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On the Turkic origin of the names of the Hungarian tribes

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In the first half of the study, the author reviews the work that has been done on the onomastics of Hungarian tribal names, with special reference to the conclusions reached by Julius Németh (1930, 1966, 1975), and sums up his own findings on the subject (Berta 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1991). The second half of the article suggests new etymologies for Nyék and Megyer, which establish their membership in the set of Hungarian tribal names of Turkic origin. The author shows that Nyék and Megyer, considered to be of Finno-Ugric origin in the earlier literature, admit of the same analysis as the names of the other Hungarian tribes, which, ultimately, can be traced back to Turkic military terminology.

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History writing for generations was dominated—and handicapped—by the assumption that a particular individual's ethnic affiliation was something that could be determined with absolute certainty. Another axiom serving to restrict the range of historical perception was that the durable cohesion of the various peoples was something that also existed in the distant past.

It was not until the 1920s that it gradually became obvious that the histories written by the early medieval historians were not so much histories of the peoples of their time, but accounts of their ethnogenesis.

Thanks to the work done by Reinhard Wenskus¹ and, more recently, by Herwig Wolfram, Joachim Herrmann, Herwig Friesinger, Falco

¹ For the terminology and methodology of modern ethnogeny, see primarily Wenskus (1961).

Daim, Walter Pohl and the outstanding Hungarian historian Jenő Szűcs,² the 1980s saw the gradual emergence of a new approach to the history of the Early Middle Ages.

Then came the publication in two volumes of the material presented at a 1986 symposium on the subject in Zwettl, Austria (Wolfram & Pohl 1990 and Friesinger & Daim 1990); the papers—marshalling new findings and new hypotheses—left no doubt that a new methodology was in the offing.

That gentilism as a principle of organization entailed poly-ethnicity is nothing new. We have long known that the Langobard armies consisted of Gepidae, Bulgarians, Sarmatians, Saxons, and other Pannonian ethnic groups. And that the name “Avar” in the sources can stand for Kutrigur Huns, Bulgarians, Gepidae, Romans and Slavs. It is also an established fact that “national” affiliation among these poly-ethnic peoples was not necessarily exclusive. A person could be a Gepid as well as a Langobard or an Avar; his gentile name, indicative of his membership in a major tribal confederation, could be devalued overnight and become no more than the name of a local clan.

It is the pattern of this development—from tribe, to tribal confederation, to ethnic group—that we are just beginning to try to trace.

The study of Hungarian tribal names, particularly their significance as a historical source, calls for a new approach. Obviously, this is something that historians and linguists will have to work out jointly. What I propose to do in what follows is to summarize the findings that linguists have reached to date, in the hope that these findings will serve as the starting point for modelling the formation of the Hungarian tribal confederation.

When it comes to doing research on Hungarian tribal names, linguists have two major sources at their disposal. One is the list of tribal names contained in the Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ *De administrando imperio*,³ a work that we have been familiar with for the past 250 years; the other is the set of all the place names in historic Hungary which originate in tribal names.

² See Szűcs (1971 and 1992), both of which deserve an international readership.

³ For a critical edition and English translation of his mid-10th-century source, see Moravcsik & Jenkins (1967).

Since the pioneering work done by Nagy (1910), there can be no questioning the fact that the two sources must be used together complementarily. Considered in themselves, Constantine VII's data admit of a number of readings and can easily mislead a researcher unfamiliar with the relevant Hungarian place names. I have no intention of listing the often ludicrous interpretations that have been offered by scholars who have ignored the latter source. Some of the earlier of these dilettantish etymologies have, at any rate, been summarily evaluated by Németh (1930: 227-230). Suffice it here to give but a single, somewhat later example. Interpreting Constantine's list of tribal names, the excellent German Altaic scholar Menges (1944-1945: 256-280) read the Hungarian tribal name *Keszi* as *Qasī*, and the name *Kér* as *Qarī*. In consequence, the translations he suggested, 'corral' and 'old', were bound to be mistaken.

Németh (1930) was the first to offer a systematic, scholarly account of Hungarian tribal names. Reviewing the earlier accounts that had been given, he retained and / or supplemented those that he found tenable and offered new etymologies for those that he did not. Of the etymologies Németh "retained" in the system he proposed in 1930, we find the one for *Nyék* (cf. Herman 1905), and for the tribal name *Tarján*, one of the earliest of the etymologies still accepted today (cf. Salamon 1876: 722). With some qualification, we can include Németh's interpretation of the tribal name *Megyer* among the "retained" etymologies, for what he did was build on an idea of Regulý's (cf. Hunfalvy 1864: 47). The long and the short of the conclusion Németh reached in 1930 was that, except for the name *Nyék* and the first part of the name *Megyer*, all Hungarian tribal names were of Turkic origin.

