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978-0-521-08051-4 - The Medieval Hungarian Historians: A Critical and Analytical Guide

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THE MEDIEVAL HUNGARIAN HISTORIANS

A Critical and Analytical Guide

BY

C. A. MACARTNEY

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'In *Hungary* I have seen it the manner at all Feasts, and other such meetings, to have songs of their Auncestours valour; which that right Souldier-like Nation thinck the chiefest kindlers of brauve courage.'—

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY: *An Apologie for Poetrie*



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PREFACE

THE various historical and biographical works in which the Hungarians of the Middle Ages recorded their own origins and early doings are less numerous and less important than their counterparts from France, Italy or Germany. Nevertheless, they constitute a not inconsiderable body of literature which is of great value for the history, not only of Hungary and the Magyar people, but of the whole of South-Eastern Europe. Naturally, however, before they can be safely used as historical sources, they require much editing and interpretation. In the case of each of them, its date and degree of trustworthiness require to be examined, and where—as is the case with the great majority of them—they consist of various component parts, put together by a later hand, then this investigation has to extend to the parts as well as the whole. Where a relationship is discernible between more than one of them, then the nature of that relationship must be investigated. Which is the original? Which the copy? Or, if both derive from a lost common source, which has preserved that source the more faithfully?

It is essential to any historian's profitable use of these texts that he should know the answers—in so far as they can be ascertained—to these questions. Unfortunately, the answers to most of them are not available today to any but Hungarian scholars, owing to the language difficulty.

The great Hungarian historians and critics of the eighteenth century—Bél, Katona, Pray, Cornides—still favoured, indeed, the stately if somewhat knotty Latin of their day; but although that generation, the first to take up seriously the study of Hungarian source-material, produced some of the best brains which have occupied themselves at all with the subject, it is a waste of time to read them today. Such of their results as have stood the test of time at all have been better and more handily restated in modern works; while many of them have, of course, been disproved by

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later research. In the nineteenth century, then, when the scientific study of German sources was undertaken, a number of German scholars engaged in that work cast fleeting glances also at the Hungarian texts, a few of which were even printed in the German series of *Monumenta*; and some of them—Rademacher and Zeissberg, in particular—made valuable contributions to the problem. Almost all their works are, however, cursory and usually suffer from the defects of ignorance of Hungarian history and of a strong bias against the Hungarian texts wherever they differ from the German. None of them today represents anything like the last word on its subject. This is the case even with the studies published between 1894 and 1902 by Kaindl, then a young professor at Czernowitz, in the *Mittheilungen* of the Vienna Academy, even though these studies stand in a class by themselves among the German works. Exhaustive, acute, and based on a thorough knowledge of Hungarian history, they bring to the discussions very much which still holds good, and which the Hungarian historians of a later age would have done well not to ignore so austere as they have done. But even Kaindl's latest work dates from little after 1900, and does not follow, but precedes the period when the most serious work has been done on the subject and the most important results achieved.

When Kaindl wrote, Hungarian scholarship had for many decades added little to the results achieved by the giants of the eighteenth century. Endlicher had published the main texts in convenient form in 1849, and Florianus, a little later, had produced a critical edition of the same in his series of *Fontes Domestici*. But serious critical study of the different texts began only in the 'eighties, when the excellent historian, Pauler, published a series of studies in the historical periodical, *Századok*, which were complementary to the work undertaken, almost simultaneously, by Marczali. The general interest in Hungary's history evoked by the approach of her millennium, which was celebrated in 1896, resulted in the publication of yet another collection of the texts (*A Magyar Hónfoglalás Kútfoi*) and in an admirable study of the special problem of Anonymus by Sebestyen. The ball had now been set rolling. In the opening years of our own century

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Domanovszky began his series of learned studies on the narrative *Chronicles*. A number of his colleagues attacked other points of detail, often with much success. Hóman, later to become Minister of Education in Hungary, and later still to suffer unjust and barbarous treatment for his political tenets, produced two grandiose works, one on a hypothetical *Gesta* or common source of nearly all the texts under review, another on the origin of the Hun tradition and the Hun Legend. Hóman's pupils, led by Deér and Miss Bartoniek, carried his conclusions further; a few of his colleagues—Madzsár, S. Eckhardt, and others—criticised them; meanwhile a school of linguistics, led by Gombocz, Németh, Melich and Pais, approached the problem from a different angle—that of the study of place and personal names.

