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## **The Magyar Raids: Fact and Fable**

### **Background**

There is no consensus on the exact starting date of the military campaigns undertaken by the Hetumoger ("Seven Magyar") tribal confederation in the ninth and tenth centuries. Some historians begin in 862, when the first Hungarian or Magyar troops appear in the East Frank Kingdom (later Germany) as allies of the Moravians.

However, as this campaign was part of the movement of the Magyar people from their former homeland of "Atelkuzu" ("Between the Rivers") in today's Ukraine, Moldova and Romania, into the Carpathian Basin, which would form their land for the next 1,100 years, the campaigns leading up to the so-called "Conquest" will not be dealt with here.

What is important is that the movement of some 200,000 men, women and children, and maybe more, with their herds of horses; cows; camels, sheep and goats and even pigs was done in an orderly, organized fashion that needs further research. It is quite possibly the major event in Continental Europe at the end of the Ninth Century.

To cover this vast movement (and how big it was can be seen by comparing it with the relatively puny American "Wagon Trains" into the West or the Boer Great Treks of South Africa) it was necessary to obtain alliances with the "Great Powers" of the day as well as smaller polities. Thus the Seven Magyars moved into Transylvania, Upper Hungary (northern Hungary, Ukraine and Slovakia) and the Great Hungarian Plain in alliance with the Byzantine Empire and the Holy Roman Empire, which at this time included the East Frankish Kingdom (East Francia) and what are now Austria, Switzerland and northern Italy.

It is interesting to note that the Magyars, often described as "barbarians", kept their side of the alliances, but the Byzantines betrayed them in 895, likely causing serious losses among the Magyar army on the Balkans. But up until 900, the alliance with the East Franks stayed firm.

### **The Problem**

The general "narrative" or storyline, about the "Magyar raids", in most sources available to the general reader, whether "serious historical works" or ahistorical commentaries and do-it-yourself websites including blogs, goes something like this. (It must sadly be mentioned that certain Hungarian historians, due to a sense of inferiority, also represent the events this way):

"The Magyars had begun their predatory incursions into Germany, in which they destroyed everything, wherever they penetrated. When, in the year 907, they again

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advanced against Bavaria in larger numbers than ever, the Margrave Luitpold summoned the entire fighting force of his people for the defence of the country. The Bavarians, however, were completely defeated, 5 July, 907, in a battle in which Luitpold himself, nearly all the Bavarian nobles, and a number of bishops, were killed. The land then became an easy prey to the barbarians and was ruthlessly devastated.”<sup>1</sup>

This version of events is ahistorical. It is merely a surface reading of secondary sources and fails to seek causes and effects. It also leaves out a number of contemporary statements in the sources and simply omits key facts. It also reverses the order of who attacked whom. In reality, the Bavarians and the troops of the Holy Roman Emperor Louis the Child attacked the Magyars.

And it is at this point that the narrative must be changed. Usually, readers are given the impression that the Magyars, for some reason of their own (such as “barbarism,” as in the quotation above) attacked the Holy Roman Empire and generally wreaked havoc until Otto the Great taught them a lesson in 955 and they slowly turned towards civilization, a process that was completed, depending on whom you believe, either in around 1000 A.D., or is still ongoing.

In this version of events, no military or political reasons are sought, therefore none are found. The weakness of the argument is the concept of the “barbarian”, which is brought in to explain the apparent actions of the Magyars. Additional biased ideas, such as their “paganism” and general supposed “primitiveness” are all that are needed to explain their raids into “civilised” Europe and Byzantium.

### **Some Answers**

An in-depth look shows this view to be inadequate, to say the least. The present article addresses this problem. I will endeavour to show that the necessary information is available to all who are interested in what happened. It is hoped that a revision of widely-held views will result.

