

Migratory mechanism: Rus' and the Magyars in the 9th century.

The famous treatise by Constantine Porphyrogenitus “De administrando imperio” (DAI) and other, including Byzantine, sources demonstrate the fact that in spite of the seeming suddenness and chaotic character of the “barbarian” migrations, the historical situation in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe depended on certain general tendencies. The “Barbarians” longed for plunder or other profits within Byzantium while the Empire in accordance with the old concept *divide et impera* tried to take advantage of the contradictions between the “Barbarians”. “While the *vasilevs* of the *Romaioi* (Greeks) maintains peace with the *Pachinakites* (Pechenegs), neither the Rhos (Rus’) or the Turks (Magyars) dare attack the state of the *Romaioi* in the law of war or demand from them tremendous and excessive sums of money or things in exchange of peace fearing that when they attack the *Romaioi*, the *vasilevs* would use the strength of this people against them” (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, DAI, 4).

Long ago the scholars noted that the first appearance of the Magyars before the Bulgarian boundaries and the first appearance of the Rus’ (“the people Rhos”) in Constantinople were linked events. The Danube Bulgarians called for the Magyar help aiming to hold the Byzantine captives who rushed home in 836 or 837. This fact does not evidence directly the hostility of the Magyars against Byzantium (and moreover, the hostility of Khazaria - the Magyars’ sovereign), though it can mark their independent status in Western regions of the North of the Black Sea. Probably, the Magyars were those “savage tribes” who blocked the way to the embassy of the “people Rhos” which appeared “as seekers after friendship” in Constantinople in 838 and had to search for a roundabout way back over the sea to “their people of Swedes” – according to *Annali Bertiniani* (839), via the Frankish Empire (by the Rhine). So, in this period the Magyars could settle in the mysterious country *Levedia* to the West of the Don (?) and even penetrate into *Etelköz* – the country between the Dnieper and the Carpathians (Lower Danube). It seems reasonable to suggest (after a lot of authors) that the embassy of the people Rhos moved to Constantinople by the Dnieper – the Khazarian boundary mainroad, while the Don was the “axial” road of the Khazarian Khaganate (the fact witnessed by building of *Sarkel* and other fortresses) and thus could not be controlled by the Magyars.

Less attention attracted the geopolitical context of the events which took place two decades later, though Emperor Louis the Pious who received the embassy of the Rhos in 839 had warned his Byzantine partner Emperor Theophilos that those people more probably were spies rather than seekers after friendship. In June 860 200 ships of the “people Rhos” suddenly appeared in front of Constantinople’s walls and, as Patriarch Photios evidences, threatened the city “with death by the sword.” We do not know, whether the Rhos possessed the data of a certain ‘intelligence service’ and were aware of Emperor Michael’s absence in the capital, but the fact is that such a raid was not possible without serious preparations. The major point here must have been the river routes – according to the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, Russian ships launched their first attack from Kiev on Constantinople by the Dnieper. In the Xth century the major obstacle on this way were the Dnieper rapids which detailed description contains the above-mentioned treatise by Constantine Porphyrogenitus:

here the boatmen had to haul their craft overland and the “savage tribes” (the Pechenegs) could use the opportunity to attack the Rhos.

The Primary Chronicle’s records, especially the dates, do not correspond to the information of a Byzantine source (unknown in Russia) on the raid of 860 and therefore are often considered unreliable. Meanwhile, the early chronicle dates have an obviously conventional character: from the report of a Greek chronographer it was known that the Rhos launched the first attack on Constantinople under the reign of Michael III, and the Russian chronicler who did not possess the exact information used to date it in a chronographic manner – by the beginning of Michael’s reign or by its end (866). Using this figure as a starting-point, the chronicler had calculated (subtracting two and another two years) the date when Russian princes and Rus (“of Varangian kin”) had been called from over the sea in Novgorod (862) and the retinue-men had established their control over Kiev and obtained the permission to launch a raid on Constantinople.

A more complicated problem is the lack of archaeological data: in Eastern Europe the Scandinavian antiquities of the period of the embassy of 838 are known only in Ladoga, in Novgorodian Gorodishche their appearance can be dated from 860, but in Kiev and even to the North on the Dnieper route – in Gnëzdovo near Smolensk the Scandinavian complexes can be reliably dated only from the Xth century. However, the early **Kievan city layers** have the same dating. It is important that this purely archaeological problem should not be directly linked with the historical problems. Similarly, the Xth century Hungarian monuments cannot be marked out in Eastern Europe.