For the tribal name *Nyék*, Németh gave a Finno-Ugric etymology on the basis of the obsolete Hungarian common noun *nyék*, meaning 'hedge; a fenced-in place of refuge'. For the tribal names of Turkic origin, Németh submitted the following meanings: *Kabar* 'rebel' (vb., 2nd pers. sing., imperat.), and 'rebel' (n.); *Megyer* 'Mañc-man'; *Kürt* 'snowdrift'; *Gyarmat* 'tireless'; *Tarján* 'viceroys'; *Jenő* 'minister'; *Kér* 'giant'; *Keszi* 'fragment'.

Németh's translations of these tribal names and the confederative structure that their etymologies were assumed to reflect became axioms of Hungarian historiography after 1930. Their impact was almost too pervasive, so much so that in his later works (see primarily Németh 1966), Németh found it necessary to rephrase and qualify some of his

earlier explanations. Compelling critical comments from other quarters, too, led him to review his earlier position and to retract, in one of his last articles (Németh 1975: 154-160), the etymologies he had proposed for *Megyer*, *Gyarmat*, and *Kér*.

Németh was not the only one to have come up with etymologies for at least certain Hungarian tribal names. Kristó, Makk and Szegfű (1973: 36) have recapitulated the attempts to identify the tribal name *Kér* with the Hungarian word *kér* in the obsolete sense of 'bark' (as of a tree), or 'crust' (as of bread), and alternatively, with the modern Hungarian third person singular verb *kér* meaning 'wants, demands'. Of the etymologies that have been proposed for the tribal name *Kürt*, the most familiar is the one correlating it to the Hungarian noun *kürt*, meaning 'horn, bugle, trumpet' (cf. Benkő 1970: 693). Moór (1951: 50-51) submitted that the tribal name *Keszi* was related to the Hungarian *kesze*, *keszi*, dialectal forms of *keszeg*, 'carp', and suggested that *Keszi* might be totemistic in origin.

All of the above accounts—a mere sampling of the etymologies that have been proposed over the years by way of interpreting the names of the Hungarian tribes—are fraught with difficulties, phonological as well as semantic. I have no wish to enter into their refutation here, having dealt—in 1989 and thereafter—in some detail with the etymology of these tribal names (see Berta 1989, 1990a, and 1991), and having discussed the historical implications of these latest etymologies in a paper delivered in Oslo in 1989 (Berta 1990b). It was this work on tribal names proper that led me to look at the names—*savarti* (Berta 1992a) and *Ungar* (Berta 1992b)—by which foreigners had been wont to refer to the Hungarians. I found these terms to be members of the same semantic field as the tribal names themselves and thus to provide indirect confirmation of the soundness of the new etymologies.

My studies of 1989 led me to propose new etymologies for four of the Hungarian tribal names. As I saw it, the original meaning of *Kürt*, *Gyarmat*, *Jenő* and *Kér*—all of which, in the final analysis, could be shown to originate in Turkic military terminology—was probably 'little breast', 'hinder part of the back', 'little flank', and 'the last'.

Besides introducing these four new etymologies, I also revised the etymology Németh had proposed for the tribal name *Keszi*, along the lines suggested by Pais (1930: 299).

There is no need to recapitulate the details of any of these etymologies here. (For the particulars of each etymology, see Berta 1990a and

1991.) Suffice it here for me to give the Turkic etymon of each tribal name and those intermediate forms which can be attested in Turkic. Other data will be cited only where absolutely necessary.

The etymon for the tribal name *Kürt* is *köküz*, meaning ‘breast’, probably a derivative of a verb **kök-*, meaning ‘suck’. Presumably, it was the Chuvash form of this word **köyür > *köwür > *kūr* that found its way into Ancient Hungarian,⁴ where there was affixed to it the well-known Ancient Hungarian diminutive suffix⁵ of Finno-Ugric origin, **+tü > Old Hungarian +t*. We might note here that the ancient diminutive suffix had not only a diminutive function, but—most probably, like its Turkic equivalent—also an individuating function.

