

Sons of Nimrod
The Origin of Hungarians

BY
ANTHONY ENDREY

MELBOURNE
THE HAWTHORN PRESS

First Published 1975
© Anthony Endrey
ISBN 0 7256 0130 2

Endrey, Anthony, 1922—

Sons of Nimrod: the origin of Hungarians— by
Anthony Endrey. — Melbourne: The Hawthorn
Press, 1975.

ISBN 0 7256 0130 2.

1. Hungarians. I. Title.

572.894511

*Wholly set up and printed in Australia by
The Hawthorn Press Pty Ltd
601 Little Bourke Street Melbourne 3000*

TO MY WIFE JADWIGA

Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
Acknowledgments	ix
Foreword	xi
1 The National Tradition	1
2 Early Foreign Sources	13
3 Fish-Smelling Relations	27
4 A Race of Turks	44
5 The Hun Brothers	52
6 The Persian Connection	61
7 The Sumerians	68
8 Subartu and the Hurri People	83
9 A New Hungarian Prehistory	93
Notes	96

Alfred B. DeBorja

1977

University of California, Los Angeles

Illustrations

	FACING PAGE
Silver and gold satchel-cover from Bezdéd, Hungary. 9th century. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest	36
Silver ladies' ornament depicting mythical 'Turul' bird from Rakamaz, Hungary. 9th century. András Jóna Museum, Nyiregháza, Hungary	37
Silver and gold satchel-cover from Galgóc, Hungary. 9th century. Hungarian National Museum, Buda- pest	37
Silver and gold ornament for warrior's headwear from Beregszász, Hungary. 9th century. Hungarian Nat- ional Museum, Budapest	52
Ceremonial sword of Hungarian ruler (the so-called 'Sword of Charlemagne'). 9th century. Weltliche Schatzkammer, Vienna	52
Gold drinking vessel from Treasure of Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary. 10th century. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna	53
Gold fruit-plate from Treasure of Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary. 10th century. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna	53

Acknowledgments

First of all, my thanks go to Professor G. M. Denning of the Department of History, University of Melbourne, for encouraging me to undertake this project and Mr William Culican of the same Department for his supervision and many helpful suggestions. I am also indebted to Dr Alexander Gallus of the Hungarian Institute, Melbourne, for his guidance on various aspects of Hungarian prehistory and his readiness to discuss my ideas as my work progressed. I must also thank the ever-helpful staff of the Baillieu Library, particularly Miss Elizabeth Garran and Mr Patrick Singleton, who obtained much rare research material for me from Europe and America. I was also helped by various members of the Hungarian community in Australia who supplied me with valuable books and articles on the subject, which would not otherwise have come to my notice. My son, Anthony, assisted me with much Biblical learning and references. Last but not least, I thank my wife for her patience and moral support without which this book would not have been written. I have great pleasure in dedicating this book to her.

Foreword

There are few peoples the origin of which has been the subject of so many fanciful theories and so much idle speculation as the Hungarians. Perhaps because they have no known relatives, or not very close ones, at any rate, and are a strange race in the heart of Europe, the Magyars have at times excited hostile feelings among the surrounding nations and this hostility has often clouded the judgment of historians and ethnic theorists dealing with their origins and early history. Indeed, this proud and talented race had a 'hostile press' from the moment of its appearance on the fringes of the West, probably due to its military superiority, and the prejudices implanted in western minds by the contemporary news media lingered long in historical literature. It was thus with some glee that western writers of the Age of Enlightenment began to assign some extremely primitive and backward tribes to the ancestry of the Hungarians, in much the same way as their mediaeval predecessors made them descend from devils and ogres.

All this was diametrically opposed to the traditions of the Hungarians but they protested in vain against the strange relations foisted of them, for the 'objectivity' of western writers soon found support in Hungary itself and was firmly embraced by the Hungarian Academy.

It so happened then that Hungarians were officially declared to be a Finno-Ugrian people, related to the remotest and least-developed branch of that group, and their ancestors were identified as hunters and fishermen of a low degree of development, inhabiting the forest regions of Russia until they were conquered and civilised by a more advanced people of Turkic race.

The writer was brought up on this 'official' theory and duly believed it until well into middle age when he started to have doubts and resolved to investigate matters afresh. He approached the subject with an open mind and, being a lawyer by training, took pains in sifting facts from fiction. As he went along, an

Sons of Nimrod

entirely different vista opened up before his eyes and many isolated pieces of information, neglected before, began to fall into place. As a gigantic jigsaw puzzle, the origin of the Hungarians commenced to take shape. What the writer saw was very different from the 'official view', but entirely in accord with the national tradition of the Magyars.

There are very few *facts* in this book which have not been previously established by others. What the writer has done, was to put them in the proper context and to formulate his own conclusions. It is only in this way that originality is claimed for this work. It is also in this way only that the writer may have erred. The facts themselves which are called in support of the writer's propositions are clearly established and well-documented. All the writer did was to adopt a new approach.

If the conclusions drawn are, then, somewhat surprising, the writer fully accepts the blame. However, he does so unrepentantly. It was time to tear down false myths. It was time to speak what the writer believes is the truth.

And so, here it is.

ANTHONY ENDREY

Hungarian Institute
Melbourne

CHAPTER 1

The National Tradition

When the Hungarians conquered the Carpathian Basin in 896, they had their own system of writing and presumably also had written records.¹ Due to their conversion to Christianity towards the end of the tenth century, however, and the destruction of 'pagan writings', these records have been lost.

There is also evidence from the earliest times of a strong epic literature, transmitted orally by a class of bards known as *regös* who went around reciting the deeds of the ancestors and national heroes of the Hungarians.² This literature, too, was treated with suspicion and contempt under the early Christian era in Hungary³ and was not written down. Although many traces of it have survived in Hungarian folklore and, as we shall see presently, in mediaeval literature as well, we are not in possession of any actual texts.

In looking for the earliest Hungarian records relating to the origin and ancestral home of the Hungarians, therefore, we are confined to the Latin chronicles written after the conversion of the Magyars to Christianity. As may be expected, these display much biblical learning and a tendency to tailor facts and events — even legendary ones — so as to agree with a literal reading of the Bible and in particular, the Old Testament.

Fortunately for our line of inquiry, there was a highly popular literary form in the Middle Ages known as the *gesta* which concerned itself with the origins and early history of nations and ecclesiastical institutions. In national history, writers of *gestas* usually followed a strictly defined pattern: they commenced with a description of the ancestral home of the people concerned and then dealt with the origin and pagan era of the people.⁴ This was followed by an account of their conversion to Christianity and the history of the first Christian kings.

The writers of these *gestas* were usually chaplains of the royal

Sons of Nimrod

court, chancellors, bishops or monks belonging to the immediate entourage of the king.⁵ Besides reflecting the personal cults and traditions of the royal house they served, their writings were also influenced by political trends current in their time.

Comparative analyses of surviving mediaeval chronicles and other records, both Hungarian and foreign, have established that the first Hungarian *gesta*, entitled *Gesta Ungarorum*, was written about 1091 during the reign of Saint Ladislas (1077-1095).⁶ The text of this *gesta* has been lost, probably due to the Mongol invasion of Hungary in 1241, during which most monasteries and other centres of learning in the country were destroyed. Thanks to the painstaking researches of Hóman⁷, however, we can state with certainty that the first *Gesta Ungarorum* contained, at least in a rudimentary form, elements of the Nimrod-legend (as to which see below), a description of *Ungaria Maior*, the ancestral home of the Hungarians, and the notion of the identity of Huns and Magyars.

This *gesta* was followed by at least two early twelfth century chronicles, containing similar material, which have also been lost.⁸ *A türki'n translation of one found in Turkey.*

The first extant piece of Hungarian historical literature is the *Gesta Hungarorum* of the chronicler commonly known as Anonymus. He cannot be called by any better name because the title page of his work, which has come down in a single manuscript, is missing⁹ and only his initial P. is given on the next page. Although he identifies himself in his preface as 'the erstwhile notary of the most glorious King Béla of Hungary of blessed memory', even this presents some difficulty as Hungary had four kings by that name. Most historians agree, however, that the reference is to Béla III (1172-1196)¹⁰ and that accordingly — the king being already of 'blessed memory' — Anonymus wrote around 1200.

Anonymus, being a former pupil of the University of Paris,¹¹ professes to write in a scientific manner, scorning 'the lying tales of peasants and the garrulous songs of players'. In his introduction, he declares that he will set out for the benefit of his whole nation the genealogy of the kings of Hungary and their nobles and how they descended from Scythia and how many kingdoms

The National Tradition

they conquered, and asserts that he will do so truly and simply, in the best traditions of literate Hungarians of whom the country is justly proud.

Anonymus therefore writes with a strong intellectual bias, if not outright snobbery, and is obviously determined to ignore the oral traditions current among his people in his time. He thus deprives himself of very valuable source material from the outset and for this reason, we cannot look to him for a full statement of the national tradition concerning the origin of the Hungarians.

