

Tales of Migration in Medieval Hungary

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In recent years, the populist Hungarian government has turned the arrival of refugees into political capital. The term “refugee” is not used in government-speak; instead, people are regularly referred to as “migrants.” The plight these individuals are fleeing is unacknowledged, and it is implied or explicitly stated that they migrate for economic reasons, or even as part of a sinister plot by the “empire of financial speculation” to destroy Europe through this “invasion.”¹ In 2017, prime minister Viktor Orbán boasted that Hungary was the “last migrant-free zone” and implicitly drew a parallel between this “resistance” and the “freedom fighters” of the Hungarian uprising of 1956.² “Resistance” is justified by routinely presenting “migrants” as a threat. Orbán’s speech at the swearing-in of the new government in 2018, for instance, emphasized that the state must protect “the mindset based on Christianity”

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1. Nóra Diószegi-Horváth, “Orbán Viktor a Terror Házánál kis riogatással fordult rá a választásokra,” *Mérce*, October 23, 2017, <https://merce.hu/2017/10/23/orban-viktor-a-terror-hazanal-kis-riogatással-forult-ra-a-valasztásokra/>.

2. *Ibid.*

against “the threat of migration and the appearance of an alien culture.”³ Apart from such general allegations, “migrants” are scapegoated as would-be terrorists intent on violence.⁴ A range of other charges have been voiced: during the election campaign Orbán asserted that, were it not for his government, migrants would cancel pensions for women.⁵ He also explained the European Union’s refusal to accept one of his candidates as EU Commissioner by claiming that his “crime” as former minister of Justice was to have helped defend Hungary against migration.⁶ In 2015, the Hungarian government had a barbed-wire fence erected along the border with Serbia and Croatia, and although refugees merely want to pass through the country, it maintains that the fence is essential for the protection of both “Christian Hungary” and Europe as a whole.⁷

The pseudo-historical past that politicians regularly invoke to claim that Hungary is still (or again) fulfilling its centuries-old role as a defender of Christian Europe, the “bulwark” or “bastion” of Christendom (*antemurale* or *propugnaculum Christianitatis*), is a late medieval and early modern trope.⁸ In the fifteenth- to seventeenth-century wars against the Ottomans, some Hungarian nobles and rulers played a prominent role.⁹ The papacy especially acknowledged John Hunyadi, who defended Belgrade against the Ottomans in 1456.¹⁰ Hungary’s rulers often claimed a special status for their kingdom, based on their role as defenders, even as the political constellation became much more complex: in fact, some of the nobility sided with the Ottomans against the Habsburgs, and at the siege of Vienna in 1683, Imre Thököly’s

3. Gergely Tóth, “Orbán: A migránsok miatt az ateistáknak is fontossá vált a kereszténység,” *Index*, May 18, 2018, https://index.hu/belfold/2018/05/18/parlament_orban-kormany_eskutetel_percrol-percre/.

4. Staff and agencies, “Hungarian Prime Minister Says Migrants Are ‘Poison’ and ‘Not Needed,’” *The Guardian*, July 27, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/26/hungarian-prime-minister-viktor-orban-praises-donald-trump>: “Every single migrant poses a public security and terror risk.”

5. Péter Magyar, “Orbán: a migránsok elvehetik a nők nyugdíját,” *!444!!!*, March 2, 2018, <https://444.hu/2018/03/02/orban-a-migransok-elvehetik-a-nok-nyugdijat>.

6. Interview with Viktor Orbán, *NOOL. A Nógrád megyei hírportál*, September 27, 2019, <https://www.nool.hu/orszag-vilag/orban-viktor-a-baloldal-askalodasa-miatt-vontak-vissza-trocsanyi-laszlo-jeloltsetget-hallgassa-meg-2843757/>.

7. Nora Berend, “Hungary, the Barbed Wire Fence of Europe,” *E-International Relations*, June 12, 2017, <http://www.e-ir.info/2017/06/12/hungary-the-barbed-wire-fence-of-europe/>; “‘Fake News’: EU Rejects Orban’s Migration Media Campaign,” *Al Jazeera*, February 19, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/02/news-eu-rejects-orban-migration-media-campaign-190219160120434.html>; Daniel Boffey, “Orbán Claims Hungary Is Last Bastion against ‘Islamisation’ of Europe,” *The Guardian*, February 18, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/18/orban-claims-hungary-is-last-bastion-against-islamisation-of-europe>.

8. Paul Srodecki, *Antemurale Christianitatis. Zur Genese der Bollwerksrhetorik im östlichen Mitteleuropa an der Schwelle vom Mittelalter zur Frühen Neuzeit* (Husum: Matthiesen, 2015).

9. For the background, see Géza Pálffy, *The Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy in the Sixteenth Century*, trans. Thomas J. DeKornfeld and Helen D. DeKornfeld (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2009).

10. For an overview in English, see István Petrovics, “John Hunyadi, Defender of the Southern Borders of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary,” *Banatica* 20, no. 2 (2010): 63–76.

troops fought on the side of the Ottomans.¹¹ Such historical nuances are nevertheless lost in the current government rhetoric of Hungary as the age-old bulwark of Christian Europe, a rhetoric also picked up more broadly by right-wing discourse.¹²

In parallel, however, there is also a state-sponsored renaissance of the tale that Hungarians came from Asia. Based on medieval stories of Hun-Hungarian common origins and espoused by the Hungarian government between the two World Wars, this ancestry myth has been entirely discredited by scholarship. Nonetheless, it has never lost its popularity for a right-wing fringe, and has now returned center stage after over seventy years. The regime sponsors a yearly “Kurultáj,” a “celebration of the common cultural heritage of kindred nations ... to strengthen the sense of brotherhood among nations with Turkic-Hun origin.”¹³ Pseudo-scientific charlatans now have the support of the prime minister in fashioning Hungarians as descendants of Attila. Orbán participated alongside the presidents of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan in the opening ceremony of the 2018 “World Nomad Games.” He also delivered a speech at the sixth summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-speaking states, where he declared that Hungarian “is a unique ... language, which is related to the Turkic languages”:

*[Among] countries of Turkic identity, ... we are the people who have moved farthest West, and who also converted to Christianity. So we are a Christian people living in the West, standing on foundations of Hun-Turkic origins; the Hungarians see themselves as the late descendants of Attila. Hungary respects and nurtures its Turkic roots. ... It has been proven beyond doubt that the old world order—with its dogma that capital and knowledge flow from West to East in search of cheap labor—has come to an end. We are living in a new world order, and its history is fundamentally determined by the development of the rising states in the East.*¹⁴

11. Sándor Papp, “Szabadság vagy járom? A török segítség kérdése a xvii. század végi magyar rendi mozgalmak idején,” *Hadtörténelmi közlemények* 116, no. 3/4 (2003): 633–69; Béla Köpeczi, “Magyarország a Kereszténység ellensége.” *A Thököly-felkelés az Európai Közvéleményben* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976); János J. Varga, “A török orientáció változatai Magyarországon. Wesselényi-Apafi-Thököly 1663–1683,” *Történelmi Szemle* 49, no. 2 (2007): 289–97.

12. For an English translation of long excerpts from one of Orbán’s speeches, see Jack Montgomery, “Orban: Central Europe Will Be Anti-Globalist Bastion of Christian Culture and National Identity,” *Breitbart*, July 30, 2018, <https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2018/07/30/orban-central-europe-anti-globalist-bastion-christian-culture-national-identity/>; Konrad Sutarski, “A keresztény védőbástya. Lengyelország és Magyarország a hagyományos érdekeket védő európai frontzónában,” *Magyar Idők*, August 10, 2016, <https://www.magyaridok.hu/velemenya/a-kereszteny-vedobastya-680476/>.

13. “Kurultáj, Europe’s Largest Equestrian Event Kicked Off Yesterday in Parliament,” *Daily News Hungary*, August 12, 2016, <https://dailynewshungary.com/kurultaj-europes-largest-equestrian-event-kicked-off-yesterday-parliament-photos/>. See also Éva Balogh, “When Politics Finds Its Way into Science: Viktor Orbán and Linguistics,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, September 3, 2018, <https://hungarianspectrum.org/tag/kurultaj/>; Balogh, “The Flowering of Pseudo-Science in Orbán’s Hungary,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, August 13, 2018, <https://hungarianspectrum.org/tag/kurultaj/>.

14. “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s speech at the 6th Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-speaking States,” September 3, 2018, <http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/>

Such sentiments represent the revival of the political strand of Turanism, which in the first half of the twentieth century predicted the decline of the West and the flowering of the “Turanian peoples,” with Hungary in a position of intellectual and economic leadership over its eastern “relatives.”¹⁵

In current politics, then, the Hungarians’ supposed Asian origins and migration westwards are promoted as central to national identity, while new immigrants are demonized and the reality of continued migration and the intermingling of populations over the centuries is denied. This double standard is not a modern invention, though its specific manifestation is linked to contemporary realities. One can already detect clear distinctions between mythic tales of migration and the treatment of actual immigrants in the medieval period, although the fault lines do not quite correspond to modern ones. Myths of migration in the Middle Ages were certainly attached to the supposed Hungarian “people,” but individual noble families also emphasized, and even invented, immigrant ancestry.

In what follows, I shall explore medieval tales of different types of migration in the Kingdom of Hungary. These migrations took place between the late ninth and the thirteenth centuries, and the main sources I use were written between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. After a brief background on immigrants in medieval Hungary, the second section focuses on the migration of the entire people—or *gens*—from a supposed homeland to a new territory that became the Kingdom of Hungary. The third and fourth sections analyze narratives of the immigration of individuals and groups into the kingdom after its foundation. The article thus brings together representations of diverse types of migration; it examines how medieval authors constructed tales about the migration of the people they identified with (their own *gens*), as well as about “foreign” immigrants. In the latter case, I distinguish between noble individuals and families on the one hand, and what might be termed mass migration on the other. The analysis primarily draws on chronicles, with evidence from charters and a few other sources utilized to complement and challenge some of the chronicle accounts. A focus on chronicles helps avoid the pitfalls inherent in comparing very diverse sources, where one cannot be sure if divergent perspectives are due to the nature of the documentation or reflect true differences. In other words, comparing chroniclers’ accounts highlights authorial perspectives rather than differences of genre. The analysis of medieval sources’ explicit reflections on the immigration of various groups into the Kingdom of Hungary thus sheds light on the coexistence of positive and negative expressions concerning migrants and the rationales behind them.

prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-6th-summit-of-the-cooperation-council-of-turkic-speaking-states/.