Ultimately, the tribal name *Gyarmat* can be traced back to a Turkic compound, *jarimartı*. The first part, *jarım*, is Chuvash in appearance: it has *ǰ-* in initial position and the suffix *-m* where Common Turkic would have *y-* and *-n*, respectively.⁶ Originally, the word meant ‘shoulder-blade’, which was modified to ‘back’. The second part of the compound is the word *art* ‘the back or hinder part of anything’⁷, and—as can be expected of a regular Turkic compound—it is the possessive form of the

⁴ The fact that the modern Chuvash form(s) of the Turkic etymon are incompatible with this reconstruction does not discredit this hypothesis. It was established quite some time ago that the early Chuvash elements of the Hungarian language do not come from some earlier form of modern-day Chuvash. In Chuvash, we have the following data: *kākār* ‘grud’ (verxnjaja čast’ tulovišč’a); ‘grud (ženskaja)’ (ČuvRS); Anatri dialect *kākār*, *kākkār*, Viryal dialect *kōkōr*, *kōkkōr* ‘grud (ženščiny)’; ‘grud (zemli; čast’ telegi: lisica)’ (Ašmarin 1934: 108). Where we have medial *-k-* or *-kk-* in modern Chuvash, there formerly was **-k-*. That there were secondary, but archaic medial *-g-* forms in Turkic is attested in Oghuz and Kipchak: cf. Turkish *göğüs*, Turkmen *gövüs*, Gagauz *gūs*, Codex Cumanicus *kövüs* (Grønbech 1942: 150).

⁵ On the suffix, see D. Bartha (1958: 105-106).

⁶ For the Common Turkic data, see Clauson (1972: 970a: *yarın*); the modern Chuvash data: *śurām* ‘spina, hrebet, spinka (odeždy)’ (ČuvRS), dialectal *śorām* ‘spina; pojasnica; vyšivka na spine kaftana’ (Ašmarin 1937: 269).

⁷ Originally, the initial vowel of Turkic *art* was long (*ārt*), and the word probably meant ‘the nape of the neck’ (Clauson 1972: 200b-201a).

third person singular of this word that is found in the compound *járīmarti*,⁸ which we take to be the etymon of *Gyarmat*.

In the case of the tribal name *Jenő*, the probable Turkic intermediary was either *Yänäk* or *Yänäy*.⁹ It was, at any event, a derivative of the original Turkic etymon *yan* meaning 'the hip; the side, flank' (cf. Clauson 1972: 940ab), either the diminutive *+Ak* (for the affix *+Ak*, see Erdal 1991: 40-42), or the affix *+Gak* (for the affix *+Gak*, see Erdal 1991: 74-75). One would like to be able to decide whether the Turkic intermediary was a *+Ak* or a *+Gak* derivative, but we have absolutely no grounds—neither phonological, nor morphological, nor semantic—on which to base such a decision. If the affix was *+Ak*, the tribal name *Jenő* originally meant 'little flank'; if the Turkic etymon had the affix *+Gak*, then *Jenő* originally meant 'face'.¹⁰ It is important to note that the initial *y-* in the Turkic form of *Jenő* is one of the unmistakable signs of Common Turkic. It follows from this that the tribal name *Jenő* did not originate from the same Turkic language as *Gyarmat* and *Kürt*.

For the tribal name *Kér* we can assume a Turkic etymon **kērū*, and an intermediary **kerü*, or **keri*. The Turkic etymon is a derivative. The stem is **kē*, meaning 'back, behind' (Clauson 1972: 686a), to which an original directional suffix *+rū* has been added (Clauson 1972: 736b-

⁸ The Turkic intermediate form was probably **járīmati*. There seems to be no need to account for the **-r- > -Ø-* shift before the *-t-* in **ati*. It is a change well attested in several Turkic languages, Chuvash among them.

⁹ We have no way of knowing whether the voicing and aspiration of the final guttural took place in the intermediate Turkic form, or in the Old Hungarian loanword. Both are equally plausible. It would be a fascinating study—and one that would require the analysis of a great many words—to try to determine what role the Turkic influence on Hungarian played in the development of the Turkic-Hungarian convergence which sealed the fate of the final guttural. It was Ligeti (1986: 71-82) who last called attention to this particular instance of Turkic-Hungarian convergence, a subject which has yet to be investigated in depth.