After stating his intellectual posture, Anonymus gives a description of Scythia, called *Dentumoger* in the language of its inhabitants, which from his data we can roughly identify with the eastern Ukraine.* He then deals with the Scythians and relates that that nation obtained the name Magyar after its first king Magog, son of Japhet.* It was from the progeny of King Magog that the powerful King Attila was born and after much time, Ügyek, 'a most noble prince of Scythia', father of Almos 'from whom descend all the kings and princes of Hungary'.

Because Scythia had become too small for the great multitude of its people, seven chieftains called *Hetumoger* (seven Magyars) held council and decided to settle in Pannonia (the mediaeval name for Hungary), which they heard to be the country of King Attila, ancestor of Prince Almos.¹² They then elected Almos their leader and set out from Scythia to the west with a large number of the people. On reaching present-day Hungary, Almos relinquished his leadership and his son Arpád was elected in his place.

Anonymus then gives a detailed account of the Hungarian Conquest under the leadership of Arpád which is the main topic of his work. In the course of his story, he repeats a number of times that Almos and Arpád were descendants of Attila, and at one stage he takes Arpád and his leading men to the ruins of Attila's city on the banks of the Danube.¹³

It is clear from the foregoing that Anonymus not only regards Hungarians as Scythians but he also regards all Scythians as Hungarians. Furthermore, he also treats Attila the Hun as a Scythian-Hungarian. Indeed, the word 'Hun' does not occur once in his *Gesta*. His regard for Attila is so high that he persistently

Sons of Nimrod

calls him king (rex) — and ‘a king of great fame and immense power’ at that — whereas he only accords Almos and Arpád the title of prince (dux).

Since the king whom Anonymus had served belonged to the House of Arpád, the first Hungarian dynasty which ruled from 896 till 1301, the emphasis placed on the connection with Attila must have been due to the personal traditions of the royal house and it is now generally accepted that the descent of that house from Attila is factual.¹⁴

Furthermore, the way Anonymus treats Attila and the Scythians in general, makes it clear that in his time, Hungarians already regarded themselves and the Huns as belonging to one nation, and that this belief was fundamental to their national *ethos*. Their identity with the Huns was also the rationale and justification of their conquest of Hungary which they regarded as ‘King Attila’s country’. In other words, they considered that the country belonged rightfully to them.

On the other hand, the reference to Magog and his father Japhet is pure fabrication, due to the ‘scientific’ approach adopted by Anonymus and his western learning. Magog and Japhet were in mediaeval times ascribed to the ancestry of all sorts of nations causing trouble in the west, ranging from Huns to Goths,¹⁵ but they were mostly associated with Scythia.¹⁶ This was clearly known to Anonymus and as he also knew that his people originated from that region, he felt duty bound to make them descend from Japhet and Magog.

As already mentioned, Anonymus states that Scythia is called Dentumoger in the language of its inhabitants.¹⁷ In a subsequent passage, however, he appears to suggest that Dentumoger is the name of the Scythian nation itself.¹⁸ At one time, it was considered that this name meant ‘Don-mouth Hungary’¹⁹ but it appears more likely that its meaning is ‘seven Magyars’ in the language of the surrounding Turkic peoples²⁰ — that is, the same as Hetumoger in contemporary Hungarian — denoting the seven Hungarian tribes which then lived north-east of the Black Sea and later settled in the Carpathian Basin.

Anonymus’ zeal in ignoring legends is quite remarkable. He wholly omits the Nimrod-legend, as well as several legends

The National Tradition

associated with the Hungarian Conquest which are featured in later chronicles and which must have been very popular in his time. This was clearly due, as he takes care to point out himself, to his contempt for the oral tradition handed down by the common people and the bards,²¹ but it hardly endeared him to his contemporaries. It is not surprising then that his work exercised no influence whatever on subsequent Hungarian historical literature²² and was wholly ignored by the Magyars who apparently did not fancy his flagrant disregard for their most sacred national traditions.

The omissions of Anonymus were remedied with a vengeance by Simon Kézai, court chaplain of Ladislas IV (1272-1290). Kézai whose *Gesta Hungarorum*, written around 1282,²³ was the next major Hungarian historical work following Anonymus, was probably encouraged in expounding the most ancient Hungarian legends — which, after all, were of pagan origin — by the fact that his king, also called Ladislas the Cuman after his mother, had a strong oriental and indeed, pagan background.²⁴ The atmosphere in the royal court was therefore favourable to an open and even defiant declaration of the oriental origin of the Magyars and the restraints which Anonymus, as a former pupil of the University of Paris, may have felt were no longer present.

After indignantly rejecting allegations of Orosius²⁵ that Hungarians descended from illicit intercourse between devils and Scythian women of loose morals — allegations actually made concerning the Huns and not Hungarians proper — Kézai declares that he is going to set out the true origin and deeds of the Hungarians. What follows then is obviously said with great conviction and must be regarded as a summary of the most ancient traditions of the Hungarians as known in Kézai's time.

Kézai relates that two hundred and one years after the Flood, the giant Menroth, son of Thana of the blood of Japhet, began with the assistance of all his kinsmen to build the tower of Babel. After the confusion of tongues, he moved to the land of Evilath, which is a province of Persia, and there his wife Eneh bore him twin first-born sons, Humor and Magor. He had many other wives and their descendants form the Persians. These resemble the Hungarians very much and their language differs from Hun-

see
the
ancient
names
of Zodi.

Aires — Kush (Biblical name of Nimrod's father — actually

Sons of Nimrod

garian in no greater degree than the Thuringian from the Saxon.

When Hunor and Magor came of age, continues Kézai, they moved into a separate tent from their father. One day when they were out hunting, a female deer appeared before them and they gave chase. She led them into the Meotid marshes and then disappeared. After searching for her all over the area and not finding her, they found the country to their liking and as it was suitable for animal husbandry, they sought permission from their father to settle there. Having lived among the Meotid marshes for five years, they went on a rampage with their men and out in the plains they came onto the wives and children of the sons of Belar who happened to be away. They seized them with all their possessions and took them back to Meotis. By chance, two daughters of the Alan king, Dula, were among the children and these were married by Hunor and Magor. All the Huns descended from these captured women. In time, they grew into a mighty nation so that the region could no longer contain them.

Then follows a detailed account of the exodus from Scythia, western conquests and exploits of the Huns, followed by the history of the Magyars. In his story of the Huns – which is now generally known as the Hun Chronicle – Kézai repeatedly refers to them as Hungarians and when he comes to the Hungarian Conquest, he treats it as the return of the same people.

Kézai's *Gesta* proved an immense success. Its contents were adopted by over twenty mediaeval and Renaissance chronicles in Hungary,²⁶ beginning with the Buda Chronicle (c. 1333)²⁷ and the Illustrated Chronicle (1358),²⁸ and right up to the present day Hungarian literature is full of allusions to the Hun connection so clearly declared by him.

Notwithstanding this wholehearted acceptance of Kézai's story by the Magyars, many modern historians have questioned its authenticity and some have gone to the extent of declaring that the whole Hun Chronicle is a thirteenth-century fabrication.²⁹ The most determined among these is Macartney who in an effort to explain away over twenty early Hungarian sources, the virtually unanimous opinion of western chronicles (see Chapter 2) and the oral traditions of the Hungarian people, still current today, asserts that the Hungarians originally knew nothing of

The National Tradition

Attila and his Huns but on hearing themselves being identified with the Huns by the surrounding Germans, Italians and Slavs, they eventually adopted 'this interesting, if spurious pedigree'.³⁰

This hypothesis, which is entirely unsupported by factual evidence, is quite contrary to common sense and fundamental human behaviour. True, the surrounding nations identified the Hungarians with the Huns almost from the moment of their appearance in the West. It is also true, however, that they did so in the most abusive terms of vilification.³¹ 'Attila' and 'Hun' were dirty words in mediaeval Europe and if they had been wrongly applied to Hungarians, the natural reaction on the part of the latter — especially after their conversion to Christianity which put them at odds with their pagan past anyway — would have been to protest loudly against such unjust accusations. Nothing of the sort happened: on the contrary, the kinship with Attila and the Huns was proudly proclaimed.

It is unnecessary, however, for us to rely too strongly on an argument based on human behaviour in the face of calumny, for an analysis of the Menroth-legend clearly shows that far from being an inventor of absurdities, Kézai in fact committed to writing very ancient national traditions which the Hungarians had brought with them from the East and which contained many factual elements.

To begin with Menroth himself, all of Kézai's successors, as well as modern historians, identify him with the biblical Nimrod. Judging from the elements of Kézai's story, it is possible, and indeed probable, that he, too, entertained this notion. Nevertheless, he chose to call his man Menroth. Since Kézai, being a cleric, must have known the correct spelling of Nimrod's name, his use of a different — one might say, distorted — version indicates that he was relying on oral tradition which was independent of the Bible.³² *The ancient Ugrian ancestor-god was menq*

Furthermore, he emphasises, unwittingly perhaps, the want of association between his story and the Bible by making his Menroth descend from Japhet. That he obviously does so to comply with the teaching of the early Fathers of the Church, according to whom the Huns were descendants of Japhet, is besides the point. What matters is that the biblical Nimrod was a descendant

Sons of Nimrod

of Cham, as Kézai clearly would have known, yet he, when faced with an obvious difficulty, opts in favour of the Hun connection and Japhet. Indeed, Márk Kálti, the writer of the *Illustrated Chronicle* (1358), takes up this point and argues that Hunor and Magor could not possibly have been sons of Nimrod, as this is contrary to the Bible. He therefore declares that they were sons of Magog, thus reverting to the 'scientific' mediaeval view. Notwithstanding Kálti's argument, all subsequent Hungarian chronicles show Nimrod as the father of Hunor and Magor.