15. Balázs Ablonczy, *Keletré magyar! A magyar turanizmus története* (Budapest: Jaffa Kiadó, 2016).

The Medieval Kingdom of Hungary and its Immigrants

Given recent events and the Hungarian government's depiction of refugees as dangerous "migrants" to be blocked at all costs from entering the country, it is somewhat ironic that the medieval Kingdom of Hungary was a land of immigration. Indeed, medieval Hungary has been called a "guestland" because of the multiplicity of peoples living in the realm.¹⁶ The local population itself was mixed from the moment the polity began to emerge in the tenth and eleventh centuries, with Slavic, Avar, and other groups merging with the "Hungarians," who had arrived in the late ninth century and were themselves a mixture of groups of different origins rather than an ethnically homogeneous population.¹⁷ Between the eleventh and the thirteenth century, a great variety of new settlers arrived, differing in belief systems, language, and customs and including Jews, Muslims, Armenians, a series of steppe peoples (most importantly Pechenegs and Cumans), German-speakers, Rus', and a variety of Romance-speaking peoples.¹⁸ Throughout the Middle Ages (and beyond), the kingdom absorbed a wide spectrum of groups, and the legal structure provided rights for many of them; legal charters of privileges began to be granted during the twelfth century, although not all groups obtained one. Some settled in their own villages, distinct quarters in towns, or specific regions, while others mingled early on with the existing populace. Some retained their language and customs for a long period, while others disappeared quickly, becoming absorbed into the local population without leaving much trace.¹⁹

Immigration was not just a lived reality; medieval Hungarian identity was explicitly founded on narratives of migration. These included tales of the migration of the entire Hungarian people and tales about individual families and other groups. Some had no basis in historical reality but were invented for prestige; others had a kernel of historicity but were much elaborated. Although medieval Hungary

16. Erik Fügedi, "Das mittelalterliche Königreich Ungarn als Gastland," in Erik Fügedi, *Kings, Bishops, Nobles, and Burghers in Medieval Hungary*, ed. János M. Bak (London: Variorum Reprints, 1986), chapter 8, 471–507.

17. For an overview of medieval Hungarian history, see Pál Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary, 895–1526* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001).

18. András Pálóczi Horváth, *Pechenegs, Cumans, Iasians: Steppe Peoples in Medieval Hungary*, trans. Timothy Wilkinson (Budapest: Corvina, 1989); Gyula Kristó, *Nichtungarische Völker im mittelalterlichen Ungarn* (Herne: Schäfer, 2008); András Pálóczi Horváth, *Keleti népek a középkori Magyarországon. Besenyők, úzok, kunok és jászok művelődéstörténeti emlékei* (Budapest/Pilisvác: Archaeolingua/MTA Történettudományi Intézet/Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar, 2014); Nora Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims and "Pagans" in Medieval Hungary, c. 1000–c. 1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

19. For examples, see György Székely, "A székesfehérvári latinok és vallonok a középkori Magyarországon," in *Székesfehérvár évszázadai*, ed. Alán Kralovánszky, vol. 2, *Középkor* (Székesfehérvár: István Király Múzeum, 1972), 45–72; Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom*; Berend, "A Note on the End of Islam in Medieval Hungary: Old Mistakes and Some New Results," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 25, no. 2 (2014): 201–206.

was a kingdom created by immigrants, the tales of migration and the reality of immigration were often not in sync. While immigration is frequently interpreted in a negative light today, and medieval (especially late medieval) immigrants could encounter difficulties and prejudice, in various medieval contexts migration was linked to more positive ideas and experiences. For example, those arriving to cultivate lands or settle in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Central European towns obtained a privileged legal status, with more economic and legal freedoms than local populations.²⁰ Additionally, aristocrats could find it advantageous to have—or even invent—immigrant ancestry to enhance their prestige. One Hungarian noble family thus claimed French descent, while others vied for the same ancestor or claimed that their forebears immigrated earlier than the historical sources attest.²¹ Migration was therefore valorized in itself as something positive, although not in all circumstances, as we shall see below.

A positive evaluation of migration was by no means a specifically Hungarian phenomenon in the Middle Ages. Much in medieval culture promoted its valorization. Life was conceptualized as an ephemeral journey, where one's attention should be focused on the ultimate goal of salvation rather than the acquisition of perishable goods, as exemplified in the late fifteenth-century Middle English *Everyman* play.²² Existence itself was thus a migration towards the final otherworldly destination. Early monasticism specifically fostered the imagery of earthly life as a pilgrimage, and pilgrimage as a penitential and spiritual exercise came to characterize medieval Christianity.²³ In addition, intellectual elites—who authored the vast majority of medieval written sources—often moved to study at university and then perhaps to take up ecclesiastical careers abroad; personal stories thus contributed to positive views about mobility. Finally, the migration of peoples from east to west was understood as a basic foundation story of Europe

20. On the many varieties of immigrant status during the Middle Ages see, for example, Kurt-Ulrich Jäschke and Christhard Schrenk, eds., *Vieler Völker Städte. Polyethnizität und Migration in Städten des Mittelalters: Chancen und Gefahren* (Heilbronn: Stadtarchiv Heilbronn, 2012); Derek J. Keene, Balázs Nagy, and Katalin G. Szende, eds., *Segregation, Integration, Assimilation: Religious and Ethnic Groups in the Medieval Towns of Central and Eastern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Nora Berend, ed., “Minority Influences in Medieval Society,” special issue, *Journal of Medieval History* 45, no. 3 (2019), in particular Katalin Szende, “Iure Theutonico? German Settlers and Legal Frameworks for Immigration to Hungary in an East-Central European Perspective,” 360–79, and Matthias Hardt, “Migrants in High Medieval Bohemia,” 380–88.

21. Nora Berend, “Noms et origines des immigrants nobles en Hongrie (XIII^e siècle). La liste des *advenae* entre mythe et réalités,” in *Anthroponymie et migrations dans la Chrétienté médiévale*, ed. Monique Bourin and Pascual Martínez Sopena (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2010), 247–64, here pp. 251–54.

22. *Everyman: Three Late Medieval Morality Plays*, ed. Godfrey Allen Lester (London: Black, 1990); Florence Bourgne, ed., “*Everyman*”: lectures critiques et documents (Paris: AMAES, 2009).

23. Most recently, see Steven Vanderputten, “Reconsidering Religious Migration and Its Impact: The Problem of ‘Irish Reform Monks’ in Tenth-Century Lotharingia,” *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 112, no. 3/4 (2017): 588–618; Larissa J. Taylor et al., eds., *Encyclopedia of Medieval Pilgrimage* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

until around 1500: “migrational flows of peoples and nations, as the medieval texts taught, were nothing less than the basic pattern of history.”²⁴

Writing the Early History of the People (*Gens*) as a Story of Migration

Medieval narratives did not merely reflect the reality of migration; they also created mythical stories of migration or elaborated a small historical kernel to the point of mythicizing it. Foremost among these tales is the story of the Hungarians’ migration from the eastern side of the Ural mountains to the Carpathian Basin. This origin story was subsequently incorporated into national history writing, becoming one of the building blocks from which Romantic nationalism and then modern historiography created “Hungarian prehistory,” that is, the history of the “ancient Hungarians” before their arrival in the Carpathian Basin.²⁵ This is a tenuous construct that draws on linguistics, folklore analogies, archaeology, and later written evidence. Since none of these can offer certainties, however, hypotheses from one discipline are often joined to those of another to reach supposedly “firm” conclusions. This modern, constructed prehistory is based on the premise that the Hungarians as a people existed for at least a thousand years before they settled in the Carpathian Basin in the late ninth century CE. In contrast, all we can be certain of historically is the emergence of a mixed group called “Hungarians” in contemporary sources from around the middle of the ninth century.²⁶

In the nineteenth century, the search for an *Urheimat* (homeland) was not limited to Hungarians.²⁷ Medieval stories were taken to be expressions of historical processes that took place over many centuries, and were coupled to linguistic and archaeological evidence to create a “scientific” origin story in a variety of countries.²⁸ While these constructs have been discredited in many places (a good example is the analytic approach to understanding origin stories in France²⁹), renewed

24. Bernd Schneidmüller, “Fitting Medieval Europe into the World: Patterns of Integration, Migration, and Uniqueness,” *Journal of Transcultural Studies* 5, no. 2 (2014): 8–38, here p. 19.

25. For a standard account of Hungarian prehistory see, for example, András Róna-Tas, *Hungarians and Europe in the Early Middle Ages: An Introduction to Early Hungarian History* [1997], trans. Nicholas Bodoczky (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999).

26. Nora Berend, Przemysław Urbańczyk, and Przemysław Wiszewski, *Central Europe in the High Middle Ages: Bohemia, Hungary and Poland, c. 900–c. 1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 61–82.

27. R. J. W. Evans and Guy P. Marchal, eds., *The Uses of the Middle Ages in Modern European States: History, Nationhood, and the Search for Origins* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

28. Similarly to stories from classical antiquity: Felix Wiedemann, Kerstin P. Hofmann, and Hans-Joachim Gehrke, eds., *Vom Wandern der Völker. Migrationserzählungen in den Altertumswissenschaften* (Berlin: Edition Topoi, 2017).

29. Colette Beaune, *Naissance de la nation France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985); André Burguière, “L’historiographie des origines de la France. Genèse d’un imaginaire national,” *Annales HSS* 58, no. 1 (2003): 41–62.

nationalistic discourse in Hungary is once again promoting a literal interpretation of such origins.³⁰ It must be stressed, however, that understood in their own context mythical tales are not reflections of historical realities through a dim mirror but rather traces of the mental map of learned communities at the time. The Hungarian tales are anchored in the intellectual culture of medieval Europe, where it was quite common to depict an invented migration of one's own group. Such population movements were held to have shaped the various peoples of Europe, including the Goths and the Irish. The Trojan origin story of the Franks was particularly successful, with several communities vying to claim such origins or find an equally prestigious alternative.³¹ These stories, in turn, were influenced by the biblical story of the Israelites' migration to the Promised Land. The medieval authors who composed these kinds of tales about the Hungarians were thus drawing on learned sources rather than recording the memory of real events.