¹⁰ Both possibilities presuppose a *ya- > yä-* shift in the Turkic word; the *+GAK* variant also presupposes an *-ñ- > -n-* shift. As I have already had occasion to point out (1990a: 35; 1991: 25-27), both possibilities are well attested in Pecheneg, and chances are that the tribal name is Pecheneg in origin, or derives from a language closely related to it.

737a). The tribal name *Kér* must have meant ‘the part or place behind’; its origin is a standard word in most Turkic languages.

For the tribal name *Keszi*, I supplemented Németh’s etymology (Németh, as mentioned above, took the form **Käsäy* as his point of departure) with the information that the Turkic etymon was received into Hungarian in two forms, *käs* and *käsäk* (Berta 1990a: 36, 1991: 7-11). This accounts for the anomaly that the tribal name *Keszi* occurs in the oldest Hungarian monuments in a number of phonetic variants.¹¹ Turkic *käs*, meaning ‘fragment, piece’ is a standard word in Ancient Turkic;¹² *käsäk*¹³ is a form ending in a Turkic diminutive. It is the same diminutive (+*Ak*) as must have occurred in the Turkic form of the tribal name *Jenő*.

The new etymologies summarized above have a number of implications for the history of the period. The new pattern of tribal names, as I have argued (Berta 1990b), sheds new light on what might have motivated the tribal alliance behind the name *Kürtgyarmat*, which figures in Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ list of tribal names. It also seems to confirm the Byzantine emperor’s account of the change of dynasties from Levedi to Álmos, or rather Árpád.¹⁴ For the confederative structure that

¹¹ There is evidence of the two variants from Old Hungarian. Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ text leads us to assume Old Hungarian **Keszi*; the etymon of the Hungarian place names *Keszi*, *Kesző*, *Keszű*, on the other hand, reflects the existence of the variants **Keszīy* ~ **Keszey* in Old Hungarian.

¹² See Kāšgārī *käs* ‘a piece of anything’ (Dankoff & Kelly 1982: 262)

¹³ Specifying the nature of the final guttural runs up against difficulties of the same kind as I have outlined in connection with the Turkic intermediary of the tribal name *Jenő*.

¹⁴ Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ account of the change of dynasties within the Hungarian tribal confederation reads as follows: “A short while afterwards, that chagan-prince of Khazaria sent a message to the Turks (i.e. Hungarians), requiring that Lebedias, their first voivode, should be sent to him. Lebedias, therefore, came to the chagan of Khazaria and asked the reason why he had sent for him to come to him. The chagan said to him: ‘We have invited you upon this account, in order that, since you are noble and wise and valorous and first among the Turks, we may appoint you prince of your nation, and you may be obedient to our word and our command.’ But he, in reply, made answer to the chagan: ‘Your regard and purpose for me I highly esteem and express to you suitable thanks, but since I am not strong enough for this rule, I cannot obey you; on the other

emerged from the new etymologies clearly implies that it was the tribe of Tarján (Árpád's tribe) that took over the leadership functions of the tribe of Megyer (Levedi's tribe) after the dynastic change (cf. Berta 1990b).

From the point of view of onomastics, my conclusions squared with those of Németh on two highly essential points. I had managed to set up a systematic description of Hungarian tribal names and had found the vast majority of these names to be of Turkic origin.

But there were also some major differences between Németh's findings and my own. The pattern I had hit upon in 1989 appeared to be more transparent than his and a suitable tool for reconstructing, at some later time, the various phases of the formation of the Hungarian tribal confederations. It was evident, however, that this task—which would fall to historians—would have to wait until I had managed to establish that the tribal names *Nyék* and *Megyer*, too, followed the same pattern.

As concerns the tribal name *Nyék*—which, as an obsolete Hungarian standard word, meant 'hedge'—I had already suggested the possibility of its Turkic origin in two separate papers (Berta 1990a: 33 and 1991: 6); in neither, however, did I adduce the data pertinent to its Turkic etymon: Kirgiz *ǰēk* and Bashkir *šěyäk*, both words meaning 'fenced-in flower bed, gully, trench marking the edge of a property, border, periphery'. In view of the fact that in Turkic we can find a morphological correspondence for Hungarian *nyék*, while the most we can reconstruct from Finno-Ugric—assumed until now to be the donor language (Németh 1930: 241-245, 1975: 155-156, Benkő 1970: 1039, Rédei 1988: 874)—is the verbal root, it seems a much more plausible approach to suppose the tribal name *Nyék* to be of Turkic origin, than to think of it as a Finno-Ugric element.¹⁵

hand, however, there is a voivode other than me, called Almoutzis, and he has a son called Árpád; let one of these, rather, either that Almoutzis or his son Árpád, be made prince, and be obedient to your word.” (Moravcsik & Jenkins 1967: 173)