### **Failure to comprehend the Magyar horse culture**

During the research for this paper, which lasted well over a year, the author realised that most historians did not comprehend the Magyar social system. It can safely be stated that there is huge ignorance of the extremely strong cultural system which lasted from well before the 10<sup>th</sup> Century to post WWII times in rural Hungary. This was the system of the family-extended family-tribe-tribal confederation which was more lasting than any Western monarchical system and more lasting than most Chinese dynasties.

How did it work?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01751b.htm> The Catholic Encyclopedia, Arnulf of Bavaria, lines 1-8. Accessed 14 October, 2011. 16H00.

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The basic element of Old Magyar society – and indeed, of many other Steppe societies – was the extended family, called a “*had*”/ *had*/ . The word today is a reference to military organisation, but it originally just meant the extended family which included not only a father, mother, children; but also uncles, aunts, in-laws and grandparents all living in an organised unit.

The *had*, which numbered about a hundred people, was also called “*falu*” /*falu*/ and which today means “village”, was part of a “*nemzetség*” /*nɛmzɛtʃeːg*/ or clan. Hungarian chronicles say there were 108 such clans, which would comprise a number of villages as well as the territory of the clan leader, his military retinue and a number of tradesmen as well as herdsman. A clan would be numbered in the thousands.

On the next level was the “*törzs*” /*tɔrʒ*/ or “tribe”. The Magyars are recorded as having seven such tribes but three “*Kabar*” tribes also joined them and then when they settled in Hungary between 890 (or so) and 900 they no doubt added the Avars, who were a majority at the time, as well as the few Slavs and other ethnic groups, to their numbers and organisation.

Finally, based on material given to him by Bulcsú /*bultʃuː*/ and other Árpád family members, Constantine VI “*Porphyrogenitos*” (“Born in Purple”) in his *De Administrando Imperio* describes three supra-tribal offices, that of the *Kende*, the *Gyula* and the *Horka*.

Scholars argue as to who were the *Kende* and who the *Gyula*, but for a long time Bulcsú was the *Horka*.

The *Kende*, according to both Constantine and Arab sources was a kind of sacral king, the military commander was the *Gyula* and the *Horka* was a kind of judge.

It should be noted that during the 10<sup>th</sup> Century, Volga Bulgars as well as Petcheneg groups settled in Hungary and were placed on the borders as border guards, along with others.

It is therefore a mistake to say that the Hungarian state only came into being with the rule of Saint Stephen (Grand Duke from 997), King from 1000 to 1038. In actual fact, the Grand Duchy (for lack of a better expression) of Hungary came into being around 890 and lasted until King Saint Stephen “upgraded” it. However, it has been shown that the Magyars were settling into a relatively permanent state right from 895 onwards.

What seems to confuse people is that the Magyars continued to live in felt tents or mobile homes called *yurts* or *gers* in Turkic and Mongolian languages (although these were reserved for the wealthy) until at least the 13<sup>th</sup> Century and that a certain percentage of people continued a kind of transhumance pastoralism from 895 onwards for centuries.

But it was precisely this settling into the Carpathian Basin that took a century or somewhat less, from about 890 to about 960 and which involved the settling in specific areas of “*hads*”, clans and tribes. This is mentioned by Hungarian chroniclers as the Parliament of *Pusztaszer*, (896) which presumably demarcated the areas of the major tribes. However, it can be imagined that disagreements over land, grazing rights, planting and harvesting, as well as finding good market-places for internal and external trade, was something that took time and could not be rushed. This fact will be referred to when describing the reasons for the Magyar expeditionary campaigns against the Western Europeans and Byzantines below.

The man who probably studied this aspect of the Old Magyars more than any other is the well-known Professor Gyula László (1910-1998) who first described the Old Magyar culture in his *A honfoglaló magyar nép élete*<sup>2</sup> (The Life of the Landtaking Magyar People) published in 1944 and in more detail about four decades later in *Árpád Népe* (Árpád's People) published in 1988<sup>3</sup>, all of which was based on decades of archaeological work. In *Árpád Népe* László describes his excavations at Felgyő in Csongrád County, in southern Hungary. So far, the 10th Century village outside Felgyő is the only Conquest-Era Magyar village fully excavated in the Carpathian Basin, although other sites have been found.

