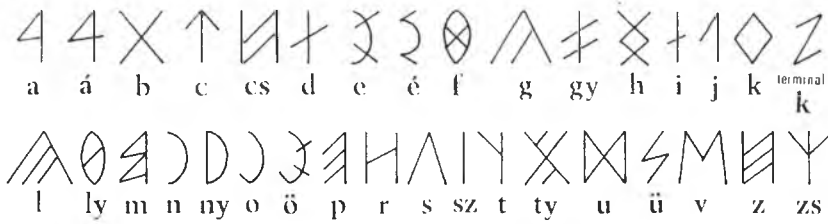
Transylvania and also has substantial colonies in the Rumanian Regat,<sup>25</sup> including Bucharest itself, numbers close to one million. According to the earliest Hungarian chronicles and the own traditions of the Szekelys themselves, they were already living in Transylvania when the Hungarians arrived there and joined the latter of their own accord. The historical truth of this assertion is accepted by even such sceptics as Macartney.<sup>26</sup>

These early chronicles and the traditions of the Szekelys also assert that they were the descendants of Attila's Huns who remained behind after the collapse of the Hunnish empire. There are also foreign mediaeval sources containing similar statements.<sup>27</sup> Whilst this aspect of the Szekelys' descent has not found general acceptance, there is nothing inherently improbable in it.

Most modern students of the subject agree that the Szekelys had a Turkish culture and tribal organisation.<sup>28</sup> However, the strange fact remains that their tribe and clan names were definitely of Hungarian origin.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, there is no evidence that they ever spoke any other language but Hungarian. If they had spoken a Turkic or other non-Hungarian dialect at the time of their adhesion to the Magyars at the end of the ninth century, surely their language would have survived long enough among the mountains of Transylvania to be noted by some mediaeval chronicler. Given their substantial numbers and the sheltered position of their habitations, one would have expected their language to remain in use up to modern times. However, there is no trace of a separate Szekely language whatever.<sup>30</sup>

In inquiring into the original language of the Szekelys, we are also assisted by their alphabet. The Szekelys had their own system of writing from early times which they preserved well into the seventeenth century. This script was perfectly adapted to Hungarian phonetics and had separate characters for every sound in the Hungarian language.

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*The Szekely alphabet and corresponding modern Hungarian characters*

It will be readily seen that whereas the modern Hungarian writing, based on the Latin alphabet, has to employ composite consonants to render various Hungarian phonemes (cs, gy, ly, ny, sz, ty, zs), the Szekely alphabet had a single character for each. Furthermore, there are several characters in the Szekely script for specifically Hungarian sounds, such as gy, ly, ny, ty and zs, which do not exist either in Turkic languages or in Turkic scripts to which the Szekely alphabet is related. It is clear, therefore, that the Szekelys must have acquired their script at a time when they were speaking Hungarian.

The outstanding expert on Szekely script, Gyula Németh, regards it as 'inconceivable' that the Szekelys acquired their alphabet from the Hungarians after the conversion of the latter to Christianity around 1000<sup>31</sup> and we must agree with this. Consequently, even if the Szekelys learnt their system of writing from the Magyars and did not bring it with them from the East, they must have adopted it virtually simultaneously with their union with the Hungarians.<sup>32</sup>

All this suggests that the Szekelys were already speaking Hungarian when they teamed up with the Magyars at the end of the ninth century. Furthermore, as there is no evidence whatever of any intensive contact between these two peoples during the centuries immediately preceding the arrival of the Magyars in the Carpathian Basin, it is a fair conclusion that the Szekelys already spoke Hungarian when they first settled in Transylvania.

Since there is no reason to doubt that the Szekelys came to the Carpathians under the Huns and indeed, the ethnic turbulence created by the westward sweep of the latter furnishes a

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perfectly plausible explanation for such event, we are further justified in concluding that the Szekelys broke away from the Hun-Magyar amalgam formed in the Caucasian region towards the end of the fourth century. The very fact that they settled in a mountainous region with such ease confirms this conclusion.<sup>33</sup> It follows from the foregoing that they must have been speaking Hungarian at that point of time.

These considerations lead us to the view that a substantial Hungarian-speaking ethnic body must have been fully formed from a fusion of Hun and Magyar tribes in the Caucasus before the end of the fourth century.