This persistent identification of Kézai's Menroth with Nimrod might be explained by the suggestion that Nimrod first got into Hungarian folklore from the Bible and that although his name became distorted in the 'lying tales of peasants', nevertheless the association between him and the Bible remained known among educated Hungarians. However, this is extremely unlikely. Biblical references to Nimrod are very scant and they would hardly have been known to ordinary Hungarians. As to Hungarians learned in the Bible, they would have been aware of the teaching of the Church Fathers regarding the descent of the Huns from Japhet, so that if the matter of selecting a biblical ancestor for their people would have been left to them, they would clearly have picked a 'correct' one from Japhet's progeny. Consequently, there is no reason why either group should have adopted the Chamite Nimrod from the Bible. *The Armenian Chronicles* state this

We are therefore forced to the conclusion that there was a truly original Hungarian tradition concerning Menroth whom the mediaeval Hungarians, seeing the similarities between him and the biblical Nimrod, identified with the latter. This was all the easier as many contemporary Christian sources spelt Nimrod's name 'Nemroth'. It may be useful now for us to investigate whether there were not some more than superficial grounds for this identification.

The Bible contains only three references to Nimrod which are very brief:

Cush became the father of Nimrod who was the first potentate on earth. He was a mighty hunter before the

The National Tradition

Lord, hence the saying, 'Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord'. First to be included in his empire were Babel, Erech and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar. From this country came Ashur, the builder of Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; this is the great city. (The last sentence is also read by some: 'Out of that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh and Rehoboth-ir and Calah. . . .') (Gen. 10, 8-12.)

Cush became the father of Nimrod, the first potentate on earth. (I Chron. i, 10.)

As for Assyria, should it invade our country,
should it set foot on our soil,
we will raise seven shepherds against it,
eight leaders of men,
they will shepherd Assyria with the sword,
and the land of Nimrod with the sword blade.
(Mic. 5, 4-6.)

It is clear from these references that by the time the Genesis was written (about 950 B.C.),³³ Nimrod had already become a remote and legendary figure for the Jews.³⁴ It is also noteworthy that the cities with the foundation of which he or his successors were credited were those the ancient Israelites detested most.³⁵ Indeed, the very fact that he is listed as a descendant of Cham probably indicates that the Hebrews regarded him as their traditional enemy³⁶ and not that he was ethnically a Hamite or that his skin was black. By the time of Micah (about 730 B.C.), his identification with the Assyrian oppressors of the Jews was complete. *The real Hamites were Asian not African.*

The Bible knows nothing of Nimrod being the builder of the Tower of Babel, although the location of this edifice is put on 'a plain in the land of Shinar' (Gen. 11, 2) which is earlier mentioned as the site of Nimrod's original empire. We may also note here that the structure is described in terms indicating a Sumerian *zigurrat* ('for stone they used bricks and for mortar they used bitumen', Gen. 11, 3).

Sons of Nimrod

On the other hand, Moslem historians clearly ascribe to Nimrod the building of a great tower which he erected so that he might ascend it and see Abraham's God.³⁷ In Moslem mythology, Nimrod is regarded as Abraham's traditional enemy and a builder of great structures.³⁸ His name has also been preserved by other peoples in the Near East.

It is also significant that one of the cities the founding of which the Bible attributes to Nimrod or his progeny, Calah, now bears his name and that ancient Borsippa, sister city of Babylon, which local and Jewish tradition associated with the Tower of Babel,⁴⁰ is now called Birs Nimrud. According to Moslem historians, the citadel of this city was also built by Nimrod.⁴¹

Again, part of the old citadel of Edessa (modern Urfa) in north-western Mesopotamia is locally known as 'the throne of Nimrod'. Nimrod's connections with Edessa are particularly close. A mountain in the vicinity of the city is called Nimrud Dagħ (Mount Nimrod). According to early Christian legends in the East, dating back to the fourth century, Edessa itself was built by Nimrod after he had migrated there from Babylonia after the Flood and he ruled in the city.⁴²

Nimrod is therefore well-attested throughout the Near East as a mighty ruler, the builder of the Tower of Babel and the traditional enemy of Semites. It is, however, extremely unlikely that these matters were known to Kézai. Mediaeval Hungarians had little contact with Arabs or the Near East, save for a solitary Hungarian crusade in 1217 which only lasted four months. Even assuming that some of the Magyar crusaders were able to converse with the natives, it is highly improbable that they discussed Moslem mythology with them, or even if they did, that they picked up pieces of the Nimrod-legend in such discussions, unless Nimrod was an important figure to them by reason of their own traditions. The same answer may be made to any suggestion that the extra-biblical elements of the Nimrod-legend were brought to Hungary by Mohammedan traders. Such casual contacts could scarcely have resulted in widespread acceptance of a supposedly new myth concerning the origin of an entire nation.

It is therefore reasonable to suppose that Nimrod was adopted

The National Tradition

by the Hungarians as their mythical ancestor — if indeed, it was a matter of adoption and not of direct descent from a Mesopotamian people subsequently symbolised as Nimrod — at a time when Hungarians were living in the Near East in the immediate neighbourhood of Semitic peoples, in close contact with them and most likely engaged in repeated warfare against them.

Turning now to Nimrod's father, Thana, it is possible that his name is derived from *tanhu*, the title of the Hun emperors according to Chinese sources — compare the Japanese *tenno* (emperor) — or from the Turkic root *tan* or *ten* (Tanri, Tengri = God). In either case, the name indicates divine descent.

As regards Nimrod's wife, Eneh, there is a recent theory that her name is of Sumerian origin, meaning 'high priestess'.⁴³ The older view is that the name means 'female deer' and has a totemistic connotation.⁴⁴ Since the Hungarian word for female deer, *ünö*, is very old and must have been the same in Kézai's time, the very use of the form 'Eneh' indicates — assuming the latter view to be correct — that the Nimrod-legend is of considerable antiquity and goes back far into the pre-conquest period of Hungarian history. *Eneh is also mentioned in old Assyrian*

The location of Evilath is somewhat of a mystery⁴⁵ but the name appears to be a distorted version of the name of the northern Mesopotamian city Eluhath which appears in Assyrian sources in the thirteenth century B.C. and which modern research has identified with Edessa (Urfa).⁴⁶ (This view is strengthened by the fact that some later Hungarian Chronicles spell Evilath as 'Eiulath' which is even closer to Eluhath.) In Kézai's time Edessa was already known by that name and by the local Arabic name Orhay or Urhay, so that his use of the name Evilath may be another indication of the independent origin and antiquity of the Hungarian Nimrod-legend.

The story of the hunter-brothers is, of course, a genuine piece of Ural-Altaic folklore.⁴⁷ The brothers are invariably the eponymous ancestors of two closely related peoples which have merged into one.⁴⁷ Magor clearly stands for Magyar and is probably a yet earlier form of *moger*. As to Hunor, although some writers have suggested that this name is simply a distorted form of the Turkic name of the Magyars, *onugor*, so that the two

*Etano
was +
found
of Ar.
Sumer
em pi
2 cit
of Eri*

*Evila
is in
butte
is al
a city
Messo*

Sons of Nimrod

brothers really represent the same people under two different names,⁴⁸ this does not make sense and is contrary to the scheme of similar legends found among other peoples related to the Hungarians. It is significant that on the drinking horn of Chernigov, which is a tenth century work attributed to Hungarian silversmiths, depicting a magic hunt by two hunters, each hunter has distinct characteristics — one being a long-haired, bearded 'Ugrian', the other a shaven-headed 'Turk' — suggesting different ethnic origins.⁴⁹ It is therefore more likely that Hunor in fact represents the Huns and that this part of the legend has preserved the memory of a merger between Huns and Hungarians.

The references to Belar and Dula are now generally accepted as indicating close connections and intermarriage between Hungarians and Bulgars and Alans respectively during the pre-conquest period.⁵⁰

Even the Persians who speak Hungarian can be explained. It is a well-established fact that a branch of the Hungarian people lived south of the Caucasus between the eighth and twelfth centuries (if not earlier), wedged between Armenia and Persia.⁵¹ As late as the middle of the tenth century, the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin maintained close contact with these Hungarians in the Near East.⁵² Since the latter were smaller in number, they were presumably under Persian hegemony, if not direct Persian rule, and by the time when contact with them ceased, the Hungarians in present-day Hungary may well have regarded them as Persians.