It might surprise many, but László found not only evidence of yurts (tents, mobile homes) but also wattle and daub; wooden and even brick-built houses belonging to the Magyars. He further found proof of a number of trades, including agriculture, at the dig. Subsequent discoveries of sickles and other agricultural items which do not bear resemblance to Western models, but are similar to those used by the Khazars, indicate widespread agriculture in 10th Century Hungary.

István Kiszely<sup>4</sup> and Gyula László, as well as others including János Gömöri, have investigated the various trades that existed among the Ninth and Tenth Century Magyars and the following list, though, incomplete, should also underline the fact that the Hungarians of that time were a far cry from "wandering nomad barbarians".

- Bee-keeping.
- Agriculture. (Including ploughing, as well as smaller scale agriculture using the sickle.)
- Herding (this, at least, is not a surprise.) The heritage of specialist herding has remained in the language, with words for various "herds", such as "*gulya*" as "herd of cows" etc.

Trades included:

- Tanners
- Leatherworkers
- Potters
- Bowyers
- Saddlers (There were still traditional saddlers in the 1930s.)
- Wheelwrights
- Traders
- Silver-and-goldsmiths, jewellers. Their work is among the most impressive of what remains of the Old Magyar culture.
- Blacksmiths. At least 100 smelting sites<sup>5</sup> (forges) have been found all over the Carpathian Basin, which produced iron for making swords, stirrups, bits, hoes, sickles, spades and so on.
- Swordsmiths. The Magyar swordsmiths knew the damascening process.

<sup>2</sup> Múzsák, Budapest, 1988. ISBN 963 564 363 2 (Facsimile edition). Original published in Kolozsvár (Cluj) in 1944.

<sup>3</sup> Helikon, Budapest, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Kiszely, I. *A magyar nép őstörténete. Őseink mesterségei.* (The Ancient History of the Hungarian People. Our ancestor's trades. Accessed 20 May, 2012 <http://mek.oszk.hu/06400/06403/html/#121>)

<sup>5</sup> Hungarian National Museum, The Ancient Hungarians. Handbook to the Exhibit, 1996, p. 63.

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In other words, the "traditional" Western (and until the 1930s, even Hungarian) view of the Conquest and Duchy-era Hungarians as being so-called "nomads" (meaning "wanderers") sadly remains, misleading those interested in history. An example can be found in this blog post:

For the nomads, violence was normal. War was their only activity requiring large-scale political organization, and success in warfare was almost the only way for a man to achieve high status. Peace was essentially unknown; during periods of disunity when war against the civilized world was not being waged, small-scale local skirmishing and raiding took its place.<sup>6</sup>

One could argue that this author is not a historian and that this is only a blog post. Below, the work of a scholar from a highly-respected university will be looked at. Sadly, there is not much difference between the two. This author even denied the steppe people he wrote about their capability of building wagons!

It is not known for certain how the Huns secured a steady supply of swords, cauldrons, bows and wagons.<sup>7</sup>

To be fair to the author, Dr. Christopher Kelly of Cambridge University, he does try to put the Huns in a better light than earlier British authors, but sadly, his sources are all English, French, Latin and Greek with a few Russian references, but no close studies of the Huns from Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Mongolia or Hungary, even though many of these people have a special comprehension of the steppe peoples, being descended from them. To leave out what cultural anthropology calls the "emic view"<sup>8</sup>, that is, the "insider view", would seem to be irresponsible.