¹⁵ If this supposition is indeed proved to be correct, the Hungarian tribal name *Nyék* (and the common noun *nyék*) will have to be categorized as an element of the most archaic Turkic stratum of the Hungarian language, a stratum where the unusual Hungarian *ny* [ń] ~ Common Turkic *-y-* correspondence is not unique: Cf. Hungarian *nyár* 'summer' ~ Common Turkic *yaz* 'id.'; Hungarian *nyak* 'neck' ~ Common Turkic *yaqa* 'the edge, border, collar'.

The origin of the tribal name *Megyer* is a subject on which I have had nothing to say in any of my earlier publications. My latest research, however, has turned up evidence that I should like to present at this point.

It might be best to start by reviewing the research results to date. There are two salient points on which all researchers have agreed. All have linked the tribal name *Megyer* to the ethnonym *magyar*; and all have sought to find a Finno-Ugric etymology for both the tribal name and the related ethnonym.

It would be hard to argue with the assumption that the tribal name *Megyer* and the ethnonym *magyar* have the same etymology.

Particularly since Róna-Tas (1993: 22) has convincingly resolved a long-standing difficulty: the exact nature of the correlation between the non-back sounds of the tribal name and the back sounds of the ethnonym. The dissimilar phonological patterns of *Megyer* and *magyar*, Róna-Tas has argued, are the result of the differences in the degree to which Ancient Hungarian and Old Turkic were stressed. The conclusions he arrived at are relevant from our point of view in another respect as well:

“In a Turkic linguistic environment, the phonological pattern of *madžer* regularly changed to *medžer* under the impact of the stressed final syllable. The name of our Chief Tribe, thus, is the ‘Turkicized’ variant of the original Finno-Ugric, a variant developed in the course of generations of close Turkic-Hungarian contact, and one which, thus, fits the pattern of Turkic origin established for the other tribal names” (Róna-Tas 1993: 22).

The Finno-Ugric origin of both the tribal name *Megyer* and the ethnonym *magyar* is, as we have noted, the other point on which all researchers have been in agreement. This was Julius Németh’s considered opinion; this was the theory subscribed to by the editors of *A magyar nyelv történeti-etimológiai szótára* (A historical-etymological dictionary of the Hungarian language) and the editors of *A magyar szókészlet finn-ugor elemei* (The Finno-Ugric elements of the Hungarian vocabulary), and, more recently, by Róna-Tas. The arguments they have presented might differ on points of detail, but not as regards the ultimate Finno-Ugric origin of both the tribal name and the ethnonym. Let us briefly summarize what it is that they actually said.

Németh had two theories on the subject. His earlier one (1930: 245-248) built on what Reguly had argued in 1841 (cf. Hunfalvy 1864: 47), and went as follows: *Megy* + root, the first element of the tribal name *Megyer*, was of Finno-Ugric origin and corresponded to Vogul *māñši*, *mañši*, the Vogul name for both the Voguls and the Ostyaks. The second element of the tribal name, Németh thought, was the possessive *eri* form of Turkic *er*, meaning 'man' (1930: 247-249).

Németh's second interpretation (1975: 154-160) was an adaptation of a theory of Setälä's. In this view, the tribal name *Megyer* was ultimately totemic in origin and corresponded to Vogul *mansin*, meaning 'capercaillie'.

As explained in *A magyar nyelv történeti-etimológiai szótára* (Benkő 1970: 817), and in *A magyar szókészlet finnugor elemei* (Lakó 1971: 415-417), the ethnonym *magyar* and the correlative tribal name *Megyer* can be traced back to a compound consisting of the Ugric fraternity name **mañćz*, and the Finno-Ugric standard word *er(i)*, meaning 'man, human being'. According to Rédei (1988: 866-867), the Ugric **mañćz* is genetically related to the Ugric verbal noun **mañćz- ~ *mañćz*, meaning 'story, tell a story'.