In the last thirty years an enormous amount of work has been done, culminating in the latest edition of the texts, with introductions and critical notes, in the *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum*.

But nearly all this work is a sealed book to the non-Magyar. The last of the studies by a Hungarian to appear in a modern European language other than Magyar was that of Marczali, which, written in Magyar in 1880, appeared in a German edition in 1882. But Marczali was a very young man when he wrote this essay, which antedates even Kaindl and precedes all the serious work on the subject, and it is thus in any case long out of date—to use no harsher term for it. All the more important later work has been in Magyar only, with, at the most, a summary in German or Latin. These summaries, however, tend only to present the reader with the results argued in Magyar in larger articles or books. He is as a rule powerless to judge whether those results are sound.

Some years ago I conceived the idea that it would be worth while for a non-Magyar who happens to read Magyar to go through this mass of material, which enshrines the results achieved by so many learned and subtle brains, and to present its fruits to the non-Magyar reader in a short form which would nevertheless give him all that he needed to know for safe and profitable utilization of the texts. Imbued with a proper respect for the august scholars of modern Hungary, I imagined that my work would be purely that of a summarizer, interpreter and translator,

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and did not anticipate that it would occupy me for more than a few months. On looking, however, more closely into the works of Hóman and Domanovszky in particular (it is on their results that the whole framework really depends), I found with mingled interest and horror, that I could not possibly carry out the work in the way in which I had proposed it to myself. The labours of these scholars were always ingenious, and, on many points of detail, illuminating; but their main conclusions seemed to me to be, with hardly an exception, demonstrably incorrect. I was obliged therefore to undertake a whole series of highly controversial and argumentative studies in which by elaborate reasoning I sought to demolish their conclusions and to establish my own. Through the kindness of the late Professor Lukinich, Secretary of the Royal Hungarian Academy, I was enabled to publish, in the English language, five of these studies (in three volumes) in the *Archivum Europae Orientalis*, published under his auspices in Budapest, and another essay appeared in Hungarian in *Századok* in 1940. One more was printed in French in the *Revue des Etudes Historiques* in 1946; two more, completing my series, were published in Oxford in 1951.

These studies set out what I believe to be the correct answers to the various problems involved. On the other hand, they do not take the place of the work which I had originally planned to undertake. With one exception they are written in English or French, but for a specialist public familiar with the problems at issue, i.e., primarily a Hungarian public; they are full of controversy and quotation and, to be frank, almost unreadable for the West European scholar. I have therefore now completed, and submit herewith, the study as I originally planned it, but resting on a somewhat different basis from that which I had originally expected. It summarizes not so much the results achieved by my Magyar contemporaries and colleagues, as those results in so far as I have been able to accept them, or my own results, where I have been obliged to differ from other critics. I have not attempted to repeat here all the lengthy and weary polemics in which I indulged in my *Studies*. I take my results as achieved. Any reader not satisfied with them, and sufficiently curious to wish to pursue

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the subject further, can find my arguments in my various *Studies*. If he is still not satisfied, there is no help for him; he must learn Magyar and himself attack the problems. I for one shall welcome this, for although I am fairly satisfied of the correctness of my main conclusions, I cannot expect to be right in every point of detail, and there are some in which I must frankly admit defeat.

Finally, I must make two apologies: one for the large number of esoteric and asterisked symbols which I have used to denote the various lost texts with which this book is so largely concerned. I know these symbols to be irritating, but I have found no way of avoiding their use: the alternative of repeating each time the long descriptions which they replace would be even more tedious.

My second apology is for the egotistical and vainglorious fashion in which I regularly refer to my own works as authorities for the statements made in the following pages. This is inevitable, since, as I have explained, the present work is essentially a presentation for another public of the results of my various *Studies*. I refer to them because I believe their conclusions to be right—otherwise I should not have reached them; and it is of little use, in a work especially designed for readers who do not know Magyar, to give long lists of works in that language. The *Studies* themselves usually contain references to the works of the Hungarian scholars with whom I am associating myself or polemizing as the case may be; and any anxious reader may find them there.