Like most Western authors (and I will touch on the works of some others) sadly Dr. Kelly, it seems, cannot conceive of steppe peoples ("nomads") making their own swords, or their own wagons. One has to wonder where the ancient Cimmerians and Scythians got wagons or bows, being physically distant from agricultural people, or how they mastered the art of bending wood to build their yurts? (The same steam-bending of wood is used to bend yurt roof-pillars, wagon wheels and bow sections.) His concept of the Huns (or any steppe people) is that they constantly wandered to and fro, apparently without any rhyme or reason. Sadly, despite the valiant attempt by many scholars in recent decades, this outdated view still holds sway. His idea of how the Huns got their fearsome composite recurved bows is revealing:

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<sup>6</sup> Emerson, J. (Authorship is not made completely clear) Nomads in Eurasian History. [http://www.idiocentrism.com/turan.nomads.htm#\\_ednref36](http://www.idiocentrism.com/turan.nomads.htm#_ednref36). Accessed on May 13, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Kelly, Christopher. Attila the Hun. Barbarian Terror and the Fall of the Roman Empire Vintage, London. 2008. P. 27.

<sup>8</sup> Personal discussions and lectures by the late Professor Ken Pike at the University of Oklahoma (OU) 1986.

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The combination of highly-specialised labour, up-front investment in materials and a long lead time was only practicable in a settled community. The composite short bow cannot easily be made by a steppe nomad on the move.<sup>9</sup>

This is true. What the author is apparently unaware of is the concept of the "winter camp" which did not move, where the children, the elderly and the women stayed while the pastoral element of the community moved the herds to warmer pastures or looked after them *in situ*. Many of these camps later coalesced into villages and towns, as Hungarian place-names show clearly.

One also has to wonder, if "nomads" couldn't make bows, how it is that the various peoples had different bows within the "composite" and "recurved" category. The Hun bow was quite different from the later Avar type, in that it was asymmetrical while the even later Magyar bow was fully symmetrical.<sup>10</sup>

Yet a practiced eye can immediately spot the difference between the small Scythian, the big proto-Xiongnu and later Hun bows, the Magyar bow and say, the later large Mongol bows. Obviously each people had its own indigenous bowyers. It is well-known, for instance, that the Huns invented the bone stiffeners which made their bow so much more powerful than the earlier Scythian type. The Cambridge scholar goes on to say about other specialty trades among the Huns:

They may have incorporated smiths, carpenters, wheelwrights and bowyers into their clans. These men might have offered their services willingly or, captured on raids, have been forced to work as skilled slaves.<sup>11</sup>

Archaeologists, like Ulambayar Erdenebat and D. Bajar, of Mongolia, Sergei Minyaev from Russia, and their Hungarian and Ukrainian (and other) colleagues, all have found Xiongnu, Hun, and in some cases, Magyar or other "steppe" people's fortresses, permanent houses as well as unique types of wagons, swords and stunning jewellery and a host of handicrafts that were unknown or less developed in other lands<sup>12</sup>. Most have found proof of indigenous bronze and iron-smelting.<sup>13</sup>

What is disappointing is that a Cambridge scholar can remain unaware of the Huns' iron-smelting, wagon-building and bow-making! Incidentally, in the Caucasus region, southern Ukraine and the Crimea, there was a wagon with high sides used until recent times called "Madjar" wagon, clearly a reference to the people of that name, which is referenced in Soviet encyclopaedias and local sources.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Szöllösi G. "Az avar íjak és a magyar íj fejlődéstörténeti kapcsolatai." IN: Fegyveres nomádok, nomád fegyverek. III Steppetörténeti Konferencia. Balassi, Szeged, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid III.

<sup>12</sup> Nomads and Settlement: New Perspectives in the Archaeology of Mongolia, Silk Road Journal Volume 8, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Minyaev, summary of Ivolga excavations: accessed 13 May 2012 <http://www.archeo.ru/eng/themes/xiongnu/recent-iss.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Helilov-Nyitray. Ősmagyarok Azerbajidzsánban. (Old Magyars in Azerbaijan) Hun-Idea, Budapest, 2008

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The case is just as bad when one looks at the Magyars. No less an authority than the Encyclopaedia Britannica says this about the period under review:

During the next half century, the Magyars were chiefly known in Europe for the forays they made across the continent, either as mercenaries in the service of warring princes or in search of booty for themselves—treasure or slaves for domestic use or sale. Terrifying to others, their mode of life was not always profitable. Indeed, their raiding forces suffered a number of severe reverses, culminating in a disastrous defeat at the hands of the German king Otto I in 955 at the Battle of Lechfeld, outside Augsburg (in present-day Germany). By that time the wild blood of the first invaders was thinning out, and new influences, in particular Christianity, had begun to circulate.<sup>15</sup>

So, according to this respected source, the Magyars were in essence a large, highly-organised lot of bandits!