Biblical and Learned Sources for the Migration of the Hungarian People (*Gens*)

Hungarian chronicles present the early history of the Hungarians as one of a long migration. Yet these narratives were written several centuries after their settlement in the region. No sources were produced by Hungarian authors at the time of their arrival in the Carpathian Basin, although some late ninth- and tenth-century western European and Byzantine sources do refer to population movement.³² In his early thirteenth-century *Gesta Hungarorum*, the author known as the Hungarian Anonymous dismisses oral stories and claims to salvage accurate knowledge for future generations.³³

30. Bernd Schneidmüller, "Medieval Concepts of Migration and Transculturality," in *Engaging Transculturality: Concepts, Key Terms, Case Studies*, ed. Laila Abu-Er-Rub et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 79–94. For pertinent criticism of other similar constructs see, for example, Wiedemann, Hofmann, and Gehrke, *Vom Wandern der Völker*, especially Felix Wiedemann, Kerstin P. Hofmann, and Hans-Joachim Gehrke, "Wanderungsnarrative. Zur Verknüpfung von Raum und Identität in Migrationserzählungen," 9–37, here p. 18–20; Anca Dan, "The Sarmatians: Some Thoughts on the Historiographical Invention of a West Iranian Migration," 97–134; and Matthias Jung, "Wanderungsnarrative in der Ur- und Frühgeschichtsforschung," 161–87. See also Felix Wiedemann, "Völkerwellen und Kulturbringer: Herkunfts- und Wanderungsnarrative in historisch-archäologischen Interpretationen des Vorderen Orients um 1900," *Ethnographisch-Archäologische Zeitschrift* 51, no. 1/2 (2010): 105–28.

31. Elizabeth A. R. Brown, "Myths Chasing Myths: The Legend of the Trojan Origin of the French and Its Dismantling," in *The Man of Many Devices, Who Wandered Full Many Ways: Festschrift in Honor of János M. Bak*, ed. Balázs Nagy and Marcell Sebök (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 613–33. On the influence of the Trojan story in formulating alternative origins, see Elizabeth M. Tyler, "Trojans in Anglo-Saxon England: Precedent without Descent," *Review of English Studies* 64, no. 263 (2013): 1–20.

32. On Regino of Prüm and Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, see below.

33. This dating is the most likely; on the arguments and alternatives proposed by scholars in the past, see János M. Bak, introduction to *Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum/Anonymus, Notary of King Béla: The Deeds of the Hungarians*, in *Anonymus and*

His prologue is addressed to an unnamed friend (real or fictional), at whose request he set down the history of “the people of Hungary” “lest it be lost to posterity forever”:

It would be most unworthy and completely unfitting for the most noble people of Hungary to hear as if in sleep of the beginnings of their kind and of their bravery and deeds from the false stories of peasants and the gabbling song of minstrels. May they not more nobly perceive the truth of matters from the sure explanation of Scripture and the straightforward exposition of historical accounts? ... Hungary ... should rejoice ... in the gift of her men of letters, because she has now [a record of] the beginning of her line of kings and noblemen, [for] which kings [let there] be praise and honour to the King Eternal and the holy Mary, His mother, through whose grace the kings of Hungary and noblemen have the kingdom for happy purpose here and ever after. Amen.³⁴

The author positions the lineage of the Hungarians within a biblical framework and describes their original homeland—“Scythia”—based on a textual tradition going back to antiquity.³⁵ He describes this Scythia as bordered by the Thanais river, neighbored to the east by the people of Gog and Magog. However, he then confusingly asserts that the first king of Scythia was Magog, son of Japhet. Magog can be both the neighbor of Scythia and its king because two different traditions were merged here, as was already the case in Isidore of Seville’s early seventh-century *Etymologies*: the first combining the biblical book of Revelation and the story of Alexander the Great enclosing the peoples of Gog and Magog with a wall, the second making Magog the progenitor of the Scythians.³⁶ This kind of accumulation of contradictory information is not uncommon in medieval origin myths.³⁷ Anonymous also made Magog the ancestor of the Hungarians, deriving the ethnonym “Moger” (Magyar)

Master Roger, ed. Martyn Rady and László Veszprémy, trans. János M. Bak, Martyn Rady, and László Veszprémy (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), xvii–xxxviii, here pp. xix–xxii. On the historiography, see Gábor Thoroczkay, “Az Anonymus-kérdés kutatástörténeti áttekintése (1977–1993). I–II,” *Fons* 1 (1994): 93–149 and *Fons* 2 (1995): 117–73.

34. *Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum*, 4–5: “Et si tam nobilissima gens Hungarie primordia sue generationis et forcia queque facta sua ex falsis fabulis rusticorum vel a garrulo cantu ioculatorum quasi sompniando audiret, valde indecorum et satis indecens esset. Ergo pocius an non de certa Scripturarum explanatione et aperta hystoriarum interpretatione rerum veritatem nobiliter percipiat. Felix igitur Hungaria, cui sunt dona data varia, omnibus enim horis gaudeat de munere sui litteratoris, quia exordium genealogie regum suorum et nobilium habet, de quibus regibus sit laus et honor regi eterno et sancte Marie matri eius, per gratiam cuius reges Hungarie et nobiles regnum habeant felici fine hic et in evum. Amen” (translation modified).

35. A third-century work, Justin’s *Epitoma historiarum Philippicarum Pompei Trogi* (itself summarizing a first-century, now lost history); based on this, the seventh-century *Exordia Scythica*; and the chronicle of Regino of Prüm (d. 915).

36. *Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum*, 6; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/isidore.html>; *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9.2.27.

37. See, for instance, Magali Coumert, *Origines des peuples. Les récits du haut Moyen Âge occidental (550–850)* (Paris: Institut d’études augustiniennes, 2007), 455–60.

from “King Magog,”³⁸ unlike the fourteenth-century chronicles discussed below, which derive the ethnonym Magyar from an ancestor called Magor.³⁹ As Anonymous tells it, it was a descendant of Magog’s line, Attila the Hun, who sallied forth from Scythia, put the Romans to flight, and took the province of Pannonia.⁴⁰

In his description of the Scythians as a paradisiacal, sinless people who were eventually worn out by war and became cruel, eating human flesh and drinking human blood, the Hungarian Anonymous reconciled two opposing sources, Justin’s *Epitome* and the *Chronicon* of Regino of Prüm (d. 915). Justin was a classical author of probably the third century CE—himself abridging the work of a first-century Gallo-Roman historian—whose description of the Scythians as noble barbarians was taken up by various subsequent works.⁴¹ Regino, writing in the late ninth century, depicted the Hungarians as a new people hailing from Scythia. He borrowed heavily from Justin’s account of the Scythians but omitted his praise of their simplicity and added descriptions of the Hungarians’ cruelty, including drinking blood and eating raw meat, an old topos attached to barbarians.⁴² Following Regino, Anonymous states that the Scythians were never subjugated, and even defeated Darius, Cyrus, and

38. *Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum*, 6. Ludwig Fóti, “Gog und Magog. Der anonyme Notar König Bélas,” *Ungarische Rundschau für historische und soziale Wissenschaften* 1, no. 3 (1912): 618–53; György Györffy, *Krónikáink és a magyar őstörténet. Régi kérdések – új válaszok* (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1993), 28–29. On medieval etymological arguments, see Julia Verkholtantsev, “Etymological Argumentation as a Category of Historiographic Thought in Historical Writings of Bohemia, Poland, and Hungary,” in *Medieval East Central Europe in a Comparative Perspective: From Frontier Zones to Lands in Focus*, ed. Gerhard Jaritz and Katalin Szende (London: Routledge, 2016), 239–53.

39. *Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi XIV*, ed. Alexander Domanovszky, in *Scriptores rerum hungaricarum*, ed. Emericus Szentpétery, vol. 1 (Budapest: Academia Litterarum Hungarica, 1937; repr. Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 1999), 217–505, here p. 249.

40. *Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum*, 4–9: “Et primus rex Scithie fuit Magog filius Iaphet et gens illa a Magog rege vocata est Moger, a cuius etiam progenie regis descendit ... potentissimus rex Athila, qui ... de terra Scithica descendens ... in terram Pannonie venit et fugatis Romanis regnum obtinuit.” (“The first king of Scythia was Magog, son of Japhet, and this people were called after him Magyar, from whose royal line the most renowned and mighty King Attila descended, who, coming down from Scythia, entered Pannonia ... and, putting the Romans to flight, took the realm”).

41. *M. Iuniani Iustini Epitoma historiarum philippicarum Pompei Trogi*, ed. Otto Seel (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1972), book 2, chapters 1–3; Justin, *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*, trans. J. C. Yardley (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994). See also Ronald Syme, “The Date of Justin and the Discovery of Trogus,” *Historia. Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 37, no. 3 (1988): 358–71.

42. *Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon cum continuatione Treverensi*, ed. Friedrich Kurze, *MGH SS rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi* 50 (Hanover: Hahn, 1890), 131–33, (under the year 889); *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe: The “Chronicle” of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg*, trans. Simon MacLean (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009). On these stereotypes, see József Laszlovszky, ed., *Tender Meat under the Saddle: Customs of Eating, Drinking and Hospitality among Conquering Hungarians and Nomadic Peoples* (Krems: Medium Aevum Quotidianum, 1998). On Regino’s borrowing from Justin, see Max Manitius, “Regino und Justin,” *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde* 25 (1900): 192–201.

Alexander. Nonetheless, since the land of Scythia was “insufficient to sustain ... the host of peoples begotten there,”⁴³ the seven leaders of the Hungarians “chose to seek for themselves the land of Pannonia that they had heard from rumour had been the land of King Attila [the Hun], from whose line Prince [Almus] descended.”⁴⁴

This justification builds on the idea that the Hungarians were related to the Huns, picked up by Hungarian clerics—many of whom studied at western universities from the twelfth century on—from western European literary sources.⁴⁵ In deciding to set out for Pannonia, they would therefore be returning to a land that rightfully belonged to them. The seven leaders, realizing they needed one chief, chose Almus.

*In the year of Our Lord’s incarnation 884, as is contained in the annals of chronicles, the seven leading persons who are called the Hetumoger [i.e., hét magyar, seven Hungarians] moved from the Scythian land towards the west. ... Advancing for very many days across empty places, they swam across the river Etyl sitting on leather bags in pagan manner and they never came across a path leading to a city or house.*⁴⁶

During the journey, they hunted and ate meat. They arrived at Suzdal’, then “reached the city of Kiev without any opposition.”⁴⁷

Despite the seeming precision of the date 884, this description does not reflect a ninth-century reality but instead combines aspects of both biblical legend and a political context closer to the author’s own time. Anonymous’s account of

43. *Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum*, 10–11. Such a reason for migration was frequent in medieval chronicles. On other medieval migration tales, see Coumert, *Origines des peuples*; Alheydis Plassmann, *Origo gentis: Identitäts- und Legitimitätsstiftung in früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Herkunftserzählungen* (Berlin: Akademie, 2006).