Before leaving the Caucasian Huns, there is one more matter of interest we ought to mention. Early Armenian sources contain several references to the town of Hunoracerta in one of the northern provinces of Greater Armenia adjoining the Caucasian Albania.<sup>34</sup> As a learned Armenian priest, Kristóf Lukácsy, writing in Hungary towards the middle of the last century has explained, 'certa' means 'work, building, town' in Armenian and occurs in a composite form in the names of several ancient Armenian towns, such as Carcathiocerta, Semiramocerta, Ervantocerta, Tigranocerta, etc. (town of Carcathios, Semiramis, Ervantes, Tigranes). As to the last one, Plutarch expressly observes that it was founded by Tigranes. Consequently, concludes Lukácsy, Hunoracerta means a town founded by Hunor and he identifies this personage with the mythical ancestor of the Huns in the Nimrod-legend.<sup>35</sup>

According to Gyula Németh, the etymology of Hunor is *hun-eri* (Hun man).<sup>56</sup> Since Hunoracerta was situated within the general area occupied by the Caucasian Huns, Lukácsy's explanation as to its origins must be clearly right, subject to the correction that Hunor was not a person but a branch of the Hun people.

Having identified the elder son of Nimrod as the Caucasian branch of the Huns, we may now turn our attention to the younger son, Magor. Before doing so, however, let us examine a further convincing proof of the Caucasian homeland of the Hungarians: their connections with the Empire of Persia.

\* how can Magor be younger<sup>60</sup> when the record is 000

## CHAPTER 6

# The Persian Connection

The question of Persian loanwords in Hungarian has long been neglected by linguists. In a recent definitive work on the Hungarian language, Loránd Benkő only lists three: *vár* (fortress), *vásár* (market) and *vám* (toll, duty). He ascribes these to contacts with Persian merchants who visited the settlements of the Hungarians and declares that 'the forefathers of the Hungarians never lived in the immediate vicinity of Persian territories'.<sup>1</sup>

It is, of course, not immediately obvious why Hungarians should have adopted such words as 'fortress' and 'toll' from Persian merchants. It is much more likely that these words found their way into their language when they were in intensive contact with the Persian Empire, paying toll on entering the border and confronting Persian fortresses facing their territory.

However, the simple fact is that Persian loanwords are much more numerous in Hungarian than the meagre examples given by Benkő. Over a century ago, Lukácsy listed over thirty of which the following seem to be quite convincing: *abroncs* (hoop), *arc* (face), *bárány* (lamb), *dajka* (nurse), *ezer* (thousand), *hab* (foam), *hombár* (granary), *huszár* (hussar, cavalryman), *kincs* (treasure), *kos* (ram), *oroszlán* (lion), *sár* (mud), *seregély* (starling), *som* (cornel), *tárkony* (a medicinal plant), *zeng* (resound).<sup>2</sup>

Writing in 1882, Vámbéry gave twenty Persian loanwords of which some were identical with those contained in Lukácsy's list but there were also several additional ones, such as *ármány* (evil spirit), *bálvány* (idol), *csárda* (inn), *csésze* (cup), *nád* (reed), *pad* (bench), *sárkány* (dragon).<sup>3</sup>

To these, the writer may add another four: *bán* (lord, provincial governor), *garaboly* (woven basket), *kutya* (dog), *satrafu* (domineering person).

*Bán* is a particularly important word as its meaning is exactly

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the same in both Persian and Hungarian. The governors of the military provinces protecting the southern frontiers of mediaeval Hungary invariably bore this title and the Viceroy of Croatia was called *bán* right up to 1918. Hungarians therefore must have adopted this word as a political designation at a time when they were in such intimate contact with the Persian Empire that they borrowed the political institutions of the latter.

*Satrafa* clearly brings to mind the Persian satraps and the secondary meaning acquired by it indicates prolonged hostilities between Hungarians and Persians.

The word *kutya* (dog) is also of some significance as Hungarian contains another word of identical meaning, *eb*, which is of Finno-Ugrian derivation. The fact that Hungarians adopted a second word for the same concept (which is now the word more commonly used) indicates extended relations with the Persians, especially when we consider that several other words relating to animals and plants were also borrowed from them. \* *kcb*

The other words listed by Lukácsy and Vámbéry all relate to everyday concepts and in some instances have a cultic significance, *ármány* (evil spirit), *bálvány* (idol), *sárkány* (dragon). *Dajka* (nurse) is a very important word as it indicates a close personal relationship. Words of domestic and economic connotation such as *abroncs* (hoop), *csárda* (inn), *hombár* (granary), are suggestive of intensive co-existence over an extended period.

We can therefore assert with some confidence that the presence of Persian loanwords in Hungarian can only be explained on the basis that these two nations lived side by side over a long period and were in intimate contact with each other. It appears certainly fanciful to attribute these extensive borrowings to mere trading relations with visiting Persian merchants.