The Arabic writings give evidence in the Ninth Century of the Magyars' wealth, such as the *Hudud Al Alam*, which states simply:

They are very rich people.<sup>16</sup>

Macartney quotes Gardezi about the same topic:

Their clothes are of silk brocade and their weapons are of silver and (two) are encrusted with gold.<sup>17</sup>

If the Magyars were recorded as wealthy in the Ninth Century and again in 950, there was no reason for them to seek wealth by robbing and plundering Western and Byzantine states. A more reasonable explanation has to be sought for the Magyar "raids" (military campaigns) than the weak theory of the "needy barbarian".

And yet, not only the Britannica, but also highly respected historians perceive the Hungarians as "predatory" and "nomadic". The American historian and Emeritus Professor, Charles Bowlus, describes

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<sup>15</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. "Hungary", accessed May 13, 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/276730/Hungary>.

<sup>16</sup> Minorsky, V. § 22. Discourse on the Majgharī Country. [http://www.kroraina.com/hudud/hud\\_22.html](http://www.kroraina.com/hudud/hud_22.html)

<sup>17</sup> Macartney, C.A. *The Magyars in the Ninth Century*. Cambridge University Press, 1968. Appendix.

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the Hungarians during the era of the Dukes as "predatory mercenaries". In his chapter on "The Early Hungarians as Mercenaries, 860-955"<sup>18</sup>, he concludes:

Archaeological evidence suggests that before Lechfeld there had been in Nyírség a flourishing bachelor culture based on mercenary activities. Afterwards there was a crash from which the region did not recover until the late middle ages when, ironically, Hungarian cowboys drove long-horned cattle on the hoof up the Danube to burgeoning cities such as Nuremberg and Augsburg. In the long run military predation was not a better way for the Hungarians to make a living in the Carpathian Basin than agriculture and pastoralism

He is mistaken about the "crash" in the Nyírség Region, which suffered no economic "crash" and was wealthy enough in times much earlier than the "late Middle Ages", it is sufficient merely to consider the great Synod of Szabolcs in 1092.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps he was fooled by the fact that most of the Magyar leadership moved further west in the 10th Century, but this was due to the conquest of Transdanubia and their move to a more central location. Still, his conclusion ignores the fact that agriculture and pastoralism were already practiced by the Hungarians in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries.

Clearly, if the respected professor's basic facts are wrong, then his conclusion must indeed be wrong. He has the Medieval Latin and Byzantine (Greek) sources at his fingertips, so what is the problem? How could he be so wrong? It would seem it is in the above-mentioned widespread beliefs about "nomads" which being incorrect, must lead to incorrect assumptions. Bowlus, it seems, like other Western historians, cannot conceive of the Hungarians living off their own land and adding value to their own products by trade, and therefore not needing to be a "predatory military" culture.

We shall see below why the Hungarians attacked both the West and the East. Whatever the reason, it was not a need to "make a living". Nonetheless, the agriculture is proven by written contemporary sources as well as archaeology, as are the other trades. Perhaps it is time this was more widely known?

Another typical problem is the one-sided approach to the "raids". Nowhere does Bowlus, or the author(s) of the Britannica section, consider the Hungarian side. Did they not feel threatened by the Bavarian invasion of 907? Did they not want to protect themselves from Petchenegs, Germans, Bulgars or others? The Western view is one-sided and therefore, of necessity, incorrect.