44. *Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum*, 16–17: “Tunc elegerunt sibi querere terram Pannonie, quam audiverant fama volante terram Athile regis esse, de cuius progenie dux Almus pater Arpad descenderat.” Although Bak and Rady’s English translation gives his name as Álmos, which in modern Hungarian means “sleepy” and is related to *álom*, “dream”—because the Anonymous author links Almus’ name to the dream foretelling his birth—this is probably a false medieval etymology; the Byzantine rendering of the name is Almuzd. I have modified all citations from this translation to reflect my use of the Latin form, Almus.

45. Jenő Szűcs, “Theoretical Elements in Master Simon of Kéza’s *Gesta Hungarorum* (1282–1285 A.D.),” in *Simonis de Kéza, Gesta Hungarorum/Simon of Kéza, The Deeds of the Hungarians*, ed. and trans. László Veszprémy and Frank Schaer (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), xxix–cii, here pp. lii–lv; Nora Berend, “How Many Medieval Europes? The ‘Pagans’ of Hungary and Regional Diversity in Christendom,” in *The Medieval World*, ed. Peter Linehan and Janet L. Nelson (London: Routledge, 2001), 77–92.

46. *Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum*, 20–21: “Anno dominice incarnationis DCCCLXXXIII, sicut in annalibus continetur cronicis, septem principales persone, qui Hetumoger vocantur, egressi sunt de terra Scithica versus occidentem ... Venientes autem dies plurimos per deserta loca et fluvium Etyl super tulbou sedentes ritu paganismi transnataverunt et nunquam viam civitatis vel habitaculi invenerunt.” On “leather bags” used in river crossings, see below.

47. *Ibid.*: “Postquam autem ad partes Rutenorum pervenerunt, sine aliqua contradictione, usque ad civitatem Kiev transierunt.”

the Hungarian migration is redolent of the passage through a desert, evoking biblical models. Yet his descriptions of the populations they encounter correspond to eleventh- and twelfth-century political constellations. The Hungarians decide to conquer the realm of the Rus', and are victorious despite resistance from the Rus' and their Cuman allies, seizing tribute and booty. Defeated, the princes of the Rus' suggest "that after leaving the land of Halich, they should descend westward beyond the Havas woods into the land of Pannonia, that had previously been the land of King Attila," recommending "the land of Pannonia as being good beyond measure."⁴⁸ (Although the seven leaders set out with the express purpose of conquering Pannonia, they seem to have forgotten that aim by the time they defeat the Rus'.) The Hungarians then make their leisurely way through Rus', stopping for several weeks in Volodimer (that is, Volhynia and Halich), gathering rich offerings and hostages, and are again told to go to Pannonia. Finally, the Hungarian leader Almus makes peace with the Rus' and is joined by seven Cuman leaders; with help and victuals from the Rus' they at last reach their destination.⁴⁹

The anonymous author of the *Gesta* thus traces the route of the Hungarians' migration from Scythia to the river Etyl (which could be the Don or the Volga), then on to Suzdal, the Dnieper, Galicia, and through Ukraine into what would become the Kingdom of Hungary. They name the first place that they occupy "Muncas" (modern Munkács, today Mukachevo in Western Ukraine), a pun on the Hungarian word *munka*, meaning "with work," because they arrived there "after the greatest toil."⁵⁰ They then rest for forty days, a figure with obvious biblical connotations and corresponding to the time spent by the Israelites scouting out Canaan.⁵¹ The local Slavs, who have heard that Almus is descended from the line of Attila, take fright and surrender of their own accord. The Hungarians capture the castle of Ung, offer great sacrifices to the immortal gods, and feast in celebration, while Almus appoints his son Árpád as leader. Detailed descriptions of sieges, dealings with local rulers, the seizure of land, and Árpád granting terrains to various prominent men follow, interspersed with many vivid stories.

The Illusion of Tradition in Learned Constructs

Although the *Gesta*'s more colorful stories are dismissed as inventions, some historians believe that oral traditions of real migration and ninth-century events were transmitted through this source, written down centuries later.⁵² National history

48. Ibid., 22–27, here pp. 26–27: "...ut dimissa terra Galicie ultra silvam Hovos, versus occidentem in terram Pannonie descenderent, que primo Athile regis terra fuisset, et laudabant eis terram Pannonie ultra modum esse bonam." See Judit Csákó, "A rómaiak pannóniai legelője. Megjegyzések egy hagyomány keletkezéséhez (I. rész)," *Fons* 36 (2019): 147–92.

49. *Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum*, 28–35.

50. Ibid., 34–35.

51. Numbers 13:1–33; Deuteronomy 1:22–40.

52. See Péter László, ed., *Historians and the History of Transylvania* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1992), 197–201; János M. Bak, "From the Anonymus *Gesta* to

writing in Hungary, especially during the nineteenth century, can be blamed for constructing and maintaining this belief, as can the continuing lack of comparative analysis when it comes to medieval migration stories.⁵³ Anonymous himself explicitly states that he relies on chronicles and the Bible, dismissing orally circulating information as erroneous. He did indeed borrow from many texts, including those that had nothing to do with the Hungarians. His *Gesta* is imbued throughout with biblical quotations and allusions, and makes explicit comparisons to Moses and the Israelites:

*Well did God fulfill in Prince [Almus] and his son Árpád the prophecy that Moses uttered to the sons of Israel, saying: "Every place that your foot shall tread upon, shall be yours." For the places whereon Prince [Almus] and his son, Árpád, together with their noblemen trod, their descendants had and have from that day to the present.*⁵⁴

The anonymous author, just as other chroniclers after him, also drew from learned histories, and very significantly from Regino of Prüm's early tenth-century *Chronicon*, mentioned above. If his reliance on this contemporary chronicler of western Europe's first encounters with the Hungarians may seem to lend credence to the stories relayed in the *Gesta*, we should not be hasty in our conclusions. Regino himself also made extensive use of texts written well before the emergence of the Hungarians, in particular works by the eighth-century author Paul the Deacon and the Roman author Justin. Ultimately, these texts were not about the Hungarians but a range of earlier and often mythicized groups—notably the Scythians, with whom the Hungarians were identified from the moment they began to attract the attention of western ecclesiastical writers such as Regino. They also contained many literary stereotypes.

Regino was faced with the problem of accounting for the advent of a hitherto unknown people on the European scene. The Hungarians were not attested in the sources, and were unknown to the authorities on which medieval writers relied, even though these authorities were held to encompass the totality of knowledge. Regino solved this problem by identifying the Hungarians with the Scythians, who did figure in the texts by ancient authors. After all, the Hungarians arrived from

the 'Flight of Zalán' by Vörösmarty," in *Manufacturing a Past for the Present: Forgery and Authenticity in Medievalist Texts and Objects in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. János M. Bak, Patrick J. Geary, and Gábor Klaniczay (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 96–107; Bak, introduction to *Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum*, xxvii–xxxiv. On parallel processes of correcting details, but partially taking over invented narratives, see Wiedemann, Hofmann, and Gehrke, "Wanderungsnarrative," 13–14.

53. On the context, but without engaging with the tale of migration, see Gernot Heiss et al., "Habsburg's Difficult Legacy: Comparing and Relating Austrian, Czech, Magyar, and Slovak National Historical Master Narratives," in *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, ed. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 367–404.

54. *Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum*, 54–55: "Bene implevit deus in Almo duce et filio suo Arpad prophetiam, quam cecinit Moyses propheta a filiis Israel dicens: *Et locus, quem calcaverit pes vester, vester erit.* Quia a die illo loca, que calcaverunt Almus dux et filius suus Arpad cum suis nobilibus, usque ad presens posteritates eorum habuerunt et habent."

the same general direction (the east), and were identified as “barbarians.” Regino therefore claimed that they came from the vast swamps of the Tanais (the Don estuary) and were uncivilized.⁵⁵ These ideas were based on old authorities: the early seventh-century works of Isidore of Seville and ultimately the stereotypes of Greco-Roman ethnography, which depicted the Scythians as the archetypal barbarians. From Isidore’s *Etymologies*, for example, medieval authors took the notions that the Scythians descended from Magog, the son of Japhet; that the Huns lived in Maeotis between the Tanais and the Massagetes, before expanding outwards; and that Scythia initially extended from India to the Maeotian swamps (the Sea of Azov), the Danube, and the borders of the Germanic lands, but was later reduced, with its western border lying at the Caspian Sea.⁵⁶ Isidore also describes Scythia’s inhabitants as barbarians and savages who ate human flesh and drank blood.⁵⁷ Western European texts elaborated on this identification and created the link between the Huns and Hungarians.

We should be wary of assuming that despite the many layers of literary composition and transmission, the chronicle accounts of the Hungarians’ emergence from Asian Scythia reflect a knowledge of actual events. Though linguistic evidence of the Hungarian language’s relationship to Mansi, Khanty, Finnish, Estonian, and other so-called Finno-Ugric (Uralic) languages can be used to suggest Asian origins,⁵⁸ it is clear that factual knowledge was not a prerequisite for authors to propose Scythian ancestry for a people: at various times during the Middle Ages, and in diverse works, the Gaels, the Turks, the Picts, and the Goths were all said to have emerged from “Scythia.”⁵⁹

Though the literary nature of its composition is widely accepted, it is often asserted that Anonymous’s *Gesta* contains at least some reliable information on certain elements of the Hungarian conquest. Yet there are good reasons to be cautious, as one particular example shows. The episode in which the Hungarians cross the Etyl on what were probably inflated animal skins may seem to be an instance of ethnological verisimilitude. In their critical apparatus, the editors comment that the word *tulbou* used in the Latin text is unknown but is assumed to derive from a Turkic equivalent of *uter* (a bag made of skin or hide) that would also be the origin of the Hungarian vernacular *tömlő*.⁶⁰ This explanation dates back to the

55. On construing the Hungarians as enemies, see Alexander Sager, “Hungarians as *Vremde* in Medieval Germany,” in *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen (London: Routledge, 2002), 27–44.

56. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX*, 9.2.27, 9.2.65–66, 14.3.31, and 14.4.3.

57. *Ibid.*, 14.3.32.

58. For an introduction to these languages, see Daniel Abondolo, “Uralic Languages,” *Oxford Handbooks Online*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935345.013.6>.