Kézai's story, therefore, far from being a thirteenth century concoction, is a veritable guidepost of Hungarian prehistory, bearing many markings pointing in various directions. Let us see now whether those markings are supported by the writings and traditions of other peoples which were in contact with the Hungarians before or shortly after their arrival in their present homeland.

It is now fairly well proven that the Magyars were too few in numbers to have brought in the Hungarian language. Rather they were only an eastern branch, with a similar language.

CHAPTER 2

Early Foreign Sources

The first source which deals at some length with the movements of the ancient Hungarians is the Poveshti Yearbook,¹ written in Kiev about 1116 but based on much earlier records. The importance of this Yearbook lies in the fact that the Kievans had first-hand knowledge of the Magyars and were able to observe their movements prior to their settlement in their present homeland.

The Poveshti Yearbook begins with the division of the earth between Noah's sons after the Flood and states that Afet (Japhet) received the southern and western parts, down to the mountains of the Caucasus which are called 'the mountains of the Ugors'. In the following narrative which precedes the actual annals and therefore must have been based on oral tradition antedating written records, there are various references to the exploits of White and Black Ugors on the South Russian steppe. In the nomenclature of the peoples of that region, the designations 'white' and 'black' signified two branches of the same people² and as we shall see presently, the writer of Poveshti clearly meant one people and one people only by the name Ugor. The first chronological reference to the Ugors is in 898 when the chronicler states that, having arrived from the east, they camped in the vicinity of Kiev and then crossed the great mountains which thereafter were called 'the mountains of the Ugors'. This is followed by a description of the wars of the Ugors with the Slovenes, Vlachs, Greeks and Moravians and it is clear from the context, confirmed by the slightly incorrect dating (the correct date is generally accepted as 896), that the reference is to the Magyar conquerors and that 'the mountains of the Ugors' in this instance signify the Carpathians.

During the following two centuries, Poveshti makes repeated references to the Hungarians, always calling them Ugors (*Ugor*,

Sons of Nimrod

pl. *Ugri*), and it is interesting to note that St Stephen, first king of Hungary (997-1038), is referred to as 'Stephen the Ugrian'.

Poveshti ends in 1110 and is immediately followed by the Kiev Yearbook (1111-1199), which again refers to the Hungarians several times and invariably calls them *Ougri*. The slightly different spelling is probably due to Byzantine influence and is of no significance.

In subsequent Ukrainian and Russian Yearbooks, the Hungarians are consistently called *Ugri*, *Ugori* and *Ougri*³ right up to 1292, when the name *Vengerski* makes its first appearance in the Ipatius manuscript of the Halych-Volodymir Yearbook. This new name was clearly due to Polish influences and can be disregarded for our purposes.

The early Ukrainian and Russian chronicles therefore firmly reserve the name *Ugor*, *Ugri* for the Hungarians from the earliest times until their settlement in the Carpathian Basin and thereafter for several centuries during their Christian era, as a specific name not applied to any other people. Apart from the significance of the name itself (the origin of which will be discussed in Chapter 8) and the fact that White and Black Ugors clearly signify northern and southern Hungarians, the most important piece of information recorded by these chroniclers is that before the advent of the Hungarians under Kiev, the mountains of the Caucasus were known as 'the mountains of the Ugors'.

Since this name was later applied to the Carpathians of which the Hungarians lived — as viewed from Kiev — on the far side, we must assume that at the time the mountains of the Caucasus acquired the epithet *Ugor*, the Hungarians also lived on their far side, i.e., south of the Caucasus in Transcaucasia.⁴ Indeed, the Kievans would hardly have called the mountains of the Caucasus by that name unless they had to be crossed in order to reach the original home of the Hungarians.

This, of course, is very much in agreement with Kézai, who makes the ancestors of the Hungarians come out from the region of Persia.

Turning now to Byzantine writings, a fruitful source of information concerning peoples inhabiting the South Russian steppes and the Caucasian regions, we find the first references

Early Foreign Sources

which can be positively identified with the Magyars in 836-38 when they are reported as allies of the Danube Bulgars against the Byzantine fleet on the Lower Danube.⁵ At that stage, they are mentioned under three different names: Huns (*unnoi*), Turks (*turkoi*) and Ugors (*uggroi*). The first two were generic names also applied by the Byzantines to other steppe peoples related to the Hungarians but the last one, Ugor, was, at least in the ninth century, a specific name reserved solely for the Magyars and it remained the name by which they were known in later Byzantine and even modern Greek usage.⁶

The fact that at the time of their emergence with a clear national identity, the Hungarians are called by the same specific name in both Ukrainian and Byzantine writings cannot be mere coincidence.

The Byzantine writers who record the Hungarians around 836 – Leo Grammaticus and Georgius Monachus – do not state where they were living at that time or where they had originated from. Several references to Ugors, however, can be found in earlier Byzantine sources. The first of these is Priscus Phetor who reports that in 463, the Saragurs, Urogs and Onogurs, having been ejected from their ancestral homes by the Sabirs, were looking for a new country, and sent legates to the Byzantine Emperor, seeking his alliance.⁷ At that stage, the Saragurs had already attacked the Akatsir Huns in their search for a new homeland and defeated them in numerous battles.⁸ These references to Sabirs and Akatsirs enable us to fix the location of the Saragurs, Urogs and Onogurs at the time of their appearance as the area north of the Caucasus and east of the Black Sea. The proposed alliance with Byzantium also suggests that the three peoples in question were at that time being pushed towards the Greek settlements on the eastern shores of the Black Sea.

The fact that Saragurs, Urogs and Onogurs make their appearance together and send a joint legation to Byzantium, indicates close connection between them and this is confirmed by an analysis of their names. Saragur can be analysed as a composite of the Turkic *sar* (white) and Ogur or Ugor, corresponding to the White Ugors of the Poveshti Yearbook. Urog is either a misspelling of Ugor⁹ or a more ancient version of that name.¹⁰

Sons of Nimrod

Onogur is again a composite of the Turkic *on* (ten) and *Ogur* or *Ugor*, indicating a federation of ten tribes under *Ugor* leadership.¹¹ — ~~this~~ This is an old disproven etymology for Ugor.

The independent appearance of a people called *Ugor*, accompanied by two other peoples bearing that name in a composite form, strongly suggests that the *Ugors* were an ancient race of distinction who gave their name to other peoples associated with them.¹²

Priscus does not state where these three peoples had been dislodged from but from the well-attested settlement of the *Sabirs* in the northern Caucasus at about the same time,¹³ it appears that the *Ugors*, *Onogurs* and *Saragurs* previously lived in that region. Indeed, they must have lived on the southern side of the Caucasus at an earlier stage, for *Agathias* reports that in 554 the *Persians* occupied a fortress called *Onogur* in *Colchis*, which was then of considerable antiquity. *Agathias* relates that this locality derived its name from 'the *Huns* called *Onogur*' who attacked this place in ancient times but were defeated by the *Colchians*, who thereafter called the fortress *Onogur* in memory of the aggressors.¹⁴ This is, of course, a 'Greek explanation' which is entirely unlikely and the probability is that the *Onogur* people lived in that part of *Colchis* for an extended period some centuries previously, and that the memory of their earlier settlement there was preserved by the fortress in question.

Half a century after *Priscus*, in 520, we hear of a king of the 'Huns' living in the vicinity of the *Cimmerian Bosphorus* (the Straits of *Kerch*) whose name was *Gord* — formed possibly from *Ugor* with the addition of the old Hungarian diminutive suffix — *d*. *Gord* embraced Christianity and became an ally of the *Byzantine Emperor* but was killed by his people, who elected his brother *Muager* in his place.¹⁵ Having regard to the eastern custom of naming rulers after the people subject to them, the names of the two brothers suggest very close connection, if not complete identity, between *Ugors* and *Magyars*.

Ugors, *Onogurs* and *Saragurs* are again mentioned as separate but related peoples by *Zacharias Rhetor* in his *Chronicle* written in *Syriac*, the relevant part of which dates from about 561.¹⁶ A few years later, in 569, a *Byzantine* envoy named *Zemarchos* is

Early Foreign Sources

reported crossing the territory of the Ugors between the Lower Volga and the Kuban rivers. These were friendly to him and his entourage and warned them of a Persian army lurking in the dense forests around the Kuban.¹⁷ At about the same time, Theophylactes Simocatta refers to a people named Ogor which is 'most powerful in numbers and in military experience' and lives near the river Til which the Turks call 'black'.¹⁸ (The 'black Til' is clearly the southern or lower Volga.) He also describes how two other peoples originated from this people and called themselves Avars on settling in the west.