The findings of Hungarian, Russian, Mongolian and Chinese historians and archaeologists shatters this view of a "nomad culture" and shows a balanced, peaceful society which resorted to war, not as a "normal" activity, but as a necessity. Indeed, their society, being very rigid and highly structured; precluded war and even fighting. The Shi Ji refers to a Xiongnu law that forbids the partial drawing of a

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<sup>18</sup> France J. (Ed). *Mercenaries and Paid Men*. Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands. 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Némethy Péter. *A szabolcsi földvár kutatásának hét éve*. IN *Régészeti Barangolások Magyarországon*. Ed. Szombathy Viktor. Panoráma, Budapest, 1978.

sword in peacetime. To those familiar with old Hungarian customary law, the idea of a lawless society in which only war mattered, or the more nuanced "military predation" would seem inconceivable.

Therefore the myth of the "wandering nomad Magyars" can be laid to rest, hopefully once and for all.

### **Magyar Raids or Pre-emptive Attacks?**

Usually it is assumed that once the Magyars settled in the Carpathian Basin -- minus modern-day Transdanubia -- around the year 895/6, that they, being "barbarians" and therefore poor, and hearing of the wealth of Medieval Europe, wished to share in it, so they began "raids", motivated by nothing else other than the desire for plunder.

That the Hungarians were indeed in an alliance with the Holy Roman Empire's emperor is made clear in two sources, Widukind of Corvey and Liutprand of Cremona, both written about 50 years later and concerned with what they saw as the emperor's misbehaviour in allying himself with "heathens" and using "heathens" to fight for his ends against Christians.

Liutprand, in *Antapodosis Liber 1, cap 13*, says (in translation):

Arnulf in the meantime ... for pain. Called together the Hungarian nation .. the eager, bold, powerful ... only greedy for slaughter, and plunder, to help him.<sup>20</sup>

Authors of history books and online sources therefore cannot say there is no medieval material to refer to. And there is much more than this!

In short, the Magyar campaign against Emperor Arnulf's vassal, King Berengar of Friuli was done in alliance with the Holy Roman Emperor and the goal was to bring his vassal into line. The Hungarians were invited as the Empire's resources were stretched by other wars.

### **What to call the Magyar attacks?**

Obviously, what one calls a given action will affect the perception of that action; therefore it is vital that correct terminology be used from the start. If the claim that the Old Magyars were only interested in plunder and had no conception of strategy or even of a supra-tribal organisation is true, then their attacks could indeed be called "raids". There is, however, so much proof that this is not so that another name must be sought.

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<sup>20</sup> Arnulfus interea... pro dolor . ..Hungariorum gentem cupidam, audacem, omnipotentis Dei ignaram, scelerum omnium non insciam, caedis et rapinarum solummodo avidam, in auxilium convocat, IN: Eintritt de Ungarisches Stammesbundes....p 27. Footnote 64.

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## Adventures?

The period from about 899 to 970 is usually called “kalandozások kora” or “Age of Adventures” in Hungarian. No doubt this would have been correct if the military campaigns were looked at from the point of view of a young man going to the mythical “Sea of Óperencia”, which is understood to be a reference to Upper Austria, from “Ob der Enns” or above the Enns River, which in fact did serve as the Hungarian/Bavarian border for most of the period.

However, it is too romantic a notion to see the whole thing, without seeking cause or effect, as just a period of “adventures”.

The other view, quoted above, according to which the Magyars were only capable of “plundering raids” and “military predation”, is clearly untenable, considering contemporary written sources plus the simple fact that mounting expeditions consisting of thousands of men and horses was extremely expensive and more could have been achieved using the standard method of trade.

Therefore, considering, as shall be seen, the size of the expeditions -- from about 300 men and around 900 horses to 5,000 men and possible 15,000 horses – all carrying bows, arrows, all using saddles and full horse tack, at least a third wearing metal armour and all wearing leather armour, these would have been extremely expensive to mount.

So why did they do it?

The expedition in alliance with Emperor Arnulf has been mentioned, as has the invasion of Hungary of 907. What happened in between?