59. Schneidmüller, “Fitting Medieval Europe into the World,” 26 and 28; Coumert, *Origines des peuples*, 393; Walter Pohl, “Narratives of Origin and Migration in Early Medieval Europe: Problems of Interpretation,” *Medieval History Journal* 21, no. 2 (2018): 192–221, here p. 193.

60. *Anonymus and Master Roger*, ed. Rady and Veszprémy, 20, n. 3.

eighteenth century, and the traditional etymology certainly needs to be reviewed on a linguistic level by a specialist in Turkic languages.⁶¹ However, the historical evidence alone is enough to show why we cannot uncritically accept this story as a reflection of real Hungarian migrations. The editors of the *Gesta* note that “this method of crossing rivers on inflated bags has been recorded for several nomadic peoples, e.g., for the Cumans by Niketas Choniates. ... Anonymous may have seen Hungarians still practicing this technique.”⁶² Another analysis states that William of Rubruk’s “description of thirteenth-century Tartar customs corroborates the veracity of this description. Perhaps our author [Anonymous] was an eyewitness of such a river crossing, if he travelled widely in Eastern Europe.”⁶³ The eighteenth-century Hungarian historian Daniel Cornides (1732–1787) made a more thorough survey of crossing a river on “round leather skins,” gathering accounts relating to a number of peoples from different sources. These include medieval examples, such as the Mongols in the thirteenth-century texts of Giovanni da Plano Carpini and Matthew Paris, and the Cumans and Hungarians according to Andrea Dandolo’s fourteenth-century Venetian chronicle.⁶⁴ However, since river crossings using stuffed or inflated animal skins can already be found in ancient historians such as Xenophon, who attributes them to Cyrus, Darius I, and Alexander,⁶⁵ the anonymous author may well have drawn this idea from a literary source. Interestingly, the story of crossing a river on animal skins also appears in later Hungarian chronicles but is attributed to the Huns rather than the Hungarians, suggesting it was a literary topos that could be applied to any “barbarian” group.⁶⁶

If we compare Anonymous’s *Gesta* to other Hungarian chroniclers’ accounts of this migration, it becomes obvious that these authors not only borrowed from various textual sources but also conducted polemics against one another. In so doing,

61. Cornides suggests that *tömlő* derives from *tulbou*, and argues it is an inflated animal skin rather than a small boat: Danielis Cornides, *Vindiciae Anonymi Belae regis notarii*, ed. Johann Christian Engel (Buda: Regia Universitas Pestana, 1802), 306.

62. *Anonymus and Master Roger*, ed. Rady and Veszprémy, 20, n. 3.

63. László Veszprémy, “*More paganismo*: Reflections on the Pagan and Christian Past in the *Gesta Hungarorum* of the Hungarian Anonymous Notary,” in *Historical Narratives and Christian Identity on a European Periphery: Early History Writing in Northern, East-Central and Eastern Europe (c. 1070–1200)*, ed. Ildar H. Garipzanov (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 183–201, here pp. 196–197. William of Rubruk was a Franciscan in the service of King Louis IX who traveled as a missionary in the Mongol Empire.

64. Cornides, *Vindiciae Anonymi Belae regis notarii*, 303–307.

65. Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* [1996], trans. Peter T. Daniels (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 374. Incidentally, stories of river crossings using inflated animal skins are found in other sources, including Livy and Caesar, concerning another barbarian people, the Iberians.

66. *Johannes de Thurocz, Chronica Hungarorum*, ed. Erzsébet Galántai, Gyula Kristó, and Elemér Mályusz, vol. 1, *Textus* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1985), 35: “Huni vero, plurima qui iam flumina post discessum ipsorum a Scitia in utrium officio transnatare asueverant, noctis tenebroso sub silentio utribus eisdem inflatis se illorum navigio commiserunt” (“Indeed the Huns, who since leaving Scythia had become used to traversing many rivers using bags made from animal skins, in the silence of the dark night inflated these same bags of skin to reach their boat”).

they constructed different migration stories, a process that can also be observed in early medieval origin tales.⁶⁷ This further undermines the idea that these later medieval sources reflect historical reality. The Illuminated Chronicle, which is one of a family of fourteenth-century chronicle compositions and dates from around 1360, states that Hungarian kings rule because of God's will and authority, and it is this point that the migration story serves to buttress in the text.⁶⁸ Based on the Bible and Saint Jerome, its author derives Scythians (and thus Hungarians) from Japhet via Magog (Magor), and explicitly refutes the idea that Hungarians descended from Nimrod as some claim. The prestige of the Hungarians' migration is enhanced by asserting that the Trojans also initially settled in Pannonia before moving on to what became France. According to the chronicler, Hunor and Magor (eponymous ancestors of the Huns and Hungarians) lived for many years in the swamps of Maeotis bordering Persia. Then, when their people became too numerous, they moved into Scythia, killing and expelling the local population, "now called Ruthenians," and still—that is, in the mid-fourteenth century—hold that land. This text locates Scythia in Europe, bordered by the North Sea, to the east by Asia, and to the west by "the river Etel, that is, the Don." The eastern neighbors of the Scythians are the Pechenegs and "white Cumans," while to the west impenetrable and uninhabited woods stretch out until Suzdal. The differences in detail between Anonymous's *Gesta* and the Illuminated Chronicle make it clear that instead of rendering a written account of the true story of these migrations, the authors were constructing and shaping their stories, even conducting intertextual polemics.

According to the fourteenth-century account—which uses both "Huns" and "Hungarians" but maintains a complete equivalence between them, describing the Huns' entry into Pannonia as the first arrival of the Hungarians—the Huns emerged from Scythia, crossing the lands of other peoples until they reached the Tisza river and settled there. Referring to a source that he calls the "chronicle of the Romans," the author states that in 677 the Hungarians came out of Scythia "a second time" and traveled to Pannonia. He has the Hungarians migrate through the lands of the Pechenegs and "white Cumans" (not mentioned by Anonymous) before traversing Suzdal and Kiev ("Kyo"). In this version, however, the Hungarians do not fight the Rus' but instead move on from Kiev through the mountains to "some region" without a name, inhabited by many eagles. These birds devour the Hungarians' cattle and horses—God's way, the chronicle states, of making sure that they move on to Pannonia quickly. They then arrive in Transylvania, where they stay for a while and build seven fortresses. The election of the seven captains takes place at this point; the first is Árpád, whose father Almus was killed in Transylvania before he could reach the promised land of Pannonia (another echo of the biblical story of Moses).

67. Coumert, *Origines des peuples*, 157 and 452–60.

68. *Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi xiv*, 241–43. Different compositions from the fourteenth century are divided into two families (the family of the Chronicle of Buda and that of the Illuminated Chronicle), with somewhat different versions of the text; details of authorship are debated.

Finally, “God gave Pannonia back to the Hungarians, as he had returned the land of Canaan to the sons of Israel.”⁶⁹ Thus, while the route of the migration differs from that given in Anonymous’s *Gesta*, the biblical framing is very much the same. There is some doubt about the chronological sequence of the two chronicles’ composition, and many Hungarian scholars have argued that the fourteenth-century texts derive from a twelfth- or even eleventh-century chronicle that has since been lost, making them earlier than Anonymous’s *Gesta*.⁷⁰ Since there is no real proof for that hypothesis, all we can say with certainty is that the texts we possess are from the fourteenth century.

The curious episode of the eagles is usually explained as some sort of misunderstanding of the name “Bessi,” one of the terms used in Latin texts for the Pechenegs, whose attack is mentioned in historical sources (Regino and Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos), and, according to modern historians, was a direct factor in the Hungarian migration into the Carpathian Basin.⁷¹ The story, however, raises the question of intertextual polemic with the Rus’ chronicle *Tales of Bygone Years* (also known as the Primary Chronicle).⁷² Is this episode a distorted account of a historical event (the attack by the Pechenegs in the late ninth century), or is it a response to a story denigrating the Hungarians found in the Rus’ chronicle? In the entry for 1097, the *Tales* record a war pitting the grand prince of Kiev Svyatopolk (r. 1093–1113) and his ally King Coloman of Hungary (r. 1095–1116) against the Rostislavichi princes of Halich allied to Vladimir II Monomakh (r. 1113–1125) and the Cuman leader Bonyak. According to the Rus’ chronicle, Bonyak’s Cumans attacked the Hungarians, driving them “hither and yon, as a falcon drives magpies” and massacring many of their number.⁷³ The coincidence of this simile of falcons with the eagles that attack the Hungarians in the Illuminated Chronicle is suggestive. Did the Hungarian author, aware of the Rus’ account, project it into an earlier past and mitigate the defeat by suggesting that it was supernatural rather than inflicted by the Rus’?

Textual polemic against earlier chronicles, and thus some reshaping of the migration story, continued in the fifteenth century. Another example shows how

69. *Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi xiv*, 243–56, 285–87, and 289, here p. 289: “Retradidit autem Dominus Hungaris Pannoniam, sicut tradiderat filii tempore Moysi terram Seo regis Amorreorum et omnia regna Chanaan in hereditatem.”

70. The historiography is too voluminous to list here. For a recent summary in English, see János M. Bak and László Veszprémy, eds., *Studies on the “Illuminated Chronicle”* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2018).

71. Sándor László Tóth, “A honfoglalás,” in *Árpád előtt és után. Tanulmányok a magyarság és hazája korai történetéről*, ed. Gyula Kristó and Ferenc Makk (Szeged: Somogyi Könyvtár, 1996), 43–54, here p. 46; Zoltán Bálint Takács, “A magyar honfoglalás előzményeiről,” *Savaria. A Vas megyei múzeumok értesítője* 27 (2002): 201–13, discusses the story about the eagles on p. 205 with further bibliographical references.

72. *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, ed. and trans. Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953). This is an early twelfth-century Old East Slavic chronicle, reworked several times in the later Middle Ages.