Anyhow, in the IXth century the Magyars like the Rus were extremely active and demonstrated their independence. A new “splash” of their activity happened in 862: according to Annali Bertiniani, in 862 the Magyars (*Ungri*) for the first time invaded Central Europe, having devastated the East Frankish Kingdom. The Annals contain no commentary upon the invasion (the major attention here is traditionally given to the invasions of the Northmen) though for a long time the scholars have thought that the Magyar raid was connected not only with the strifes in Khazaria, but also with the “pressure” of the forming Varangian – Russian state upon the Magyars. Anyhow, the Magyar invasion influenced upon the balance of forces in Central Europe and in the Balkans. **The Great Moravia** (in alliance with Byzantium) was clashing with Louis the German, king of East Franks, allied with Bulgaria.

Concerning the situation in Eastern Europe, Constantine Porphyrogenitus (DAI, ch. 38) wrote about the three year period when the Magyars (Turks) lived under direct domination of the Khazars in the country Levedia called after their voivoda (military chief). After that the Pechenegs defeated by the Khazars occupied the territory of the Magyars, and one part of them was pressed to Persia (Caucasus?) and the other moved to the West to Etelköz. The khagan called Levedia from Etelköz and offered him to become the archon of the Magyars. Levedia rejected, and the Magyars elected Arpad their ruler: these data obviously demonstrate the beginning of the Magyar autonomy. The evidence of this autonomy gives an early Xth century geographer Ibn Rosta whose information about the Magyars collecting tribute from the Slavs goes back to the sources of 870s. It is important that the Primary Chronicle named the only tribute collectors from the Slavs – the Khazars. Obviously, the

migration to Etelköz was connected with the formation of the Hungarian ethnic identity – and so Ibn Rusta was the first who mentioned their self-name, the Magyars.

Constantine's information about the Magyars (DAI, ch. 38) reveals the situation characteristic of the relations between the Slavs and the nomads. Their relations should not be reduced to a simple domination and tribute-paying: the Magyars have adopted important Slavic terms designating a military chief and law. Levedia was called their first voivoda (βοεβόδα) and Arpad was elected archon; according to a Khazarian custom – *zakana* (ζάκανα) the Magyars raised him on a shield. It is significant that the Pechenegs swore oaths to the Greeks according to their *zakan*. So the Slavic *zakon* became a term of international law (judging from the treaties between the Rus and the Greeks, in the Xth century the Russian law – *zakon russkij* was recognized in Constantinople). Basing on the data on the Slavic-Hungarian relations one can suggest that the transformation of the Slavic culture in the left-bank Dnieper region, i.e. the formation of Romny culture of the Severians, was connected with the new Magyar domination, though judging from the Russian chronicle the Slavic tribute was as before passed to the Khazars obviously through their Hungarian vassals. Anyhow, the Romny culture area in the left-bank Middle Dnieper lacks numerous Khazarian Saltovo-Mayak antiquities – the Magyars could have isolated the Dnieper Slavs from Khazaria.

The most complicated problem of the Hungarian history in Eastern Europe is the impossibility to distinguish the IXth century Hungarian archaeological monuments neither on the Don, or on the Dnieper. For a long time this situation had a good explanation: the Magyars had adopted the Khazarian Saltovo-Mayak culture, and it was not without reason that Constantine Porphyrogenitus as well as the Eastern authors called them the Turks. But the recent decades were marked with the finds of many “Ugrian” elements in equipment and burial rituals of the Saltovo-Mayak monuments in the forest-steppe zone including such major centers as a white stone fortresses near Sukhaja Gomel'sha and Verkhnij Saltov on the Severskij Donets.*

Moreover, the archaeological aspects of the problem should be taken into account: the Hungarian material culture was formed in the Xth century with their Conquest of Homeland. The same are the antiquities of the original Rus – the Scandinavian antiquities of the IXth century in Eastern Europe. They are not numerous in the North – in Ladoga, Novgorod (in Gorodishche) and in the Upper Volga, are practically absent in the Middle Dnieper, but spread in the first half of the Xth century – the epoch of formation of Old Russian state with the center in Kiev.