Róna-Tas has come up with a new interpretation. In a paper delivered in Düsseldorf in 1984 (1988: 131), and then in the inaugural address delivered at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1993: 19-21), he pointed to the problematic onomastic assumptions of the earlier accounts and convincingly demonstrated the implausibility of the self-denomination *mañši* 'man'. The ethnonym *magyar*, he argued, can be traced to a compound consisting of two ethnonyms, a compound whose original phonological pattern was probably *mañć er*.¹⁶

Somewhat the same kind of argument has been made in recent years by János Gulya. In a personal letter dated March 25, 1994, he made the point that the tribal name *Megyer* was probably ultimately the Khazar form of the Finno-Ugric (Ugric) name *mañć-er* in Hungarian.

What has made so plausible the notion that *magyar ~ Megyer* is Finno-Ugric in origin is not, I think, the fact that Hungarian—the lan-

¹⁶ This ingenious new etymology of Róna-Tas' calls for expanding the Ugric family of languages, i.e., for adding a fourth member (Er) to the three established members (Hungarian, Vogul and Ostyak). The problem is that nothing he says substantiates the existence of this fourth member.

guage of the Magyars—is a Finno-Ugric language, but the fact that the initial *m-* of the ethnonym seems, at first glance, to rule out the possibility of its Turkic origin, the only logical alternative, given the historical background and the established origins of the other tribal names. Of course, the Hungarians, considering they spoke a Finno-Ugric language, could have adopted a name of foreign origin, as did, for instance, the Bulgarians, the Tatars, the Turks, and the Russians. But anyone who knows anything about Turkic languages will know that no word of Turkic origin ever has an initial *m-*.

Let us examine the names *magyar* ~ *Megyer* a little more closely. The relationship of the two phonological patterns to one another has, as we have seen, been satisfactorily clarified (Róna-Tas 1993: 22). The original form was a combination of back sounds and non-back sounds. The form *madžer*, presumably the immediate antecedent of *magyar* ~ *Megyer*, can be traced back to an earlier **mančer* or **mandžer* form. It would be difficult to overstate the significance of the fact that the original pattern was a combination of back sounds and non-back sounds: In a language attuned to vowel harmony—as was Ugric, but also every one of the Turkic languages—a combination of back sounds and non-back sounds is always an indication that the word at issue is a compound.

The question, then, is whether it is in fact the case that the phonological pattern **mančer* or **mandžer* cannot have anything but a Finno-Ugric etymology. When the question is put this way, the answer has to be “No”. We can have an initial *m-* in a word of Turkic origin if the word has a nasal consonant. (This, too, is something that anyone who knows anything about Turkic languages will know.) For in such cases, the *m-* can go back to an earlier **b-*, which *can* be in initial position in words of Turkic origin.

What this means is that if the form **mančer* or **mandžer* were, in fact, of Turkic origin, the original phonological pattern would have had to be **bančer* or **bandžer*.

Before going on to suggest the form that a Turkic etymology might take, I should like to note that the ethnonym *bančer* or *bandžer* that we have arrived at does not really require the *** which marks reconstructed linguistic forms, for the simple reason that the word does occur in the sources.

In the Middle Persian sources used by the Arabian chronicler Ṭabarī, and in Ṭabarī's own writings of between 915 and 923,¹⁷ there is a people referred to by the letters BNJR. This people, Ṭabarī tells us, lived in the Caucasus in the 6th century in association with three other "Turkic" peoples. Since Marquart published his findings (1903: 490-491), the people referred to as BNJR (which can be read as *BaŃJaR*, or *BäŃJär*, or *BaŃČaR*, or *BäŃČär*, etc.) has been identified with the *Burjan*, i.e. the Bulgarians. What has allowed this identification is the fact that the graphemes *wāw*, *nūn*, and *rā* are represented by one and the same character in Middle Persian (Pehlevi).