The name Ugor appears again in a letter written by Joseph, king of the Khazars, early in the tenth century where he lists Ugor as the eldest of the ten 'sons' of Togarma, a descendant of Japhet, giving him precedence over Huns, Avars and his own Khazars.¹⁹

To complete the picture, it is interesting to note that when the Magyars first emerge in the west by attacking the eastern Frankish Empire in 862, Hinkmar of Rheims refers to them as 'unknown enemies called Ugri'.²⁰ The *Annales Sangallenses Maiores* continuously refer to the Hungarians as 'Agarens' from 888 to 955,²¹ and although this name is clearly misconceived, signifying Saracen or Arab in the nomenclature of that era, it again brings to mind the name Ugor. The Bavarian historian Aventinus, writing in the Renaissance period, still calls the Hungarians 'Ugri' who in their own language are 'Magyars'.²²

We therefore find a continuous record of the Ugors from the Caucasian region through the South Russian steppes to present-day Hungary, at the end of which journey they are in the most specific terms identified with the Magyars by Byzantine, Slav and German writers. Since all the sources reviewed by us refer to Ugors as a particular people and not as a group of peoples or steppe-dwellers in general, we are justified in assuming that at all stages of their appearance in history, the Ugors represent the Magyars and no other nation.

Nothing further is heard of the Saragurs after the sixth century but Arab sources based on ninth century records refer to a substantial branch of Magyars settled between the middle Volga and the southern slopes of the Urals, in the vicinity of present-

day Bashkiria.²³ These Magyars were separated from the main body of Hungarians and probably moved to the location referred to in the seventh century when a branch of the Bulgars left the Caucasian region and migrated north-eastward to found Magna Bulgaria on the Volga.²⁴ It is reasonable to suppose that these Magyars formed the northern branch of Hungarians – the White Ugors or Saragurs – even before their final separation, and since their migration so far from the Caucasus put them outside the Byzantine sphere of interest, it is understandable that they do not thereafter appear in Byzantine records. They preserved their ethnic identity, however, for several centuries and still spoke 'pure Hungarian' when the monk Julian found them in 1237.

References to the Onogurs also peter out towards the end of the seventh century. They are last mentioned as an existing people in 671 when Theophanes refers to them as living north of the Black Sea in the region of the Don and the Cimmerian Bosphorus, in company with the Bulgars and the Kotragurs.²⁵ Nearly three centuries later, Constantinus Porphyrogenetus states that the Danube Bulgars were once called Onogurs.²⁶ Although the Onogurs and the Bulgars were listed as separate peoples as early as the sixth century,²⁷ it appears from Arab and Persian writings based on an early tenth century Arab source that the name Onogundur or a corrupted form of it, Vanandur or Vunundur, ultimately fastened onto the Danube Bulgars and was regarded as their proper name.²⁸ This is confirmed by the mediaeval Hungarian name of the Danube Bulgars, *Nándor*.²⁹ All this suggests that the Onogurs were closely related to the Bulgars and excludes any possibility that the Hungarians descended from them as some historians maintain.

The Turkic etymology of the names of the Onogurs and Saragurs and the fact that the name Ugor forms part of both of these names, however, strongly argue in favour of an extended association between Hungarians and certain Turkic peoples of whom the Onogurs must have been one. In view of the close relationship between and possible identity of Onogurs and Bulgars, it is probably this association with the Onogurs which forms the factual basis of the rape of the daughters of Belar in the Nimrod-legend.³⁰

Early Foreign Sources

Even apart from this Onogur connection, the Hungarians must have lived in a Turkic milieu for several centuries, intermarrying with and assuming many of the characteristics of Turkic peoples and resulting in their being referred to as 'Turks' and 'Huns' in various Byzantine and Arab writings. This Turkic association is confirmed by the company in which the Hungarians make their appearance from time to time between the fifth and ninth centuries A.D. and as we shall see later, also their predominantly Turkish ethnic character and culture at the time of their settlement in the Carpathian Basin.

This Turkic association finds further support in the chapters relating to the Magyars in Constantinus Porphyrogenetus' *De administrando imperio*, a most important source written around 949.³¹ Since Constantinus, a Byzantine Emperor, also throws some light on the earlier homes and origin of the Hungarians, we shall deal with this writing of his in some detail. Constantinus relates that the Magyars whom he calls Turks (*turkoi*), originally lived in a place called Lebedia where they were known as *Sabartoi asphaloi*. After being defeated by the Petchenegs (a Turkic people), they split into two parts. One part went eastward and settled in the region of Persia where 'they to this day are called' by the ancient denomination of the Turks 'Sabartoi asphaloi'. The other part went west and settled in places called *Atelkuzu* (Hungarian *Etelköz*, 'between the rivers', 'Mesopotamia'). After another defeat by the Petchenegs, this western branch settled in present-day Hungary.³²

Constantinus does not give any dates for these events but we know from the Frankish writer Regino that the Hungarians were living at the mouth of the Don in 889 when they were expelled from there by the Petchenegs. It is accepted by most modern historians that this was the time and place of the first defeat of the Hungarians by the Petchenegs referred to by Constantinus.³³ It would follow from this that Lebedia was near the mouth of the Don, but its precise location is still subject to argument. It may have been identical with the Dentumoger of Anonymus but it also could have been an intermediate home between the latter and *Atelkuzu*. The name itself is definitely not of Hungarian origin and of the various etymologies which have been given for

Sons of Nimrod

it, the most likely seems to be that it comes from the Russian *lebed* (swan), meaning swan-country. This would accord with Kézai's report that after leaving Persia, Hunor and Magor lived among the Meotid marshes. ^{no!} *Lebed* = "military governor" of Kazaria.

Atelkuzu is better defined by Constantinus, being the region or regions between the Bug, Sereth and Pruth rivers. Judging from the date given by Regino for the eviction of the Magyars from the Don (889) and the date of their settlement in the Carpathian Basin (896), the time spent by them in Atelkuzu must have been comparatively short.

The meaning of *Sabartoi asphaloi* is again hotly contested but most historians agree that whatever the origin of this expression, it refers — insofar as it relates to the Magyars settling in the region of Persia — to the branch of Hungarians reported in Armenian and Arab sources from the eighth century onwards as living near the river Kur in Transcaucasia.³⁴ The Armenians called this people *Sevordik* and this appears to correspond with *Sabartoi*, whilst *asphaloi* is simply a Greek adjective meaning 'mighty' or 'glorious'. It cannot be correct, of course, that these Hungarians migrated to Transcaucasia after the defeat inflicted on their people in Lebedia by the Petchenegs, since they appear in Armenian and Arab sources as living south of the Caucasus nearly a hundred and fifty years earlier. We must assume, therefore, that the story of the split is either a speculative explanation by Constantinus for the presence of the same people in two places so distant from one another, or it refers to a comparatively small number of Magyars seeking refuge with their kinsmen in Transcaucasia after the defeat of their main body by the Petchenegs.

A number of matters of importance must be noted in connection with these eastern Hungarians. Firstly, the Magyars in present-day Hungary still sent envoys to them 'in the parts of Persia' at the time when Constantinus wrote and exchanged messages with them.³⁵ There is no record of similar contacts between the western Hungarians and the other branch of Hungarians in the east near Bashkiria to whom we have already referred. Indeed, when the monk Julian found them in 1237, he did so virtually by accident.³⁶ We must assume, therefore, that the

Early Foreign Sources

western Hungarians and the Hungarians in Transcaucasia both belonged to the southern branch of the Magyars and remained in close contact over a long period, whilst the Magyars near Bashkiria represented a northern branch which separated from the other two at a much earlier date.

The second matter is that according to Constantinus, the Magyars in Lebedia consisted of seven tribes and he gives their names with what appears to be reasonable accuracy.³⁷ Now, we know from Anonymus that all seven tribes — the Hetumoger — migrated to the west. Consequently, no substantial part of the Lebedian Hungarians could have remained behind and the Transcaucasian Hungarians could not have originated from them. Nevertheless, Constantinus asserts that both the Lebedian and the Transcaucasian Hungarians were called *Sabartoi asphaloi*. This identity of designation again confirms that these two branches of Hungarians must have formed a closely united people over an extended period.

Thirdly, the Transcaucasian Hungarians were still called *Sabartoi asphaloi* in Constantinus' time, although their western brothers had by then long lost that name. This suggests that the name itself was of Transcaucasian origin and that the Lebedian Hungarians acquired it while they were living in that region.

Lastly, the place where Constantinus puts the Transcaucasian Magyars coincides with the north-western region of the Persian Empire from the fourth century onwards,³⁸ an area for the possession of which Byzantium and Persia fought a series of fierce wars in the fifth and sixth centuries.³⁹ This again confirms Kézai's assertion that the Magyars originated in Persia and also supplies a likely explanation for their northward movement.

To summarise, the matters recorded by Constantinus raise the possibility that originally all Hungarians lived south of the Caucasus and that their division, due to a desire to avoid enslavement by the great powers contending for their homeland, occurred in two stages: first by the separation of the White Hungarians later found near Bashkiria, and then by the settlement of the main body of Magyars on the shores of the Black Sea. The Sevordiks south of the Caucasus thus represented those who remained behind in the ancient home of all Hungarians.

Sons of Nimrod

Probing further in the Transcaucasian region for evidence in support of these suppositions, we find it recorded by Theophylactes Simocatta⁴⁰ that in 587, two Byzantine generals restored in Armenia 'the fortress of the Matsars, ruinous with old age'. This fortress must have been erected, therefore, by a people of that name some centuries previously. It is significant that in modern Turkish, the word for Hungarian is still *Macar* (pronounced as Matsar), indicating local survival of this form of Magyar.