* See also about the find of a Hungarian burial from the 2nd half of the IXth century in Poltava region: Suprunenko, Kupatova, Prijmack 1999. A single, though a characteristic element of a female dress – horse-like pendants – marks the connections of the burial monuments of the Donets basin in VIII-IXth centuries with the Kama region on the one hand and with the Taman' peninsula, on the other hand (cf. Mikheev 1982, Aksjenov 1998). If this element is really characteristic of the East European Hungarian dress, one can reasonably suggest that the Magyars had reached not only Donets, but also the Bosporos (as the above-cited anonymous author used by Ibn Rusta evidenced).

An Arab anonymous author whose report used Ibn Rusta tells that the country of Magyars lies between the countries of the Pechenegs and the tribe *Eskel* (a fraction of the Volga Bulgars). The Magyars collect tribute from the neighboring Slavs (*Saqaliba*), capture them prisoners and sell to the Greeks from ar-Rum in their port *K.r.kh* (Kerch'). The Magyars use to roam between two rivers in the country of the *Saqaliba* – Itil (flowing to the Khazars) and Duba (or Ruta): beyond one of these rivers lives a people *Nandar* which belongs to ar-Rum, over their land there is a high mountain, and beyond it a Christian people *M.rwat* lives. Generations of scholars tried to interpret this text. The main question deals with the rivers between which the Hungarian roaming territories lay. Long ago the river Duba was identified with the Danube over which the real people *Nandor* lived (such was the Hungarian name for the Bulgars - the term going back to an old Turkic ethnonym *Onoghundur*)^{**}; the Danube Bulgarians settled within the Empire of the *Romaioi* and so were affiliated to ar-Rum. Therefore the Carpathians appear the mountain over which the *M.rwat* lived – in fact, over the Carpathians lived the Slavs – the Moravians. More difficult is the problem of Itil: the Turkic term *itil* means ‘a river’. Most of the scholars identified the Itil not with the Volga but with the Dnieper: the Magyars moved beyond the Dnieper to the country *Etelköz* (the Hungarian term for “a country between two rivers”).

No less difficulty presents the question of dating the events described. It is significant that both the anonymous author and Ibn Rusta do not mention the Rus in the country of the Slavs. According to the Arab geographer, the people ar-Rus lives on a mysterious island, from there they sail to the Slavs to collect tribute; they enslave the Slavs like the Magyars. The Primary Chronicle reports the date when the Rus appeared in the country of the Dnieper Slavs for the first time: Askold and Dir's retinue settled in Kiev after calling-in of the Varangian princes to Novgorod; as we know, it happened before 860 – the year when the Rus launched their attack on Constantinople. By that time the Magyars settled in *Etelköz*.

The Primary Chronicle reveals the geopolitical situation in Eastern Europe: the chronicler reports (under the conventional 859) about the tribute laid on the Novgorodian *Slovene*, *Krivichi* and *Merja* by the Varangians from over the sea and about the tribute collected by the Khazars from the *Poliane*, *Severiane* and *Vjatichi*. This report corresponds to the above-mentioned data by Ibn Rusta about the domination of the people ar-Rus over the Slavs in the North: they sail to the Slavs from the “island of ar-Rus”, i.e. from over the sea and not from the Eastern Europe; and in the South, according to the Arab author, the tribute from the Slavs was collected by the Magyars and not by the Khazars proper: they were formal Khazarian vassals.

^{**} The Ravenna anonymous author (between the VIIth and VIIIth centuries) mentions the country *Onoghoria* to the North from the Maeotis - the Sea of Azov (Podosiniv 2002. Pp. 192, 251-252); V.P.Shusharin thought that there the first contacts between the Bulgars-Onoghurs and the Magyars-Ugrians took place, and since then the Magyars had called the Bulgars the *Nandor*, while the Slavs had named the Magyars after their country *Onoghoria* and from this term an ethnonym the Ugrians developed in Proto-Slavic language (cf. Róna-Nas 1999. 282-287).

Meanwhile, the *Slovene* and other Northern tribes have driven the Varangian violators away over the sea and called Russian princes in Novgorod; in 860 their retinue-men launched the attack on Constantinople. Obviously, at that time Kiev and the Dnieper route including the rapids (in the Xth century the Rus feared them because of the Pechenegs' threat) were free. The Rus' gained a foothold in Polianian Kiev in 860, at the time of the Magyar-Pecheneg conflict, but the left-bank Dnieper still remained under the nominal domination of Khazaria (and former Khazarian allies - the Magyars) – the Rus' appropriated the Khazarian tribute later, under Oleg the Prophetic (880s, according to the chronicle dating).