73. *Ibid.*, 196.

such decisions could be made based on “authorities” who had no genuine knowledge of the Hungarians’ early history. Printed in 1488, John Thuróczy’s *Chronica Hungarorum* borrows significantly from the fourteenth-century chronicles but also argues against some of their views.⁷⁴ In his prologue, the author mentions debates about the history of the Hungarians, specifically disagreement over “which part of the world brought them forth.” Reading the “old historical works” on the subject, he remarks that many things were omitted, including the glorious deeds of Attila, kept silent “because of the hatred of foreign peoples.” John Thuróczy claims to have corrected the erroneous stories of earlier authors of Hungarian history, stating that he added nothing of his own invention but followed older, and therefore more authentic, historiography. He notes that previous histories diverge in their description of the origin of the Huns, that is, the Hungarians, and even contradict each other; to prove his point, he cites two chronicles written during the reigns of Charles I and Louis I, the Angevin kings of Hungary during the first half of the fourteenth century, that hold differing views.⁷⁵

After describing the conflict between his sources, John Thuróczy seeks to resolve the contradictions of these fourteenth-century chroniclers by turning to recognized authorities, including some of his near-contemporaries. He cites Archbishop Antoninus Pierozzi of Florence’s *Chronicon* of 1457 and the *Cosmographia* written by Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pius II) in 1461, as well as patristic texts such as Saint Jerome’s commentary on Genesis and the works of the first-century historian Josephus Flavius, to ascertain that Scythia was peopled by descendants of Japhet’s second son, Magog. He observes that one of the two books of history names Nimrod as the ancestor of the “Huns, that is, Hungarians” via his sons Hunor and Magor, and supplies a genealogy that extends from Noah through Ham, Nimrod, Attila the Hun, and Almus. However, he discounts this information because his other source derives the Hungarians from Magog, son of Japhet, which according to John Thuróczy is in accordance with the Bible and Church fathers such as Jerome, and so must be the correct version.

The author then quotes a wide range of previous histories on the Huns and the ancient Scythians, as well as descriptions of Scythia based on an older Hungarian chronicle (from the Illuminated Chronicle family) and other earlier writers. He relays that the chronicle locates Scythia in Europe between Asia and the Etul (Don), adjoining the lands of the Pechenegs and white Cumans to the east, with uninhabited woods stretching to Suzdalia to the west. He then disputes this location based on the other Hungarian chronicle and authors such as Paulus

74. *Johannes de Thurocz, Chronica Hungarorum*, vol. 1.

75. *Johannes de Thurocz, Chronica Hungarorum*, ed. Elemér Mályusz and Gyula Kristó, vol. 2, *Commentarii*, part 1, *Ab Initii usque ad annum 1301* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988), 41. John Thuróczy does not identify his sources by name, but the editors provide useful information in their apparatus. The Chronicle of Buda, written during Charles Robert’s reign and covering events up to 1332/1333, starts with chapter 11 of Genesis, the tower of Babel; the Illuminated Chronicle, written under Louis I and covering events to 1349, starts with chapter 10 of Genesis.

Orosius, Ptolemy, Strabo, and Pliny, arguing that Scythia was in Asia, with the Tanais, the river that divides Asia from Europe, flowing through its center. After enumerating the many peoples that originate from Scythia, including the Huns and Hungarians, John Thuróczy explicitly supports the interpretation that the Hungarians come from Scythia located in Asia, citing Paulus Orosius, the second- or third-century philosopher Dionysius Periegetes of Alexandria (“the African”), various histories of the Huns, and Pius II. None of these authorities, of course, knew anything about Hungarian origins. Nevertheless, John Thuróczy uses their prestige to give weight to his account of the foundational migration, with the Huns initially leaving Scythia due to a lack of space, then the Hungarians returning to Pannonia in 744 via the lands of the Pechenegs and the white Cumans, Suzdal, and a town called “Kio” (Kiev, spelled “Ryo” in some early printed versions⁷⁶). He repeats the story about the attack by the eagles, after which he has the Hungarians cross the mountains for three months to arrive in Transylvania. He then proceeds to give the colorful stories of the conquest of Pannonia.⁷⁷ Yet it seems that not all of his fifteenth-century contemporaries found the migration narrative to be the most crucial aspect of early Hungarian history. An edition of John Thuróczy’s chronicle printed in 1488 and illustrated with woodcuts features no images of the migration but prioritizes a battle scene, inserted at the point where the narration observes that Pannonia was granted to the Hungarians as Zion had been granted to the Israelites under Moses.⁷⁸

These various Hungarian chronicles cannot be understood as in some way reflecting the memory of real migrations. Scholarship on similar medieval migration stories (such as those of the Franks, the Goths, and the Lombards) has highlighted the importance of symbolic geography in these descriptions and the influence of the biblical model.⁷⁹ Medieval authors created a link between migration and the formation of a people, who in the process moved from barbarism to civilization. Thus the far-away homeland was inhabited by barbarians, who were humanized and organized in the course of their migration, as in Isidore of Seville’s account of the Goths or the *Historia Brittonum*’s description of the ‘Trojans’ journey to Britain.⁸⁰ These stories were erudite and constructed, based on ideas from classical antiquity and the Bible, with a strong imprint of the biblical story of the Israelites; one cannot suppose a priori that they reflect actual events. Given the relatively late composition of the Hungarian chronicles discussed here, a large array of medieval literary models was already available to their authors, all of which suggested the need for a far-away homeland and a story of migration when constructing the story of one’s own *gens*. Finally, many of the building blocks of the tale of the Hungarian

76. Thus in the copy printed in Augsburg in 1488: Cambridge, University Library, Inc.5.A.6.18., fol. 27r.

77. *Johannes de Thurocz, Chronica Hungarorum*, vol. 1, 14–114 and 200–203.

78. Cambridge, University Library Inc.5.A.6.18., fol. 27r.

79. Coumert, *Origines des peuples*, 510–14; Pohl, “Narratives of Origin and Migration in Early Medieval Europe.”

80. Coumert, *Origines des peuples*, 511–12.

migrations in fact predate the emergence of the Hungarians themselves, and are borrowed from earlier descriptions of the Scythians.

Once the authors of the Hungarian histories picked up on these early literary sources, the trajectory of their narratives was determined: the Hungarians, assimilated to Scythians and Huns, had to originate from Scythia, and one had to explain how they came to inhabit Pannonia. The only possibility was a long migration. Coupled to the biblical prototype of the formation and political organization of a people, that is, the migration story of the Israelites, this determined the nature of the origin tales that they wrote. These tales are learned myths constructed from written sources, not transcriptions of the oral tradition of historical events.

The Hungarian origin stories have the same characteristics as those of the Goths, Lombards, and others. They claim that an already existing, identifiable people migrated for an extended period, encountering enemies on the way in a series of battles that served to demonstrate their valor and cohesion. The migrating people have an eponymous founder, and are led by chieftains during their exodus. In the course of their migration, they acquire civilization and eventually Christianity, and their installation in their current homeland is proof of their tenacity and bravery. Certain elements vary between the different accounts, such as the location of Scythia, the precise route of the Hungarians' migration, names, and other details. Yet the medieval narratives about Hungarians should no more be taken as encapsulating folk traditions of real migrations than other learned medieval texts on the migration of peoples. Such *origo gentis* accounts served the political aims of an elite group. They became foundations for ascribing an identity from above, rather than reflecting an already existing ethnic identification of a whole people.

Moreover, elements were borrowed from classical antiquity and other authors who were not writing about the Hungarians. Notably, the very location of Scythia, the Hungarians' alleged homeland, in Asia rather than Europe was decided on the authority of Saint Jerome, who lived well before the Hungarians emerged as a recognizable people. That decision, rather than specific historical knowledge, underpinned the Asian origin story of the Hungarians, who were thus assimilated to the Scythians and the Huns. Nevertheless, the ambiguity of an Asian origin should not be forgotten: while it could signal that a people were bloodthirsty barbarians, in the medieval division of the world Jerusalem, the center of salvation, was also located in Asia. Providential salvation (that is, conversion to Christianity) is also embedded in the story.

Noble Families' Migration Stories

In medieval Hungary, migration tales were linked not only to ethnogenesis but also to the histories of many individual families. Two main versions of the Hungarian narrative, that compiled by Simon of Kéza in his late thirteenth-century chronicle and that given—with some variations—in the fourteenth-century chronicles, include a list of *advenae*, or immigrant nobles, emphasizing that the standing of these

families was equal to the noble families of the “original” Hungarian migrants. In these instances, chroniclers were not writing about their own *gens* but rather about others, though this does not preclude a sympathetic rendering of their alleged stories, as some of them may have been familiar to the chroniclers, or even their friends at the royal court. Simon of Kéza lists these nobles towards the end of his chronicle.⁸¹ Significantly, the fourteenth-century chronicles move the list to a position immediately after the story of the arrival of the Hungarians themselves, an arrangement that serves to further underline their equal status.⁸² These texts enumerate nineteen cases of immigrant knights (one case can include several individuals from the same family), of which ten are of German origin and the others from France, Italy, Bohemia, Moravia, and the Iberian Peninsula. Though the two versions contain some variations in the details of the families, they both suggest that they arrived in response to the invitation issued by the ruler Géza (d. 997), father of Hungary’s first Christian king, Stephen I (r. 997–1038), to people from Christian countries to help in the conversion of Hungary.⁸³

It is crucial to consider these lists in the context of their creation. From the early thirteenth century, the weakening of royal power in the Kingdom of Hungary benefited the nobility. Aristocratic power surpassed royal power, with the baronial elite filling all the important royal offices and playing a key role in the newly constituted general assembly (the precursor of Parliament).⁸⁴ As a consequence, demands were made that new immigrants be excluded from high positions.⁸⁵ In 1213, Queen Gertrude was even murdered by a baronial conspiracy for ensuring preference in high offices and influence for her relatives from Andechs-Meran.⁸⁶ In a sign of this shift of power, those arriving in the entourages of royal brides after 1204 no longer managed to found new aristocratic lineages.⁸⁷ The list of old “newcomers” preserved in the chronicles was thus drawn up to acknowledge the equality of noble families who had already achieved high status. Proving descent from early immigrants was clearly advantageous, while the closer to the (then) present one’s ancestor immigrated, the more dubious the family’s standing would become.

81. *Simonis de Kéza, Gesta Hungarorum*, 158–75.

82. *Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi XIV*, 294–304: “Cum ergo quidam sint hospites isto tempore nobilitate pares Hungaris ...” (“Since these days there are some foreign settlers equal to the Hungarians in nobility ...”).

83. Berend, “Noms et origines des immigrants nobles en Hongrie (XIII^e siècle).”

84. On the Hungarian nobility, see Erik Fügedi, *Castle and Society in Medieval Hungary (1000–1437)* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986); Fügedi, *Kings, Bishops, Nobles and Burghers*; Martyn Rady, *Nobility, Land and Service in Medieval Hungary* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

85. Gyula Kristó, “Selbstbewußtsein und Fremdenfeindlichkeit im Ungarn der Árpádenzeit,” *East Central Europe* 20–23, part 2 (1993–1996): 91–111.