Another Byzantine writer, Agathias, when reporting on the war between the Greeks and the Persians in Colchis in 554, refers to a fortified town called Mukheir.⁴¹ Writing about the same campaign, Procopius states that an entire province of Colchis is called Mukheris and that it is thickly populated and by far the best part of the country.⁴² These geographical designations clearly bring to mind the name Moger preserved by Anonymus and indicate the presence of a people of that name over an extended period.

The reader will recall that it is in the same year and in the same province that Agathias reports the occupation of a fortress called Onogur by the Persians. Hungarians and Onogurs must have been therefore associated south of the Caucasus centuries before their emergence on the northern side.

Indeed, strong evidence of Hungarian presence in Transcaucasia well before Christ can be found in the writings of Herodotus and Xenophon. Reporting on the wars of Cyrus in the middle of the sixth century B.C., Herodotus refers repeatedly to a people called Makrones living in the neighbourhood of Colchis and Cappadocia and furnishing soldiers for the army of the great Persian king.⁴³ More details of this people are supplied in Xenophon's Persian Expedition, written at the beginning of the fourth century B.C. Xenophon reports that as the Greek army was crossing the mountains north of Armenia, marching through the country of the Scytheni on its way to the Black Sea, it was held up at a river forming the boundary between the Scytheni and the Makrones. The latter were drawn up in battle order, ready to impede the progress of the Greeks, and it is clear from the narrative that they were sizeable enough to have

Early Foreign Sources

been able to do so. After the Greeks had pledged their peaceful intentions, however, the Makrones gave them every assistance and led them through their country for three days until they brought them to the Colchian frontier.⁴⁴

The name Scytheni has been interpreted as possibly relating to a party of Scythian invaders.⁴⁵ We are justified in suspecting a similar distortion in the name of the Makrones. As the memory of this people has survived in the name of a local mountain called Makur Dag,⁴⁶ it is almost certain that at the time when Herodotus and Xenophon wrote, they called themselves Makor, or a name sounding like that to Greek ears, leading us unerringly to Magor, the eponymous ancestor of the Hungarians and the oldest form of Magyar known to the Hungarians themselves.⁴⁷

The presence of a branch of the Scythians in that area probably gave rise to the first substantial intermarriage between Hungarians and Turkic peoples of which we shall see more later.

To complete our references to the Makrones, it is interesting to note that the second son of Mithridates the Great, Makares, was king of Colchis at the beginning of the first century B.C.⁴⁸ Calling to mind the eastern custom of naming the ruler after the people subject to him, the existence of a people called Makar or Magar in that region is clearly postulated.

Before leaving the eastern sources relating to the early Magyars, we must note another important piece of information revealed by Constantinus Porphyrogenetus in his *De administrando imperio*. Constantinus tells us that in leaving Lebedia, the Hungarians were joined by three tribes of the Kabars, a Turkish people. Later on he mentions that the Magyars of his time were, in addition to their own language, also speaking the language of the Kabars. The Hungarians of the Conquest period were therefore bilingual, speaking their present-day language and also a Turkish idiom, and this bilingualism continued up to the middle of the tenth century (when Constantinus wrote) and presumably for some time thereafter. This fact, when looked at in conjunction with other Turkish characteristics of the early Hungarians, suggest a merger between two peoples which is very much in line with the Nimrod-legend and will be further examined in Chapters 4 and 5.

Sons of Nimrod

We have left the Western sources last, as by necessity, they only contain first-hand information regarding the Hungarians from the second half of the ninth century. Some of this information, however, is highly significant.

The first important matter emerging from these sources is that from the moment of the appearance of the Magyars in the West in 862 until well into Renaissance times, virtually all Western writers assume their identity with the Huns.⁴⁹ This is of course in full agreement with the Hungarian national tradition set out in Chapter 1 and the only logical explanation is that the Western sources derived this notion from the Hungarians themselves. The historical and ethnic bases of this Hun-Magyar identity will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Another significant piece of information is handed down by two thirteenth-century encyclopaedists, Bartholomaeus Anglicus (fl. c. 1220-1240) and Vincent de Beauvais (c. 1190-c. 1264), who report independently of one another yet in virtually identical terms that the original home of the Hungarians was in outer Syria (*ulterior Syria*).^{50*} This suggestion is not as absurd as it may seem at first sight. Herodotus tells us that the ancient Greeks called the Cappadocians Syrians⁵¹ and it is almost certain that both Bartholomaeus Anglicus and Vincent de Beauvais refer to Cappadocia. The almost verbatim agreement of the relevant passages of these two authors suggests that they were using a common text since lost, and the reference by both of them to Orosius indicates the original author of that text. Orosius, however, wrote around 415 and could scarcely have referred to the Hungarians. It is more likely that he wrote about the Huns and that some subsequent writer or writers applied his information to the Hungarians. Assuming this to have been the case, we have here a strong mediaeval tradition, dating back to the early part of the fifth century, that contrary to all present-day notions, the original home of the Huns was in Transcaucasia. The ready identification of the Magyars with the Huns in that locality also suggests the existence of a further mediaeval tradition, probably handed down by a series of lost sources, that the Hungarians themselves originally lived in the region of Cappadocia. Since both Bartholomaeus Anglicus and Vincent de Beauvais were

Early Foreign Sources

highly learned men, the existence of such a tradition seems much more likely than that they uncritically accepted the substitution of Hungarians for Huns in some earlier source.

This suggestion is confirmed by the strong and detailed argument of the Polish historian and geographer Matthias Miechovius concerning the ancestral home of the Huns and Magyars. In his *Tractatus de duabus Sarmatiis*, written at the beginning of the sixteenth century, he devotes a long chapter to the 'Thuri' (by which name he calls both Huns and Hungarians) and states that these were later called 'Hugui' and then Hungarians. He places the original home of this people in Sarmatia which he describes as the country bounded by the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea and the mountains of the Caucasus. He then takes issue with 'certain historians' who assert that the 'Hugui' came from a land among high and inaccessible mountains. Although he does not specify these mountains by name, it is reasonably clear from his context that he is referring to the Caucasus. There must have been, therefore, a well-established historical tradition even in Renaissance times that the Hungarians originated from Transcaucasia, the strength of which is underlined by Miechovius' efforts to refute it.

Lastly, beginning with Godfried of Viterbo's *Memoria Seculorum* (1185), several Western sources state that the old home of the Hungarians was near the Meotid marshes. This is again in agreement with Kézai and other early Hungarian writers and, as already suggested, may well correspond with Constantinus' Lebedia.

We may now summarise the information imparted to us by foreign sources relating to the Hungarians. They lived originally south of the Caucasus, in the region between Cappadocia and Colchis. Whilst there, they mixed with certain Turkic peoples. In company with these peoples, they moved north of the Caucasus in the early part of the fifth century A.D. They then remained between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea for four centuries (apart from their northern branch which settled near Bashkiria in the seventh century), until they moved to the Don in the ninth century. After suffering a defeat by the Petchenegs in 889, they shifted to the Western Ukraine, and in 896 they

Sons of Nimrod

embarked on the conquest of the Carpathian Basin. At some stage during their wanderings, they became so closely identified with the Huns that on their arrival in their present-day homeland, all the surrounding nations regarded them as Huns, as indeed they did themselves.

It is interesting to see how badly this information has fared at the hands of later historians and ethnic theorists.

CHAPTER 3

Fish-Smelling Relations

When the great Hungarian lawyer, Stephen Werböczi, codified the laws of Hungary in 1514, he was still able to assert as the fundamental and incontrovertible argument for the original equality of all Hungarians that 'they all descended from one and the same stock, namely, from Hunor and Magor.'¹

This conviction in the absolute truth of the brotherhood of Huns and Hungarians and their descent from Scythia, remained basic to the Hungarian ethos for the next two centuries. Even the Near Eastern origin of the two eponymous ancestors remained unchallenged and was even embellished by Hungarian historians of a theological orientation who went to much trouble to find Persian and Hebrew ancestors for their people through analysis of the old Testament and comparative linguistics of a rudimentary kind.² These efforts to connect Huns and Hungarians with biblical times lasted well into the eighteenth century and underwent an enthusiastic revival and extension in the first half of the nineteenth century when the popular, although uncritical, professor of history at the University of Budapest, István Horváth, indiscriminately linked the ancestors of the Magyars with almost every ancient civilisation then known.³

The first blow to the national pride was dealt by János Sajnovics, a Hungarian Jesuit, who went to observe the transit of Venus from the island of Vardö in Norway and on finding similarities between his native tongue and the language of the Lapps in the vicinity, published a learned thesis in Copenhagen in 1770 (*Demonstratio Idioma Ungarorum et Lapponum idem esse*), asserting that the language of the Hungarians and the Lapps was the same.