On December 8, 899, Emperor Arnulf of the Holy Roman Empire, ally of the Magyars, died. At the time, a Hungarian army under the command of Prince Szalárd /'spla:rd/<sup>21</sup> was deployed in Italy. As it happens, this is the only army about whose numbers have remained. According to Liudprand's *Antapodosis*<sup>22</sup> the Magyar army was a third the size of the 15,000-strong Italian army raised by Berengar of Ivrea, so it was five units of 1,000 (*ezred*) for a total of 5,000.

This army had gone to Italy in alliance with Arnulf and was still there when he died, even though it had achieved its main aim of defeating King Berengar's army. (At the Battle of the River Brenta on September 24.)

Considering the fact that the Muslim chronicler Ibn Rusta, (writing in Isfahan after 903) had written “Their leader rides at the head of a cavalry troop of some 20,000”<sup>23</sup> writing of the Magyars in the East, and

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<sup>21</sup> Nagy, Kálmán. *A honfoglalás korának hadtörténete* (The Military History of the Landtaking Period) Heraldika, Budapest, 2007. P-140.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 141, referring to both the Venetian Chronicle and Liudprand.

<sup>23</sup> Author's translation from the Hungarian. Kmoskó, M. *A mohamedán írók a steppe népeiről* (The Muslim Writer's on the Peoples of the Steppe). Magyar Őstörténeti Könyvtár. Balassi, Budapest, 1997. P-207

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after the peoples of the Carpathian Basin joined the Magyars, it would appear this number could have doubled for an absolute maximum defensive force of 40,000, although even this number is unlikely.

Five thousand men sent on an expeditionary mission would be quite possible and is the most reasonable figure for Szalárd's army.

It was the death of the pro-Magyar Arnulf that started what would eventually be inaccurately termed "Magyar raids". According to the *Annales Bertiniani*<sup>24</sup> in the spring of 900, a Hungarian delegation visited Regensburg, to re-negotiate the treaty with Arnulf's son, Louis the Child (incidentally, the last Carolingian king of Germany). Louis was a minor at this time and the real leaders of Germany, or East Franconia, like the regent, Bishop Hatto of Mainz<sup>25</sup>, were against any alliance with the "pagan" Magyars, whom they despised.

However, what they did next was less than wise. They arrested the ambassadors on the trumped-up excuse that they were "spying". This, not surprisingly, led to war. This was the first step that led to the strategy that deployed the Magyar armies and which is misinterpreted as "barbarian raiding".

Until this time, the Magyars had scrupulously observed the Danube as the border and it is even possible that this was Grand Duke Árpád's original plan. After all, the river is very wide and therefore offers an excellent defensive line, the other side of which was used as such for almost five hundred years by the Romans.

As a result of the arrest of the ambassadors and violation of the treaty, many historians believe Grand Duke Árpád ordered up the army of Szalárd from Italy and invaded the region west of the Danube, adding it to the Grand Duchy of Hungary from the year 900.

This was followed by what could correctly be called "raids" by the Hungarians into Bavaria, but these were most likely not centrally-directed campaigns, as will be seen. These were also very small-scale efforts, probably local in origin.

The second step leading to the great Magyar campaigns was a "peace feast", in which King Louis invited the man he thought to be the Hungarian king, Kurszán /'ku:rsa:n/. Heinz Dopsch writes:

While Orientalist historians have reported a dual leadership of Hungary, as was common among steppe peoples, the Alemannic and Bavarian sources speak only of a sacred Grand Prince or king who is referred to as Kende or kündü or rex or dux. During the ongoing clashes, Bavaria invited the Hungarians to a banquet in 904 and there killed Kende Kurszán (Cussal) in a deceitful way<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Nagy, p-175

<sup>25</sup> Hatto I. (2012). In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/256949/Hatto-I>

<sup>26</sup> Heinz Dopsch STEPPENVÖLKER IM MITTELALTERLICHEN OSTEUROPA – HUNNEN, AWAREN, UNGARN UND MONGOLEN. Lecture at the University of Salzburg, 2003/4. [http://www.uni-salzburg.at/portal/page?\\_pageid=1285,685785&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://www.uni-salzburg.at/portal/page?_pageid=1285,685785&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

(The full document can be found at <http://www.uni-salzburg.at/pls/portal/docs/1/544328.PDF>) Translation by author.