86. Tamás Körmendi, “A Gertrúd királyné elleni merénylet a külföldi elbeszélő forrásokban,” *Történelmi Szemle* 51 (2009): 155–93. On the broader historical background and various aspects of the murder, see Judit Majorossy, ed., *Egy történelmi gyilkosság margójára. Merániai Gertrúd emlékezete, 1213–2013* (Szentendre: Ferenczy Múzeum, 2014).

87. Erik Fügedi, *Ispánok, bárók, kiskirályok. A középkori magyar arisztokrácia fejlődése* (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1986), 15.

Here I will focus on two of the most interesting cases, where we can infer at least some information about how these families' tales of migration were forged.

The brothers Volphgerus and Hedricus de Vildonia—probably the equivalent of the German names Wolfger and Hedrich—are presented as the ancestors of the Hedrici/Hedrih (Héder) lineage.⁸⁸ Modern scholarship has disputed Simon of Kéza's assertion that the brothers came from Wildon in Styria; according to the fourteenth-century chronicles, they were counts of "Heinburg" (Hainburg).⁸⁹ The fourteenth-century chronicles recount that they immigrated to Hungary during the reign of duke Géza, that is, in the second half of the tenth century, while Simon of Kéza also notes that Wolfger founded a monastery. The monastic foundation is a historical fact, but it did not take place in the late tenth century: the foundation charter survives and is dated 1157.⁹⁰ We thus have documentary evidence that the brothers immigrated to Hungary during the reign of King Géza II (r. 1141–1162), that is, in the mid-twelfth century. In order to depict the lineage as more illustrious, and to present its originators as responding to the call to Christianize a new kingdom, the moment of their immigration was pushed back by two centuries to the period of the formation of the Christian Kingdom of Hungary.

A similar change in the chronology of immigration is discernible in the case of another family, though the reason for the rewriting is perhaps easier to guess. Simon of Kéza recounts that Pot of Lébény, also known as Ernistus, arrived with many warriors, and names his descendant, count "Conradus of Altumburg."⁹¹ The fourteenth-century chronicles explain that "Poth" is a sobriquet drawn from the German term (*Theutonice*) *Bote*—equivalent to the Latin *nuncius*—because of his service as a messenger between the Hungarian kings Andrew I (r. 1046–1060) and his son Solomon (r. 1063–1074), and "Emperor Conrad"—though in fact the dates of these Hungarian rulers correspond to the reigns of the kings then emperors Henry III (r. 1028–1056) and Henry IV (r. 1054–1105). Conrad of Altenburg is attested in the sources between 1239 and 1299. He was thus a contemporary of the chronicler who recorded his family history. Conrad would have had ample opportunity to meet Simon of Kéza, court cleric of King Ladislas IV (r. 1272–1290), since he was *comes* (a royal officer in charge of a county, usually rendered as "count" in English, or *ispán* in Hungarian) of the county of Borsod in 1258 and *comes camerae* (count of the Treasury, an officer in charge of the mint and certain revenues) from 1260; King Ladislas also rewarded him for defending the borders of the

88. *Simonis de Kéza, Gesta Hungarorum*, 162–65; *Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi xiv*, 296.

89. According to one view, Wolfger of Erlach, of the Au-Erlach lineage, who arrived in Hungary during the reign of Géza II, is the person named in the chronicle: *Simonis de Kéza, Gesta Hungarorum*, 164, n. 1.

90. This was the Benedictine abbey of Kúszén, today Burg Güssing, in Austria. For the charter, see György Fejér, *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis*, vol. 3, t. 2 (Buda: s. n., 1829), 144–45; Fügedi, *Ispánok, bárók, kiskirályok*, 13.

91. *Simonis de Kéza, Gesta Hungarorum*, 164–65; *Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi xiv*, 297–98. In the fourteenth-century chronicles he is "Corardus de Altinburg"; slightly different forms (Pot, Poth) are also used in the two chronicles. Altenburg (Magyaróvár) is a town on the western border of Hungary.

kingdom.⁹² It was therefore most likely Conrad himself who provided the material on his family that we find in Simon's chronicle.

There is also a historically attested Pot. Palatine (*comes palatinus*) of Hungary between 1209 and 1212 and founder of the monastery of Lebyn (Lébény), he was a member of the Győr family, which according to one modern opinion was not an immigrant family at all, but Hungarian.⁹³ According to another view, the true ancestor of Conrad's lineage was the German immigrant *comes* Otho, who settled in Hungary in the eleventh century and founded the monastery of Zselicszentjakab in 1061.⁹⁴ In either case, Pot could not have been the ancestor of the lineage and did not arrive in Hungary when the chronicle account suggests. Nor was this misrepresentation a mere confusion or later conflation of different members of the family, Otho and Pot(h). Although Simon of Kéza did not explicitly give the date of Pot's arrival, he implied by the chronological order of his entries that Pot immigrated during the tenth or eleventh century: the family is mentioned before others whose immigration is dated to the eleventh century. His late thirteenth-century chronicle thus already portrayed Pot as the founder of the lineage. It is highly unlikely that Conrad would mistake someone who, given the dates, must have been his own father or grandfather for the family's ancestor who supposedly arrived in the eleventh century. But charters concerning Conrad's activities throw light on this strange misdating. After Conrad made an alliance with Othakar of Bohemia and used German warriors to attack the lands of his enemies in Hungary, King Béla IV (r. 1235–1270) punished him for his disloyalty, confiscating his lands, including the monastery of Lébény, until he was pardoned in 1263 and his possessions restored.⁹⁵ It seems that in the aftermath of these events, it was part of Conrad's strategy to affirm his right to his family's possessions through claims that the founder of that monastery (in fact his own father or grandfather) was the much earlier founder of his lineage.⁹⁶

Tales of the migration of noble families' ancestors were most likely created by the families themselves but recorded by chroniclers who were not members of those lineages. These tales were devised to enhance the prestige of a family and to buttress the claims of older immigrant families as opposed to more recent arrivals. In these tales, we can already trace two opposing views about immigrants: a positive one, explicitly expressed, and a negative one, tarnishing the standing of

92. Gusztáv Wenzel, *Codex diplomaticus Arpadianus continuatus. Árpád-kori új okmánytár*, vol. 12 (1874; repr. Pápa: Jókai Mór városi könyvtár, 2003), 355; Attila Zsoldos, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, vol. 1, 1000–1301 (Budapest: História/MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 2011), 319.

93. János Karácsonyi, *A magyar nemzetségek a XIV. század közepéig* (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1900; repr. Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 1995), 545–46.

94. Fügedi, *Ispánok, bárók, kiskirályok*, 33–34. Most recently on the lineage, see Norbert C. Tóth, "A Győr-nemzetség az Árpád-korban," in *Analecta Mediaevalia I. Tanulmányok a középkorról*, ed. Tibor Neumann (Budapest: Argumentum Kiadó, 2001), 53–72.

95. Karácsonyi, *A magyar nemzetségek*, 550.

96. *Ibid.*, 548, 554, and 557; Pál Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, vol. 2, 1301–1457 (Budapest: História/MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 1996), 60, 93, and 230.

recent immigrants and forming the backdrop to the novel insistence in the thirteenth century that older immigrant noble families were equal to the immigrant Hungarian *gens*. The same tension between positive and negative ideas attached to migrants can also be found in tales of mass immigration into the Kingdom of Hungary, but the balance between them was shifting towards more explicit expressions of hostility.

Medieval Discourses of Mass Immigration

Medieval discourses on mass immigration into Hungary after the arrival of the Hungarians themselves crop up in a few narratives. The well-known early eleventh-century *Admonitions*, written by a cleric but attributed to King Stephen I in the hagiographic tradition, extolled the usefulness of immigrants in one of its chapters:

For as the guests arrive from different parts and provinces, so they bring with them different tongues and customs, different examples and weapons, and all this adorns the royal court while deterring foreigners from overweening contempt. For a country of one single language and one set of customs is weak and vulnerable. Therefore I enjoin you, my son, to protect newcomers benevolently and to hold them in high esteem so that they may stay with you rather than dwell elsewhere.⁹⁷

The text is a king's mirror, intended to teach the skill of governance to the heir to the throne. Its clerical author (whose identity remains uncertain despite attempts to identify him) was inspired by classical and patristic antecedents and biblical models.⁹⁸ The Carolingian and Ottonian tradition of the ancient Roman Empire was

97. *Libellus de institutione morum*, ed. Iosephus Balogh, in *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum*, ed. Emericus Szentpétery, vol. 2 (Budapest: Academia Litterarum Hungarica, 1938; repr. Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 1999), 611–27, here pp. 624–25: “Sicut enim ex diversis partibus et provinciis veniunt hospites, ita diversas linguas et consuetudines, diversaque documenta et arma secum ducunt, que omnia regna [variant: regiam] ornant et magnificent aulam et perterritant exterorum arrogantiam. Nam unius lingue uniusque moris regnum inbecille et fragile est. Propterea iubeo te fili mi, ut bona voluntate illos nutrias, et honeste teneas, ut tecum libentius degant, quam alicubi habitent.” Of the many analyses, see András Kubinyi, “Zur Frage der Toleranz im mittelalterlichen Königreich Ungarn,” in *Toleranz im Mittelalter*, ed. Alexander Patschovsky and Harald Zimmermann (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1998), 187–206; Jenő Szűcs, “Szent István intelmei: Az első magyarországi államelméleti mű,” in *Szent István és kora*, ed. Ferenc Glatz and József Kardos (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézet, 1988), 32–53; László Veszprémy, “Megjegyzések Szent István ‘Intelmei’-hez,” in *Várak, templomok, ispotályok. Tanulmányok a magyar középkorról*, ed. Tibor Neumann (Budapest: Argumentum Kiadó, 2004), 311–25.

98. Előd Nemerikényi, *Latin Classics in Medieval Hungary: Eleventh Century* (Debrecen: University of Debrecen/Central European University Press, 2004), 31–71. On the genre of king's mirror, see Sverre Bagge, *The Political Thought of the King's Mirror* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1987).

also incorporated into this chapter.⁹⁹ The presence of immigrants at the royal court was certainly commonplace in this period and Stephen's new kingdom was heavily shaped by immigrant clerics and nobles.¹⁰⁰ The continued flow of arrivals is summed up by the fourteenth-century Illuminated Chronicle, which lists "Bohemians, Poles, Greeks, Spaniards, Ishmaelites or Saracens, Pechenegs, Armenians, Saxons, Thuringians, those from Meissen and the Rhine, Cumans, and Latins" among the settlers in the Kingdom of Hungary who stayed and intermarried with the Hungarians, gaining the right to live in the realm and noble status.¹⁰¹ The chronicler reports this situation in a matter-of-fact tone, without any particular value judgment.