Five years later, George Pray, 'the father of Hungarian historiography', published his *Dissertationes Historico-Criticae in Annales Veteres Hunnorum, Acarum et Hungarorum* (Vienna,

Sons of Nimrod

1775) in which he adopted the findings of Sajnovics, and enlarging these with detailed comparisons between Hungarian and various Finno-Ugrian languages and referring copiously to foreign writers, asserting the relationship between Hungarians and the latter, declared that the Finns and their near relatives were of Hunnish stock and of the same origin with Huns, Avars and Hungarians. He even made an attempt to trace the migrations of these peoples from Karelia, correcting the views expressed by him in an earlier work where he placed the ancestral home of the Huns in Mongolia, north of China.⁴

Whilst the endeavour to classify the Finns as Huns is illuminating because it shows the depth to which the notion of Hun-Magyar brotherhood had permeated the Hungarian mind, it did nothing at the time to allay the consternation of Hungarians who were not at all amused and protested loudly against the 'fish-smelling relations'.⁵ The national memory of the Magyars had preserved no trace of any contact with Finns and related peoples and Hungarian public opinion found the way of life of these poor relations as foreign as their political condition uninspiring.

However, the die had been cast. Due to the influence of Pray and a succession of zealots committed to the cause of Finnish-Hungarian relationship, the study of Hungarian prehistory soon became dominated by the Finno-Ugrian school which based its arguments almost entirely on linguistic considerations. This linguistic approach was obvious in the writings of the first major foreign protagonist of this school, August von Schlözer, and his Hungarian disciple, Samuel Gyarmathy, who published a thesis on this subject in 1799. In another age, attempts to explore Hungarian prehistory solely by means of comparative linguistics probably would not have aroused more than a mild and somewhat sceptical interest. The end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, however, witnessed an enormous revival of Hungarian literature and the sudden focusing of public attention on the Hungarian language, previously neglected due to the official use of Latin, lent a reflected glory to the comparative study of that language and supplied the sails of the Finno-Ugrian school with much-wanted wind.

So it happened that when the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Fish-Smelling Relations

came into existence in 1840, one of its first tasks was to grant generous financial support to a young Hungarian, Antal Reguly, aged only twenty-one at the time, to enable him to establish the relationship between Hungarian and the Finno-Ugrian languages.⁶ Reguly made extensive journeys in Karelia and Lappland and finally ended up studying the languages of two small peoples in Western Siberia, the Voguls and the Ostyaks, who were hardly known at that time. He returned to Hungary in 1848, bringing with him a mass of material which, due to his declining health and his early death in 1858, he was unable to publish.⁷

Reguly's inheritance was embraced with great zeal by Paul Hunfalvy whose influence on the study of Hungarian prehistory can be felt even today. In a lecture delivered at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1851, Hunfalvy proclaimed it to be the sacred duty of Hungarians to assume leadership in the field of Finno-Ugrian linguistics and having secured financial support from the Academy, he founded the periodical *Magyar Nyelvészeti* (Hungarian linguistics) in 1856, devoted principally to this cause.⁸ Hunfalvy was a man of strong convictions who knew no limits in defending his point of view and attacked with great fervour all linguists holding different ideas concerning the origin and relatives of the Hungarian language. He managed to bring the linguistic section of the Hungarian Academy entirely under his sway and when the Academy founded its own linguistic periodical, the *Nyelvtudományi Közlemények*, in 1861, Hunfalvy was appointed its editor and remained in this position for the next fourteen years. During this period, he published a Lapp grammar and two substantial treatises on the Vogul and Ostyak languages.

Hunfalvy found an able and learned collaborator in Joseph Budenz, a young philologist from Göttingen, who specialised originally in Indo-European languages but became soon attracted by the virtually unknown territory of Ural-Altaic languages⁹ and was invited by Hunfalvy to settle in Hungary. From the late 1850's, Budenz was the most frequent contributor to Hunfalvy's periodical and, next to him, the chief protagonist of the Finno-Ugrian school. He was the first trained linguist to enter the field of Finno-Ugrian comparative philology — Hunfalvy himself was

Sons of Nimrod

a dilettante — and applied the methods of Indo-European linguistics to his new-found field of interest. Whether these methods were entirely suited to the subject matter is another question.

In 1864, Hunfalvy published a voluminous work entitled *A vogul föld és nép* (*The Vogul country and people*), based on Reguly's researches. Budenz showed more originality and as a result of his own efforts, compiled a Hungarian-Finno-Ugrian comparative dictionary (1873-81) and also published a comparative morphology of the Finno-Ugrian languages (1884-94).

Due to the joint and tireless efforts of Hunfalvy and Budenz, the Finno-Ugrian origin of the Hungarian language became generally accepted in scientific circles. However, whilst Budenz contented himself with linguistic studies, Hunfalvy transferred his linguistic conclusions to the field of prehistory and declared that the Magyars were of Finno-Ugrian ethnic origin.¹⁰

This entirely unwarranted transposition of linguistics into ethnic theory has ever since dominated the study of Hungarian prehistory, not only in Hungary but also abroad. Indications furnished by linguistic research, sparse as they were, were magnified out of all proportions and the proud inheritors of Attila's sword were boldly pronounced as basically of humble Finno-Ugrian stock. Indeed, 'denounced' would be the more appropriate expression, for certain foreign scholars, mainly Germans — such as Zeuss, Büdinger and Roessler — hardly concealed their hate towards the Hungarians and their pleasure in tearing down the 'myths' of this troublesome race,¹¹ whilst their confreres in Hungary followed the same path out of a desire to keep up with, and if possible, outdo, the western Joneses. It is not surprising then that scientific objectivity was often lost in this fervour to create a Finno-Ugrian prehistory for the Hungarians.

Because studies of Finnish and languages more closely related to it did not produce sufficiently strong indications of ethnic relationship with the Magyars, attention was increasingly focussed on the Voguls and Ostyaks, also called Ob-Ugrians by reason of their settlements along the river Ob in Western Siberia. Bernát Munkácsi, Károly Pápai and Joseph Pápay, all Hungarians, carried out particularly intensive researches among these peoples towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of

Fish-Smelling Relations

the twentieth centuries, whilst among foreign scholars, A. Ahlquist and S. Patkanov distinguished themselves in the same field.¹² Although these studies indicated a closer relationship of Hungarian with Vogul and Ostyak than with the other Finno-Ugrian languages, the conclusions drawn from them by certain historians and ethnic theorists were entirely unjustified.

A great deal of the blame attaches to Budenz' foremost disciple, Joseph Szinnyei who, after distinguishing himself in Finno-Ugrian linguistics,¹³ turned to Hungarian prehistory and basing his assertions entirely on linguistic researches, attributed to the ancient Magyars an exclusively Finno-Ugrian origin and civilisation.¹⁴ His 'crowning achievement' was the publication of a voluminous manual of Hungarian linguistics (*Magyar Nyelvtudomány Kézikönyve*) by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1923 which devoted a separate volume to Hungarian prehistory, based largely on an analysis of the basic vocabulary of Hungarian. The writer of this volume, Istvan Zichy,¹⁵ undoubtedly influenced by Szinnyei, concluded that the social organisation and civilisation of the ancient Magyars corresponded with those of the present-day Ob-Ugrians and that the original home of the Hungarians was in the forest region of the Urals, near where the Voguls were still living in the eighteenth century.¹⁶ This kind of idle speculation proved too much even for foreign scholars. Sauvageot¹⁷ and Tallgren¹⁸ were quick to point out that the Voguls and Ostyaks were exhibiting signs of regression and probably had a higher degree of civilisation previously, whilst Wiklund expressed the view that these two peoples were ethnically not Finno-Ugrians and had acquired their present language through outside contacts.¹⁹

At the time these discussions were taking place, there was already a substantial literature dealing with certain basic words of Turkic origin in Hungarian and their importance as regards the ethnic origin of the Hungarian people. Under the influence of linguists, however, these Turkic elements in the Hungarian language were regarded as 'loan-words' of little significance, indicating no more than neighbourly contacts with, and at most, conquest and domination by, a Turkic people or peoples.²⁰

Although the following fifty years saw more research into and

Sons of Nimrod

discussion of the Turkic aspects of Hungarian, the basic assumption of the Finno-Ugrian ethnic origin of the Magyars has not been successfully challenged. Linguists have continued to transpose their findings directly into ethnic theory²¹ and the eminent Hungarian prehistorian, Gyula László, whilst occasionally bemoaning the domination of linguistics in the study of Hungarian prehistory,²² has only recently reaffirmed that 'the Hungarian language and through it, our Finno-Ugrian relationship, are, as before, safe bases of our researches into prehistory'.²³