The invasions of the Northmen, Magyars, as well as the raid of the Rus' on Constantinople resulted in the mid-IXth century in an extraordinary splash of the missionary activity both in the West and in the East. Ansgar's mission to the Swedes, Constantine the Philosopher's mission to Khazaria and Great Moravia, the rivalry of the Eastern and Western Churches in the course of Bulgaria's Baptism, and finally, Patriarch Photios' report that the barbarian "people Rhos" who had attacked Constantinople wished to be baptized and asked for a bishop in Byzantium, - all these facts were obviously connected not only with the ideas about Gog and Magog, the "prince Rhos" from the Septuagint and other signs of the coming end of the world: the concepts characteristic of Christian Europe since the Migration period. No less significant was the desire to "tame" the barbarian peoples and to draw them into the sphere of influence of the rival Churches and great powers. The "Barbarians" were capable of using these aspirations in their own interests: Bulgarian prince Boris who adopted Byzantine Emperor Michael's baptismal name had secured the independence of the Bulgarian Church from Byzantium and thus positioned himself being not a Byzantine subject. The IXth century Magyars remained out of the sphere of this missionary activity – the spreading of the world religions among the nomads met certain difficulties, but after the Conquest of Homeland in the Xth century the Magyars were converted to Christianity, and the heritage of the Great Moravia contributed a lot to this event – the Hungarian Christian vocabulary contains Slavic adoptions, and there is a significant stratum of the indirect adoptions - from the Turkic forms of Slavic origin, in particular the terms for the Franks (*olasz*) and for a king (*király*). Besides that the Magyars adopted from the Slavs the hydronyms of their conquered land (including the name of the Danube – *Duna*).

The consequences of the "Photios' Baptism" of Rus' are practically unappreciable. G. Bakalov suggested that the fragility of this event was conditioned by the fact that the Bulgarians of 860s were unable to read and write the Slavic language and did not participate in the conversion of Rus'. It should be also noted that by the 860s the Varangian Rus could hardly master the Slavic language. Nevertheless, the author of the Primary Chronicle was aware of the importance of the Slavic writing for Rus', and a special chronicle construction witnesses to this fact.

The Primary Chronicle reports about the Magyar moving by Kiev under 898 in order to link it with the Magyar invasion in Moravia and with the story about the beginning of the Slavic written language which was brought to Moravia in 860s by St. Constantine and Methodios: the Chronicler needed this anachronism for the assertion that "the Slovenian language and the Russian language are the same."⁽²¹⁾ Earlier, under 882, the chronicle tells that Rjurik's successor prince Oleg with his retinue of Rus and *Slovene* which moved from Novgorod and captured Smolensk on the Upper

Dnieper before the capture of Kiev came to a stop lower the Dnieper in *Ugorskoje*; it was named so (according to the record under 989) after the Magyars/*Ugrians* had stood there. As it was noted above, the chronicle dates are of conventional character, but the whole geopolitical situation was described properly. It is significant that in 881 the Magyars with a Khazarian fraction (the Kavars) who had freed themselves from the khagan's power launched a new raid to the West in Central Europe (on Vienna) acting as the allies of Moravia and the enemies of the Franks. In Kiev Oleg in the guise of a trader sailing to the Greeks (the first mention of the route from the Varangians to the Greeks) lured **Askold and Dir** for a bargain, but then killed them as usurpers and proclaimed Kiev the capital ("the mother of Russian towns"). At that moment Oleg's Varangians and *Slovene* brought the names "Rus'" and "Russian land" to the Middle Dnieper region. Then (under 883) the chronicler tells how the prince violated the right-bank *Drevljane* and collects tribute from them, then he appropriated tribute from the left-bank *Severiane* (884) and *Radimichi* (885) proclaiming hostility towards the Khazars. Oleg could appropriate easily the Khazarian tribute from the left-bank Dnieper Slavs thanks to the crisis in Khazaria after the Magyars had left Levedia occupied by the Pechenegs (the latter cut off the Dnieper Slavs from Khazaria) and moved to the West – to Etelköz and farther.