Vámbéry makes the interesting observation that Tsheremiss and other Finno-Ugrian languages contain only such Persian loanwords as can be directly traced to Russian or Tartar mediation, whereas the Persian loanwords in Hungarian cannot be so traced and appear to have been acquired through direct contact with the Persians.<sup>4</sup>

An ancient stratum of Persian loanwords in Hungarian was also noted by the eminent Hungarian linguist Bernát Munkácsi

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and he attributed these to Old Persian, Avesta, Middle Persian and Pamirian influences. The presence of these Persian loanwords, along with other very old loanwords of Caucasian origin, induced Munkácsi to place the ancestral home of the Hungarians in the northern Caucasus.<sup>5</sup>

Linguistics, however, are not the only source from which we can prove the Persian connections of the early Hungarians. The art of the Hungarians of the Conquest period, as witnessed by numerous tenth century finds throughout the Carpathian Basin, bears a strongly Sassanian character. The favourite motif of Sassanian art, the *palmette*, dominates Hungarian art objects of the Conquest period, along with other characteristic Persian ornamental forms, such as the tree of life, the winged lion, dragons, stylised birds of prey and other mythical animals. This is most obvious in early Hungarian gold and silver work which we can classify as purely Sassanian. Indeed, it is not only the outward appearance of this branch of Hungarian art which is dominated by Persian motifs but the technique itself with which these objects have been executed, is typical of Persian gold and silver-smiths of the Sassanian era.<sup>6</sup>

} not  
Persian  
but  
Parthian  
origins

The gold and silver objects thus impregnated with Sassanian art forms and techniques are, nevertheless, truly Hungarian. They consist only of such items as the early Hungarians had use for: ornaments for swords and other weapons, belt buckles, head-dress decorations, drinking vessels, horseriding outfits and personal jewellery.<sup>7</sup> A particularly interesting group is constituted by the silver satchel-covers, often inlaid with gold, of which some twenty examples have been found in historical Hungary.<sup>8</sup> These objects served to decorate small leather satchels in which the early Hungarians kept their fire-making implements. The delicately worked covers were obviously a mark of the bearer's rank, since they have only been found in graves of high-ranking persons. Only one such cover has come to light so far outside Hungary (in Semionovo in Russia, in an area occupied by the Tsheremiss),<sup>9</sup> so that we are dealing here with a unique Hungarian artistic development, of which the sole 'foreign' example may well have originated from Hungarian territory.

The gold and silverwork in question is of such great variety

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and manifests the outlook and cultural concepts of the early Hungarians in so many ways, that it cannot possibly be ascribed to a single workshop or to a small group of Persian silversmiths working for the Hungarians. It is not only that the large number of the finds negatives any such suggestions: the general character of all these objects shows such a basic unity of style and spiritual outlook and the technique with which they have been executed is so self-assured and masterly, that we must regard them as products of an indigenous Hungarian culture, preceded by centuries of development.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, application of Persian ornamental forms and motifs is not limited to early Hungarian metalwork. We find the *palmette* and similar motifs time and time again on carved bone-plates decorating wooden articles, such as bows, quivers and saddles.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Persian motifs must have also become traditional features of Hungarian houses and other buildings constructed of timber in the pre-Christian era, for the *palmette* keeps recurring in the stonework of the early Christian churches in Hungary as one of the favourite motifs used by the masons. In the absence of any western counterparts, we must conclude that this was a case of transfer of an established decorative procedure from one architectural medium to another.<sup>12</sup>

We are thus faced with a thriving Hungarian art, completely moulded to the needs and mentality of the Magyar conquerors, yet expressing itself in the standard forms of the Sassanian period of the Persian Empire (224 to 651 A.D.) The fact that this Hungarian-Sassanian art makes its appearance three centuries after the end of the reign of the Sassanides in Persia, suggests that it must have been adopted by the Hungarians at least three hundred years prior to their arrival in their present homeland and maintained by them in a basically unaltered form through their long journey in time and space.

This fundamental conservatism of tenth century Hungarian art and the fact that in spite of its Sassanian formal expression it had a strong Hungarian character, further suggest that the early Hungarians did not simply copy the Persian forms but grew up with them as these forms were being developed. In other words, the Magyars must have been in intimate contact

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with Sassanian Persia from the third to the sixth centuries, so as to make the art of the latter their own and to take it with them as a living entity when they departed from the scene.