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Is it any surprise that the Hungarians eventually targeted much of Europe? First, they find the Holy Roman Empire imprisons envoys – an unheard of behaviour. A few years later, they “deceitfully” assassinate one of the Hungarians’ two kings, or dukes. Should the Magyars have just adopted an attitude of “grin and bear it”? Which nation, or tribe, or civilisation, would have accepted two such massive insults and not attacked the West with all the resources at their disposal?

And yet, aside from some local activity, dealing with border squabbles, the Magyars did not initiate a major attack on the Holy Roman Empire! But who is always assumed to have been the aggressor? The Hungarians!

Studies should be undertaken to see how these deceitful actions affected the policies of the Magyar Duchy. Some longer range operations were undertaken even before the watershed year of 907, but these were quite small in comparison with the truly large campaigns that would eventually be sent against Western Europe in 937 and 954.

In brief: In 904, the Magyars allied themselves with their former opponent, Berengar I, an alliance that served him well in later years, when they became the mainstay of his power in northern Italy.<sup>27</sup> This served the Hungarians well too, because while armies were tied down in internal squabbles in Italy, they could not attack Hungary.

The Magyar Duchy also completed the destruction of the Moravian Kingdom, which by this time was on its last legs, sometime between 903 and 906. The Magyars also responded to a request by the still-independent Dalmanche people, a Slav group, which was in danger of being swallowed up by the Holy Roman Empire. In this case, in 906, there is a record which indicates two Magyar armies, who were operating against the Duchy of Saxony without co-ordination. This would soon change.

In fact, it was only in 907, when a vast army (by the standards of the time) made up mainly of Bavarians under the auspices of the Holy Roman Emperor, invaded Hungary with the aim of destroying the Magyar Duchy. It must have become clear to the Magyars that peaceful co-existence with Western Europeans and notably the Empire, was simply not possible. They, quite clearly, decided on a military response.

But what do we actually know about the Hungarian Duchy from 890 to 1000 AD? The truth is, very little. Beside the material given above, it appears the Hungarian Duchy or Grand Duchy or Principality, that is, the period between 895 to 1,000, when Grand Duke Vajk took the throne as King Stephen I (later Saint Stephen), is only of importance to the present article in answering the question of political organisation. Was there some form of political unity, or were the Hungarian tribes and clans in a state of disorganisation, wandering around the Carpathian Basin, herding horses and cows, and occasionally, on impulse, attacking their neighbours?

According to the consensus of Hungarian historians, there was a Duchy-wide organisation. Some believe that there were two main power systems, east and west, because western sources know nothing of Árpád. Either way, given the fact that all the military expeditions were carried out in alliance with Europeans and that the shifting alliances were obviously carefully followed, added to which the

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<sup>27</sup> Nagy K. Ibid, p-175

archaeological data shows both offensive capability and defensive earthworks it must be clear that these expeditions were military campaigns, part of a carefully thought out, planned strategy.

This strategy was a result of the three factors referred to above: The arrest of the Magyar envoys in 900; the murder of Duke Kurszán and the major invasion of 907. That it was indeed these factors, and notably the last, that made the Hungarians realise that peaceful coexistence with the Holy Roman Empire was impossible and the only way to survive in their new home was to keep their enemies weak by a divide and rule strategy. The idiom: "Attack is the best form of defence" best explains the so-called "Magyar Raids" which were in fact in-depth defensive actions.

That this was indeed the case is shown by the fact that not counting a minor and failed raid in 950, the Holy Roman Empire did not attack Hungary again until 1030. From 907 to 1030 is well over a century and the time won by the military campaigns gave the polity the opportunity to develop without becoming a vassal of either Germany or Byzantium.