Now, we turn back to the epoch of Hungarian Conquest of Homeland and the significance of this event for Rus'. The new collision in 894 had a traditional for IXth century form of a conflict provoked by Byzantium (the conflict was described in the Chronicle by Simeon Logothete and by Constantine Porphyrogenitus - DAI, ch. 40). The Greeks gave the Magyars gifts to make them attack the Bulgarians who were at war with Byzantium. The Magyars managed to defeat the Bulgarian tsar Simeon and make headway to his capital Preslav. After the Magyars had returned to Etelköz, Simeon in 895 concluded peace with the Greeks and a military alliance with the Pechenegs. When the Magyars launched a military campaign (Constantine Porphyrogenitus does not report its aim) the Bulgarians and the Pechenegs devastated their country. It should be noted that at the same time in 894 the Magyars as Moravians' allies again attacked the Franks (Bulgarians' allies) and the Slavs in Pannonia. The Magyars returned to their devastated country, but soon had to leave it under Pechenegs' pressure. They moved through the Carpathians to the Danube, occupied Transylvania, ravaged the Great Moravia (taking advantage of the intestine struggle there) and in 896-906 settled in this region. Constantine Porphyrogenitus noted that "the rest of the population" of Moravia "dispersed fleeing to the neighboring peoples – Bulgarians, Turks (the term he used for the Magyars proper), Croats and others".

It is not clear whether Rus' participated directly in the events connected with the Magyar-Bulgarian war and how the Pechenegs' threat was estimated (the Pechenegs have already penetrated the limits of the forest-steppe zone). Anyhow, to a certain degree Rus' evidently appeared the successor of the Great Moravia – according to the archaeological data, Rus' was among "the other peoples" where the Moravians fled. The Moravian antiquities were found in two major areas – in the Middle and Upper Dnieper. It is significant that in Gnězdovo, the main retinue settlement controlling the passage from the Volkhov water system to the Dnieper system, were found Moravian things and there was maintained the Moravian ceramic tradition – the manufacturing of clay vessels of high quality. Kiev and Gnězdovo on the route from the Varangians to the Greeks appeared attractive for the Moravians as

well as for the Varangians. The reason for such attractiveness is quite obvious: here before Oleg who was saved from the Magyars lay the way from the Varangians to the Greeks. Oleg took advantage of this way having gathered all the forces available with the aim of an attack on Constantinople (according to the chronicle dating, in 907); in 907 he concluded an unprecedented trade treaty with Byzantium. The Russian prince once more took advantage of the profitable geopolitical situation: according to the chronicle, under Igor in 915 “the Pechenegs for the first time came to the Russian land and concluded peace with Igor and came to the Danube.” In the North Black Sea region the Pechenegs replaced the Magyars, and it was the factor to be taken into account during the campaigns against the Greeks. On the Danube the Greeks exploited the Pechenegs against the Bulgarians, possibly, the Russians concluded peace with the Pechenegs in the interests of their trade relations with Byzantium. In 944 Igor engaged the Pechenegs for his expedition against Byzantium: he aimed to demonstrate force, frighten the Greeks and make them conclude a new trade treaty. Having achieved the conclusion of this treaty on the Danube, he sent the Pechenegs to wage war in Bulgaria. After several decades it was the turn of Rus’, and prince Svjatoslav was called by the Greeks against the Bulgarians and then Byzantium had to appeal to the Pechenegs in order to restrain the ambitions of the Russian prince who considered the “center of his country” to be on the Danube.

The IXth century migratory mechanism in Eastern Europe was connected with the system of East – West movements of the “steppe nomads” and the North – South movements of the “river nomads”, i.e. of the Rus (B. Najmushin). It is significant that the both groups were included in the geopolitical system of the relations between the “great powers” of the Early Middle Ages and in the system of tribute collecting from the East European Slavs (as well as in the system of alliances with the Great Moravia). The Magyars were prepared for the meeting with the Pannonian Slavs in their conquered homeland: the linguists reconstruct the situation of Slavic-Hungarian bilingualism (the Koine) in Arpad epoch (X-XIth centuries) (E. Helimsky). This factor favored the intensive intrusion of the Magyars (as earlier – of the Bulgars) in the context of the international relations in Central Europe and in the Balkans and the formation of “national” states there. At the same time, as A. Róna-Nas noted, the Slavs did not participate in military expeditions of the Magyars, that’s why “the Magyars, unlike the Bulgars and the Avars, did not become assimilated”, but assimilated the Slavs.