We can gain further insight into medieval discourses on immigration by considering more closely one of the groups on this list, the Cumans. Another source offers a much more detailed account of their arrival, which also shows the limits of the positive medieval discourse on immigration. In his mid-thirteenth-century chronicle of the Mongol invasion of Hungary, Master Rogerius recounts that Kuthen, "king of the Cumans," sent an embassy to King Béla IV, asking permission to move into the realm with his followers; after his defeat by the Mongols, his lands had been ravaged and his subjects massacred.¹⁰² The Hungarian king was pleased to accept the subjection of another ruler and welcomed the possibility of converting the Cumans to Christianity when Kuthen promised they would accept baptism. After a further exchange of envoys, the Cumans traveled to Hungary. King Béla "went to meet [Kuthen] at the border of his country ... and granted him and his people such exceptional honours as the inhabitants of the land had neither done nor seen since times beyond memory."¹⁰³ The Cuman presence, however, led to conflict as enmity grew between the locals and the newcomers. Significantly, Rogerius describes the confrontation using ethnic labels: *Comani* and *Hungari*. The Cumans were accused of roaming around Hungary, destroying crops and raping women.¹⁰⁴ Hungarian nobles were also resentful of the Cumans for the royal favor shown to them: the king was keen to keep the Cumans on his side because of their military might. In the end, when the Mongols attacked Hungary the Cumans were accused of being their vanguard, and their leader Kuthen was murdered by a mob. As "the people clamored against him: 'He has to die! He has to die!'" Kuthen and

99. Nemerkenyi, *Latin Classics*, 54 and 57–61.

100. Erik Fügedi and János M. Bak, "Foreign Knights and Clerks in Early Medieval Hungary," in *The Expansion of Central Europe in the Middle Ages*, ed. Nora Berend (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 319–32.

101. *Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi xiv*, 303: "Bohemi, Poloni, Greci, Ispani, Hismahelite seu Saraceni, Bessi, Armeni, Saxones, Turingi, Misnenses et Renenses, Cumani, Latini." The other chronicle family features an abbreviated list.

102. *Magistri Rogerii Epistola in miserabile carmen super destructione Regni Hungarie per tartaros facta*/Master Roger's Epistle to the Sorrowful Lament upon the Destruction of the Kingdom of Hungary by the Tatars, ed. and trans. in *Anonymus and Master Roger*, ed. Rady and Veszprémy, 133–229, here pp. 138–39.

103. *Ibid.*: "Rex vero ... usque ad confinium terre sue obuius sibi fuit tot eximia et tot honores sibi et suis faciens, quod ab incolis terre illius a tempore, cuius non exibat memoria, factum non fuerat neque visum."

104. *Ibid.*, 140–41, and 146–47.

his entourage “were captured, and their heads immediately cut off and thrown out of the windows of the palace into the crowd.”¹⁰⁵ The specific cause of the Cumans’ behavior is attributed by the author to their nature, rather than to their being immigrants per se: they were tough, wild, and not used to subordination.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Rogerius writes that, if the king “kept the Cumans in greater honor than the Hungarians, they could and should not have taken that badly. For it is appropriate to the royal dignity to honor guests, particularly as he had promised this to them by oath,” adding that “only the king was their protector in Hungary.”¹⁰⁷ Rogerius therefore invokes the idea, also advocated by the anonymous author of the *Admonitions*, that it was a royal duty to welcome immigrants. He emphasizes the king’s aim to bring the Cumans into the Christian fold, and praises him for their baptism.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, Rogerius suggests that the charges of destructive behavior were true; implicitly, the Cumans are held responsible as new immigrants whose customs clash with those of the locals.¹⁰⁹

Tales of migration about foreign groups differed from those concerning the Hungarians’ migrations or noble families’ ancestors. In the case of the Hungarians as a group, their original homeland was a crucial part of the migration story and made it possible to situate the narrative within inherited models of origin myths. For noble lineages, their place of origin contributed to their prestige. When it came to foreign groups, however, less attention was paid to where they came from, and it was merely the motivation for their moving that was recorded. Although medieval observers, like modern ones, were warier of mass migration and its attendant tensions with locals, medieval authors were not necessarily negatively biased when they wrote about a people other than “their own.” Three points are worth emphasizing in regard to Rogerius’s account. First, there is the relative empathy he expresses with a foreign group, recording that the Cumans sought refuge in Hungary because of the fierce Mongol attack they had suffered. This is particularly striking in comparison to current narratives about refugees, and part of the explanation may lie in the common enemy, given that Rogerius’s focus was the Mongol devastation of Hungary. Second, his account of the conflict with local populations does not seek to blame only one side, the newcomers, but also lists local interests that distorted the reaction of the Hungarian nobles. Rogerius sided with the king against the nobles in his narrative, which also meant not laying all the blame on

105. *Ibid.*, 172–73: “Clamabat totus populus contra eum: Moriatur! Moriatur! ... ceperunt eosdem et cunctis in instanti capitibus amputatis ea in populos per fenestras de pallatio proiecerunt.”

106. *Ibid.*, 138: “Erat gens dura et aspera subdi nescia ...”

107. *Ibid.*, 154–55: “Si autem Comanos plus, quam Hungaros honorabat, hoc ipsi egre ferre non poterant nec debebant. Nam decebat regiam dignitatem introductos hospites honorare, maxime cum hoc eis promiserit iuramento”; “solum regem habebant in Hungaria protectorem.”

108. *Ibid.*, 138–39.

109. On modern fears and accusations against immigrants, compare Leo Lucassen, *The Immigrant Threat: The Integration of Old and New Migrants in Western Europe since 1850* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

the Cumans. Finally, insofar as he did blame the Cumans, he did not frame the problems in terms of their status as “migrants,” but related them to their nature and way of life, emphasizing their difference.

As with the tales of noble individuals, in these tales of mass migration into the Kingdom of Hungary the treatment of real immigrants was intertwined with the narrative construction—something that was not true for the tales of the migration of the Hungarians. Whether immigrant nobles were accepted in society or how the Cumans were treated was no longer a literary construction, but impacted the lives of actual people. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the constructed tales of the migration of a *gens* over the longer term also acquired significant power to influence reality.

Medieval and Modern Tales

Migration stories play a crucial and persistent role in medieval Hungarian narratives. Learned authors wrote and rewrote the tales of the migration of the Hungarian people, while also constructing polemics against each other on various points; their sources were authorities such as the Bible and classical authors, often predating the very existence of the Hungarians. Migration, for these authors, was a positive aspect of the history of both peoples and individuals. There was an aura of chosenness, of being a new Israel, associated with migration and modeled on the Bible. Situating one’s own noble family as migrants, drawing a parallel with the “original” Hungarian immigrants, and establishing prestige or security by linking their arrival to the foundation of the Christian Kingdom of Hungary became intertwined with the tale of the migration of the Hungarians. Yet within this positive discourse about migration itself, we can see the emergence of a distinction. Individual immigrants or certain groups were criticized and even demonized, though this was not explicitly tied to them being immigrants as such but rather to their status as “nomads,” “barbarians,” or “newcomers” intent on taking political power. The distinction between old migrants (positive) and new migrants (negative) is latent in the case of the Cumans and explicit in that of the immigrant nobles. Nevertheless, it did not affect the broader medieval discourse on migration itself, which continued to carry a positive value.

Resting on these medieval foundations, tales of migration persist to the present day, but they also gain a sharper distinction: old migration is valorized, while new migration is demonized. The nationalist narrative of Hungarian history, despite being increasingly challenged by scholarship, is making a comeback. While archaeologists debate the interpretation of artifacts, and historical DNA studies show heterogeneity in earlier populations,¹¹⁰ Orbán’s government is reasserting the tale of hundreds of years of “Hungarian” migration, invoking a coherent ethnic group that did not in fact exist and even dismissing linguistic evidence of Hungarian’s relationship to Finno-Ugric languages in order to emphasize a mythic Turkic,

110. Aranka Csősz et al., “Maternal Genetic Ancestry and Legacy of 10th Century AD Hungarians,” *Scientific Reports* 6 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep33446>.

Hun descent. The new national curriculum for history mandates the teaching of mythic Hungarian “prehistory” and tales of “the taking of the homeland.”¹¹¹ While nineteenth-century historians naturally built on medieval stories, today only a willful disregard for scholarship can lead to an acceptance of medieval tales as true. The mythic migration story is celebrated as essential to creating Hungarian identity. In stark contrast, new immigrants are presented as a threat that will destroy the fabric of society. Both modern tales of migration, whether positive or negative, are instrumentalized in the service of power. Those who claim that new migrants are a threat to a homogeneous society forget that migration has always created hybridity, and that no “ethnic purity” can be found no matter how far back in time we go. Hybridity was already the rule in the Middle Ages and even before,¹¹² including when it came to “the Hungarians” themselves. Migration as a historical process—both in the past and in the present—can generate tensions, but longer-term integration means that “locals” include descendants of past immigrants. What tales are spun around real and invented migrations has always been linked to authorial agendas in both the medieval and the contemporary world. Tales of migration have long played a role in creating communal identity,¹¹³ but their brutally exclusionary instrumentalization is an invention tied to games of power. Nothing demonstrates this better than the outcome of a recent court case. In 2021, Árpád W. Tóta, a writer who ironically subverted government rhetoric by describing the Hungarians defeated at the battle of Augsburg (Lechfeld) in 955 as “smelly migrants,” was condemned by the highest court for “violating the dignity of the community of the Hungarian nation”; the verdict stated that the term “‘migrant’ has a pejorative connotation in today’s public discourse.”¹¹⁴

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111. *Magyar Közlöny* 17 (2020): 342–52, here p. 345.

112. Compare Schneidmüller, “Medieval Concepts of Migration and Transculturality.”

113. Charles F. Briggs, “History, Story, and Community: Representing the Past in Latin Christendom, 1050–1400,” in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 2, 400–1400, ed. Sarah Foot and Chase F. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 391–413.

114. Márk Herczeg, “A Kúria elítélte Tóta W. Árpádot, mert bűdös magyar migránsokról írt,” *!444!!!*, March 24, 2021, <https://444.hu/2021/03/24/a-kuria-elitelte-tota-w-arpadot-mert-budos-magyar-migransokrol-irt>.