As to the plan of this volume: each text is taken separately, and a short description given of its MSS, main editions, date, contents, reliability, relations to other texts, etc. I have, however, prefixed to this, the main part of the work, a short general sketch of the development of Hungarian literature during the period reviewed. Here I have taken account of those numerous works which have not survived as they were written, but have left fragments or traces in the existing texts. The texts described individually are those usually treated as containing first-hand information on the Arpadian period of Hungarian history. My list is, in fact, identical with that of the editors of the latest collection made in Hungary—the *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum*—with trifling variants. I have not included the *Admonitions* of St Stephen, which seem to me to go

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more properly with a collection of laws or charters. On the other hand, I have included the Codex Ossolinski and the Chronicle of John, Archdeacon of Geracs, both of which, in my belief, the editors of the *Scr. R.H.* were mistaken in passing over; also Friar Julian's letter. In describing the text I have used the abbreviations adopted by the editors of the *Scr. R.H.*, all of which are obvious: also, for convenience, a certain number of other abbreviations, which I list below. As for order, I put the texts, in general, in chronological order of composition, as far as this is known, but in two groups: the narratives, including Anonymus, first, the Lives of Saints, including the Codex Ossolinski and the Polish-Hungarian Chronicle, after. I have, however, not felt bound to adhere pedantically to the chronological order where another arrangement seemed more convenient. I have, for example, grouped together all biographies of a single Saint.

The statements as to the whereabouts of MSS, etc., refer to 1938. Many of them must since have been moved, and some probably no longer exist.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

COLLECTIONS OF TEXTS.

Endlicher = *Rerum Hungaricarum Monumenta Arpadiana*, ed. J. L. Endlicher; St Gallen, 1849, reprinted in Leipzig, 1931. (Texts only, often carelessly reproduced, and far from complete, but also gives a collection of laws, charters, etc.)

Florianus = *Historiae Hungariae Fontes Domestici*, ed. M. Florianus, Budapest, 1881–5. (Contains some texts not in Endlicher, but superseded today by later works.)

Gombos, *Fontes* = *Catalogus Fontium Historiae Hungaricae*, ed. A. B. Gombos; 3 vols, Budapest, 1937–9. (Purports to be a complete collection of all historical texts relating to Hungary during the Arpad period, for which purpose the passages relating to Hungary are extracted from the various writers. Is extraordinarily valuable as a time-saver where most writers are concerned, as the obscurest German chronicler, for example, is anthologised; but oddly capricious, omitting quite a large number of texts for no discernible reason, and not including those references to the Huns which afterwards became a constituent, if mistaken, part of the Hungarian story.)

M.H.K. = *A magyar hónfoglalás kútfői*, Budapest, 1898. (Produced to mark the millenary of the Conquest. Contains texts in all languages on the earliest period, some of them not easily found elsewhere.)

Schwandtner = *Scriptores rerum hungaricarum veteres ac genuini*, ed. J. G. Schwandtner; 1st ed. 3 vols, Vienna 1746–8; 2nd ed., Tyrnau, 1765; 3rd ed., Vienna, 1766–8. (The first great collected edition, with critical commentary, which represented a great feat of scholarship in its day, but now out of date.)

Scr. R.H. = *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum*, Budapest, 2 vols, 1937–9. (A collected edition, with critical notes and introductions. The definitive edition as regards texts, but full of misprints, and the different editors vary greatly in the degree of care and skill with which they deal with their material. As a rule, few exegetical notes are given, while the introductions enshrine a mass of false theory on the inter-relationships of the various texts.)

In addition, the usual abbreviations are used for other collections

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of texts: *M.G.H. SS.* = *Monumenta Germaniae Historiae, Scriptores*; *Migne, P.L.* = *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Migne; *Acta SS.* = *Acta Sanctorum*.

PERIODICALS AND COLLECTIVE WORKS

Arch. Eur. Or. = *Archivum Europae Orientalis* (Budapest).

Byz. Z. = *Byzantinische Zeitung* (Munich).