There are, I admit, a number of difficulties with introducing Ṭabarī's BNJR into the data used to establish the origin of *magyar* ~ *Megyer*. For one thing, the 6th century seems rather late to have an *-n-* in a word denoting the ethnonym *magyar*. The denasalization of the Finno-Ugric (Ugric) phoneme **-nč-* (*-ńć-*) and the voicing of the affricate (which, incidentally, must have occurred prior to the *-n-* > *-Ø-* shift) took place quite some time before the 6th century (Bárczi 1967: 103-104). These reservations notwithstanding, I think that this chronological difficulty is by no means insuperable, and that it would be a mistake to ignore the possibility that BNJR might shed some light on the etymology of *magyar* ~ *Megyer*. We know for a fact that the Finno-Ugric (Ugric) **-nč-* (*-ńć-*) > Late Ancient Hungarian *-dž-* > Old Hungarian *-gy-* shift did not take place across the board: Bárczi (1967: 104) gives Hungarian *hangya* (< Finno-Ugric **kuńće* ~ *kuće*: Cf. Rédei 1988: 209-210) as an instance of the ancient *-n-* having been retained: *Hangya*, the modern vernacular for 'ant', has completely displaced the "regular" form, *húgy* 'ant'. If Ṭabarī's BNJR does, in fact, refer to the Hungarians—a possibility that cannot be ruled out, given that we have variants of the form *hangya* ~ *húgy*—then it would be the earliest known reference to them: a reference, to boot, which places them in the Caucasus, in the company of the Khazars and the Alans, precisely the setting and the company in which we would expect the Hungarians to show up, assuming we do not subscribe to the—altogether unsubstantiated—theory that the land of the Bashkirs was their ancestral home.

To return now to the possibility of a Turkic etymology for the ethnonym *magyar* ~ tribal name *Megyer*: I suggest that the words origi-

¹⁷ For Ṭabarī and his sources, see Ludwig (1982: 32-37).

nated in the Turkic compound *ban ĵer*, meaning ‘chief place’, ‘central place’.

The first part of the compound has been discussed at length by Róna-Tas (1992: 121-126) in a study dealing with the Chuvash word *mǎnǎ*, *mǎn*, meaning ‘big / grand, wide, fat, basic, original, major, old, elder, dense, deep (of sound)’. Róna-Tas traces the Chuvash word directly to the form **mon*, an ancient loanword of Chinese origin in Proto-Chuvash. He also discusses the form *ban > man*, meaning ‘big / grand, chief’, an attested form in Turkic, which can be traced to the same Chinese etymon as the Proto-Chuvash **mon*, and which, presumably, entered Old Turkic through Tocharian mediation. Old Turkic *ban* meant ‘ten thousand’ (Clauson 1972: 346a); its acquiring the meaning ‘big / grand, chief’ in Turkic seems to be the result of an internal development. The *ban* form of the word *man*, as Róna-Tas, too, points out, occurs in Kāšgārī in two geographic names: *Man Qišlāġ*, “Name of a place in the country of the Oghuz”, and *Mān Kānd*, “Name of a city which was near Kāšgār; it is now in ruins” (Dankoff & Kelly 1982: 348 and 1984: 229); but we also find the form *man* in the name *Man Kermen*, the name Kiev was called under Mongolian rule. *Man Kermen*, which is designated as Kipchak in *The Secret History of the Mongols*, was probably the translation of the Slavic “Velikij Gorod”, meaning ‘Big / Grand Town’.

The second element of the compound *ban ĵer* is a well-known old Turkic word. In Eastern Old Turkic, it probably had the phonological pattern *yēr* (Clauson 1972: 954ab); in Western Old Turkic, the phonological pattern *ĵēr*. It means ‘earth, place, position, area, country’.

The Turkic name *Banĵer > Menĵer*, meaning ‘Chief Place’, ‘Central Place’ regularly changed to *Medĵer* in Ancient Hungarian. As a tribal name, it must be dated among our first, most archaic tribal names: *Nyék*, *Kürt* and *Gyarmat*.

For the moment, the etymology of the tribal name *Megyer* outlined above is meant to be no more than a working hypothesis. Like every proposed etymology having to do with the names of the Hungarian tribes—and with tribal names in general—it raises a number of questions that go beyond etymology, historical questions in particular. These questions will need to be addressed, primarily by historians.

Lastly, let us consider the pattern of meanings that will emerge on the assumption that all Hungarian tribal names are of Turkic origin: ‘Hedge’ (*Nyék*)—a tribe of guardsmen, who, in earlier times, patrolled the borders of the tribal confederation; ‘Chief Place’ (*Megyer*)—the Chief

Tribe before the change of dynasties; 'Abreast—Behind' (*Kürtgyarmat*)—formerly the vanguard and rear guard of the *Megyer* tribe, merged to protect the new Chief Tribe after the change of dynasties; 'Tarxan' (*Tarján*)—the new Chief Tribe; 'Little Flank / Face' (*Jenő*)—the flank or vanguard of the new Chief Tribe; 'Back; the Last' (*Kér*)—the rear guard of the new Chief Tribe; 'Fragment' (*Keszi*)—the remnant of a former major tribe.

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