

Book and Other Reviews

Gyula Kristó. *Hungarian History in the Ninth Century*. Szeged: Szegedi Középkorász Műhely, 1996. 231 pages.

The book under review by one of Hungary's most noted medievalists is a history of the Magyar tribal federation in the ninth century, a period which ended with the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin (Historic Hungary). The manuscript was originally prepared for publication in the United States, but "for reasons other than professional" it never appeared in print until it was published in Hungary some five years later. The decision not to publish it in the United States is really unfortunate, because Professor Kristó's synthesis is a most worthy volume. It should be readily available in the English speaking world, and certainly more so than it is possible through the efforts of a small regional Hungarian publisher.

The book covers the century before the Árpádian Conquest of Hungary in fifteen chapters, whose topics stretch from the first appearance of the Hungarians in written sources to the above-mentioned conquest of the Carpathian Basin at the turn of the ninth to the tenth century. The chapters in between these two extremes treat such diverse topics as the ethnogenesis of the Hungarian people, the locations of the earlier Hungarian homelands, the relationship of the Hungarians to various Turkic peoples who have influenced the evolution of their language and culture, the origin and meaning of the various national names of the Magyars, their alleged relationship to the Huns of Attila's fame, their temporary homelands while on their way to the Carpathian Basin, the main historical sources of their nation building at the time of the Conquest, the role of Prince Levedi in this process of nation building, the nature and meaning of their heroic legends and archeological remains, their position and role within the Khazar Empire, their relationship to the Kangars and the Kabars, the role of Prince Álmos and his sacred kingship just before the Conquest, and finally the general condition of the Hungarian tribal federation at the time of the conquest of future Historic Hungary.

These chapters are complemented by two historical maps, a list of the most important primary sources, as well as by a detailed index of geographical

terms, ethnic designations, personal names, and the names of the authors of the main primary and secondary sources.

The book is an unusually well thought-out and well documented scholarly work that treats most of the questions, problems and debatable issues concerning the history of the early Magyars. At the same time, however, it is not an easy reading. The data contained in the individual chapters is so detailed and massive that unless one is already versed in the history of ninth-century Central and Eastern Europe, it is easy to get lost amidst the details. In consequence of this, Kristó's book is probably more useful to the historian than to the general reader. Even so, it is a book that should be available in all of the major academic and public libraries of North America, for it is the product of the scholarly effort of one of the most significant Hungarian medievalists in the twentieth-century Hungary. It would be a great service to the profession if an American publisher would find this book worthy of translation, publication and mass distribution in the English speaking world.

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János Makkay. *A magyarság kelezése* [The Dating of Hungarians]. Szolnok: Damjanich János Múzeum, 1994. 2nd, revised and enlarged edition. 231 pages.

This book's title could be translated into English more freely as "the chronology of Hungarian origins." In it, Makkay, an eminent archeologist, discusses Gyula László's hypothesis of the "double conquest" of the Carpathian Basin by the Hungarians, a theory which postulates that the ancestors of the Magyars appeared in the Middle Danube basin for the first time not in 896 — as it is traditionally held — but centuries earlier.

Makkay observes that the current received version of the Hungarians' origins maintains that between the 4th and 9th centuries a.d. the Bulgaro-Turkic (or Onogur) ruling class of the ancient Hungarian nomadic tribes began a process of acculturation to the masses of Finno-Ugric-speaking subjects they ruled. This supposedly happened on the southern Russian steppes. Through this process the Hungarian language is supposed to have been enriched by about 300 Bulgaro-Turkic (or early Chuvash) loan-words, most of them relating to animal husbandry. In 894 a.d., threatened by other invading Turkish peoples, the Magyars fled to the West and, under the leadership of Árpád, in 895-896 settled in the Carpathian Basin. Árpád and the other tribal chiefs of the Hungarians had Turkic names and contemporary Byzantine sources refer to them as *Turkoi* or Turks. This tends to confirm the theory that the rulers of the Magyars were of Turkic