Another feature of early Hungarian culture indicative of Persian and Near Eastern influences is the prevalence of the lion as a heraldic animal. The coat of arms of the first Hungarian royal house, the House of Arpád, contained seven lions and there is a lion carved in the crystal sphere constituting the head of the Hungarian coronation sceptre, dating from about 950. The lion also appears as a symbol of sovereignty on a painting in the royal chapel of Béla III (1173-1196) in Esztergom. This painting depicts a highly stylised lion in a pose which is characteristic of the representation of the lion in Near Eastern heraldry.<sup>13</sup> The Near Eastern origin of the Esztergom lion is reinforced by the use of the tree of life and other symbols which two writers, working quite independently of one another, have recently traced back to ancient Mesopotamia.<sup>14</sup>

It is quite clear then that the lions in the Hungarian royal coat of arms were not adopted from the West after the conversion of the Magyars to Christianity, especially as the lion makes its first appearance in Western European heraldry in 1164,<sup>15</sup> more than two hundred years after the making of the Hungarian royal sceptre. Furthermore, the lion also figures prominently in the coats of arms of high-ranking Hungarian clans and families of the Conquest period, such as the Elöd (Csák), Ond (Bor-Kalán), Tuhutum (Zombor), Gyula (Kán) and Ajtony clans. Of these, the lion in the Gyula shield also stands in a typical Near Eastern pose.<sup>16</sup>

The Magyars of the Conquest period therefore must have brought the lion with them as a heraldic animal and since the only place where they could have become acquainted with it was the Near East, it is reasonable to assume that they lived in that area for an extended period. This means that they must have been at least as far south as the neighbourhood of Persia, although the Esztergom lion with its Mesopotamian characterisation and symbolism strongly suggests that they resided at one time even further to the south, in the region of the Tigris and the Euphrates (see Chapter 7).



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It is also interesting to note that in depicting a legendary fight between Saint Ladislas, the most popular mediaeval king of Hungary (1077-1095), and a Cuman warrior, Hungarian artists of the Middle Ages invariably show the king dressed in pure white, with a white horse, whereas the Cuman wears black or dark clothes. This clearly symbolises the cosmic struggle between light and darkness which is the basic concept of Persian religion and indicates that traces of that religion were surviving among Hungarians even after their conversion to Christianity.<sup>17</sup>

Recent investigations of mediaeval Hungarian personal and place names indicate that the Hungarians of the Conquest period were accompanied by a sizeable Iranian minority which settled in the south-western corner of the country, the subsequent counties of Vas and Zala, and took a substantial part in the early western campaigns of the Magyars. These Iranians, called *káliz*,\* were in charge of the iron foundries of Western Hungary, essential for manufacturing weapons, and also had a military responsibility as frontier guards. They were Mohammedans which led to their enforced dispersal all over Hungary in the Christian era.<sup>18</sup> Whilst more research will have to be done on this subject before we can form any definite conclusions, the metalworking abilities of these Iranians suggest that they were Persians proper who probably joined the Hungarians after the adoption of Islam in Persia in the seventh century. It is clear of course, that the main body of the Magyars was no longer occupying a territory directly adjoining Persia at that time, but they may well have acquired this Persian element through the mediation of the Hungarians who remained south of the Caucasus. *The muslim encyclopedic* *mentro*<sub>15</sub>

We also cannot exclude the possibility that these Persians went north with the Hungarians when the two nations parted company and were converted to Mohammedanism when their own people adopted that religion. In either event, the existence of a Persian minority within the Hungarian ethnic body suggests extended direct contact leading to the absorption of Persian elements.

When all these Persian connections of the early Hungarians are taken into account, they add up to a powerful argument that the Magyars must have lived in the immediate neighbourhood

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of Persia over a long period. The predominance of Sassanian art forms and symbols indicates that this period coincided, at least partly, with the amalgamation between the proto-Magyars and the Huns of the Caucasus. This is confirmed by the fact that the Persian Empire began to be active in the Caucasian region in the third century A.D., pressing hard on the Armenians and repeatedly invoking assistance of the Huns. The Hun-Magyar-Persian relationship therefore must have alternated between peaceful coexistence and mutual warfare, until the pressure from the south, aggravated by Byzantine interference, became too much for the Huns and Magyars and they departed for the north.

We have so far established that a branch of the Huns played an important part in the formation of the Hungarians and that this process took place in the southern Caucasus between the second century B.C. and the fourth century A.D. It now remains to be seen which people or peoples furnished the remainder of the ethnic material from which the early Hungarians were formed.

- Magyars in the Caucasus  
who were famous metalsmiths  
working for the Persians?  
In today's Armenia, city of  
Hunoracerta  
see Sevardik's.