K.Cs.A. = *Körösi Csoma Archivum* (Budapest). (A small but interesting periodical, appearing irregularly under the editorship of G. Németh, and chiefly concerned with Oriental peoples and texts.)

S.I.E. = *Emlékkönyv Szent István király halálának kilencszázadik évfordulóján*; ed. J. Serédi, Budapest, 1938, 3 vols. (Issued in commemoration of the 900th anniversary of St Stephen's death. Contains a number of articles by various scholars, some of them very valuable.)

Századok = the organ of the Hungarian Historical Society.

U.J. = *Ungarische Jahrbücher* (Berlin).

ARTICLES, BOOKS, ETC.

By S. Domanovszky:

B.K. = 'A búdai krónika' (*Századok*, 1899).

Folytatása = 'A magyar királyi krónika XIV századi folytatása' (*Berzeviczy-emlékkönyv*, Budapest, 1934).

Interpolationen = 'Die Interpolationen der wiener ungarischen Bilderchronik' (*Ungarische Rundschau*, 1908).

K.S.M.K. = 'Kézai Simon Mester Krónikája' (*Századok*, 1906).

Húnkrónika = *Kézai és a húnkrónika (Károlyi Arpád Emlékkönyv, Budapest, 1933)*.

P.K. = *A pozsonyi krónika és a kisebb latin-nyelvű prózai szerkesztések* (*Századok*, 1905, p. 402-19, 518-26.)

By B. Hóman:

Gesta = *A szent-lászlókorai Gesta Ungarorum* (Budapest, 1925).

H.H. = *A magyar hún-hagyomány és hún-monda* (Budapest, 1925).

By R. F. Kaindl:

Studien = 'Studien zu den ungarischen Geschichtsquellen'; *Archiv für österreichische Geschichte*, Vienna. I-II (1894); III-IV (1895); V-VII (1898); VIII (1899); IX-XII (1900); XIII-XVI (1902).

By C. A. Macartney:

Magyars = *The Magyars in the IXth century* (Cambridge, 1930).

Pascua Romanorum = 'Pascua Romanorum' (*Századok*, 1940).

Studies = *Studies on the early Hungarian historical sources I and II*,

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Budapest, 1938; *III*, Budapest, 1941; *IV-V*, Budapest, 1940;¹
VI-VII, Oxford, 1951.

By H. Marczali:

Geschichtsquellen = *Ungarns Geschichtsquellen im Zeitalter der Arpaden*. (Berlin, 1882.)²

By J. Melich:

H.K.M. = *A hónfoglaláskori magyarország* (Budapest, 1925).

By G. Pauler:

M.N.T. = *A magyar nemzet története* (Budapest, 2 vols. 1899).

TEXTS

Where convenient, I have used abbreviations (as far as possible those used in the *Scr. R.H.*) for the main texts discussed:

Anon: *Anonymi Gesta Hungarorum*.

B: *Chronicon Budense*

H.C.: *Hun Chronicle*

K: Simon de Kéza (Kézai), *Gesta Hungarorum*

O: *Codex Ossolinski*

P.H.: The Polish-Hungarian Chronicle

Pos.: *Chronicon Posoniense*

V: *Chronicon Pictum Vindobonense*

W: The Várad Chronicle

Z: The Zagreb Chronicle

A.A.: *Annales Altahenses*

D.A.I.: Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Bonn.

In addition, I have introduced in previous works the following notation in reference to various chronicles whose identities are explained in this work on the pages indicated:

*Eb	page 16	*V ²	page 31	*P	page 47
*DI	17	*M	32	*W	50
X	20	T	35	*Kn	50
*Ra ¹	23	*O	42	*Co	51
*Ra ²	23	*Mi	47	*L.C.	53
*V ¹	23				

¹ Actually printed in 1942; the date was falsified out of deference to international susceptibilities, since Great Britain and Hungary were at war at the time. The numbers were also given erroneously as *III-IV*. I quote them hereafter as *III* (*recte IV*) and *IV* (*recte V*) respectively.

² Reissue in German of a work which had appeared two years earlier in Budapest under the title '*A magyar történet kútfői az Arpadok korában.*'