We may now state briefly the Finno-Ugrian ethnic theory in its present-day form. According to this theory, the ancestors of the Finno-Ugrian peoples lived on the European side of the Urals around the rivers Kama and Pechora in the forest zone at the beginning of the third millenium B.C. They formed a homogeneous group until about 2500-2000 B.C. when the Finno-Permian group moved towards the west and north-west and the Ugrian group migrated gradually towards the south-east. However, this was a slow process and the various groups remained in contact over a considerable period. The separation of the proto-Hungarians from the Ob-Ugrians took place about 500 B.C. The Hungarian ethnic group moved towards the borders of the forest zone and settled at the outer tracts of the steppe, in the region of present-day Bashkiria. There they made contact with Turkic tribes presumably of Turco-Bulgar origin and under their influence, adopted a semi-nomadic, horsebreeding way of life. During the thousand years following their separation from the Ob-Ugrians, certain amalgamation took place between the proto-Hungarians and Turkic elements, so that at around the fifth century, A.D., we find a Hungarian people exhibiting mainly Turkic features and living in a Turkic environment. At that time, the Finno-Ugrian peoples, including the Hungarians, were still living in the area demarcated in the east by the Urals, in the north by the Arctic Sea, in the east by the Gulf of Bothnia and the Baltic Sea and in the south by the line Libau-Novgorod-Tambov-Saratov-Jekaterinburg. The Hungarians who were living in the south-eastern region of this area, were then swept south and westwards by the great migration of peoples, until they eventually landed in present-day Hungary.²⁴

Fish-Smelling Relations

Apart from the fact that most members of the Finnish group still live within the area stated, that the Ob-Ugrians were living there around 1300 A.D. and that a branch of Hungarians was found in the vicinity of Bashkiria by the monk Julian in 1237, the entire Finno-Ugrian theory is *purely speculative* and both the stages and the timetable of the suggested separation are based entirely on comparative linguistics.²⁵ In particular, apart from the existence of the northern Hungarians referred to, there is no evidence whatever to suggest the presence of the Hungarians within the area stated at any historical or indeed, pre-historic period and their supposed cohabitation with other Finno-Ugrian peoples is just as fanciful as the development attributed to them under Turkic influence between 500 B.C. and 500 A.D.

It is clear therefore, that in order to maintain credibility, the Finno-Ugrian theory must rely heavily on three factors:

- (1) The Hungarian language and its progressive relationship with other Finno-Ugrian languages;
- (2) The alleged close ethnic relationship between Hungarians and the Ob-Ugrians; and
- (3) The supposition that the branch of Hungarians found near Bashkiria represented those Hungarians who had remained behind in their ancestral home.

As regards linguistic affinity, the number of Hungarian words to which a Finno-Ugrian origin has been attributed, is somewhat less than a thousand.²⁶ This is in itself a very insignificant number in a language boasting some 190,000 primary words,²⁷ although the words in question are of a basic character (some personal pronouns, simple numerals, parts of the body, words designating kinship, simple objects, general phenomena of nature, certain plants, animals, parts of the house, simple tools, weapons, items of clothing and verbs denoting everyday actions).²⁸ It must be pointed out at once that the majority of these words of allegedly Finno-Ugrian origin can only be related to Vogul and Ostyak and have no parallels in the other Finno-Ugrian languages. However, even this number of less than a

Sons of Nimrod

thousand is grossly inflated. As Dennis Sinor, a Hungarian linguist living in the United States, pointed out in recent years in a trenchant criticism of the past methods of Hungarian linguists, far too many etymologies claiming a Finno-Ugrian connection for certain words had been based on an *a priori* historical hypothesis that these words must be of Finno-Ugrian origin because Hungarians were of such ethnic origin themselves.²⁹ Indeed, Vámbéry demonstrated nearly a century ago³⁰ that a number of Hungarian words claimed to have a Finno-Ugrian derivation can be better explained from Turkic languages and a similar study has recently been carried out by Sándor Csöke.³¹ It is significant that the Fenno-Ugric vocabulary of Collinder³² only lists some four hundred and fifty Hungarian words as of Finno-Ugrian origin.³³ If we remove the Ob-Ugrians from the picture, the number of these words falls well below two hundred.

By way of contrast, Hungarian contains at least three hundred words of Bulgaro-Turkic origin, most of which are just as basic in character as the much-stressed Finno-Ugrian vocabulary.³⁴ If words erroneously listed as Finno-Ugrian are re-classified as Turkic, this number can be probably doubled. Furthermore, it is now reasonably clear that there are at least several hundred, and probably much more, basic words in Hungarian which have Sumerian etymologies.³⁵ (> 1000)

The Finno-Ugrian words in Hungarian are therefore in the minority even among words of the most basic character and whilst they indicate a certain connection between Hungarian and the Finno-Ugrian languages, such connection is of a very remote nature.

Comparisons of grammatical structures produce no better results. Hungarian is, of course, an agglutinative language and in this it shares common features with all the Ural-Altaic languages and also with many others, such as Japanese and Sumerian. However, when it comes to comparison of specific grammatical phenomena, and in particular, endings and suffixes, Hungarian has very little in common with the Finno-Ugrian languages and, indeed, there are several instances where it is closer to Turkic.³⁶ Here again, such similarities as exist with Finno-Ugrian languages are to be found mainly in Vogul and Ostyak.

Fish-Smelling Relations

The phonetic relationships of Hungarian and the Finno-Ugrian languages also display similar differences and in certain respects, the phonetics of Hungarian are closer to Turkic languages.³⁷

Indeed, Géza Bárczi, the eminent Hungarian linguist, makes the following interesting admission:

The relationship existing between the Finno-Ugrian languages in their present form is not striking at first sight. It certainly does not even approach the resemblances of diverse members of the Romance or Germanic group . . . but might best be compared to the kinship existing between the different groups of the Indo-European family, e.g. the Germanic and the Slav group.³⁸

In other words, each member of the Finno-Ugrian branch of languages may be considered as forming a separate group of its own. Since the Finno-Ugrian languages other than Hungarian, although only remotely connected, still stand in closer relationship to one another than to Hungarian, the relationship between Hungarian and these languages must be very distant indeed.

All this suggests that the Finno-Ugrian languages must have undergone a separation and diffusion at a much earlier date than is generally thought and the fact that leaving the Hungarians aside, they now find themselves in a comparatively confined area, may well be a post-diffusion phenomenon, produced by these peoples being pushed together by external forces after a long period of separation. There are also linguistic indications that all these peoples may have lived in a reasonable proximity to the Caucasus and even Mesopotamia at an earlier stage.³⁹

Having regard to the extremely conservative character of the Hungarian language – witnessed by the fact that it has lost practically none of its stock and qualities over the last thousand years⁴⁰ – and the very meagre relationship between Hungarian and the Finnish branch of the Finno-Ugrian languages, it appears that the era when Hungarian acquired its scant common vocabulary with these languages must have been not later than 10,000 B.C. and indeed, may have been much earlier. This, of

course, does not postulate any ethnic relationship between the Magyars and the peoples now speaking Finnish languages. After all, Hungarian also exhibits some connections with the languages of the Lapps and Samoyeds, yet there is absolutely no ethnic relationship between the Hungarians and these two peoples.⁴¹ One might as well seek to establish a common descent for Englishmen and Albanians on the ground that their languages belong to the same family!

Comparative linguistics therefore afford no valid basis for assuming any substantial ethnic connection between Hungarians on the one hand and Finns, Estonians and their relatives on the other. If any such connection exists, proof of it must be sought in the field of anthropology and not in linguistics. Even if anthropology shows some such connection — to which we shall return below — the high degree of dissimilarity between the languages in question proves conclusively the extremely remote nature of any ethnic relationship.

This leaves us with the Voguls and Ostyaks who, with the Hungarians, are said to form the Ugrian branch of the Finno-Ugrian group. Because the languages of these peoples exhibit closer affinities with Hungarian than the other Finno-Ugrian languages, they are considered as providing the 'missing link' between Hungarians and Finno-Ugrians both from the linguistic and the ethnic points of view. They thus occupy a key position in the Finno-Ugrian ethnic theory, for if it can be shown that they are ethnically not Finno-Ugrians but acquired their languages from contact with other peoples, then the theory of the Finno-Ugrian origin of the Magyars is considerably weakened, if not altogether destroyed.

We have already referred to Wiklund's view that the Voguls and Ostyaks are ethnically not Finno-Ugrians. More recently, a similar opinion has been expressed by the Finnish scholar Vuorela.⁴² The difficulty in showing any anthropological connection between these peoples and other peoples with Finno-Ugrian languages is generally recognised. The Voguls and Ostyaks show strong mongoloid features which cannot be found either among the Magyars or other peoples classed as Finno-Ugrians. Sauvageot has sought to explain these mongoloid traits by sug-



Satchel-cover from Bezéd, Hungary. 9th century



Ladies' ornament from Rakamaz, Hungary. 9th century

Satchel-cover from Galgóc, Hungary. 9th century



Fish-Smelling Relations

gesting that the Voguls and Ostyaks have mixed with Turkic races to the point of losing their original racial characteristics.⁴³ However, there are two serious objections to this theory. Firstly, there is simply no historical or linguistic evidence of such Turkic-Vogul-Ostyak mixing either in recent times or at any stage in the past. Secondly, the cultural and social gap between Voguls and Ostyaks on the one hand and Turks on the other is so enormous that a Turkic people would hardly have condescended to mix with them.⁴⁴

A Hungarian anthropologist, Paul Lipták, carried out a detailed examination of skulls found in Hungarian graves of the Conquest period and compared them with cranial measurements of Voguls and Ostyaks. It is clear from his report that he approached his investigations with preconceived notions concerning the Ugrian ethnic origin of the Hungarians. Nevertheless, all he could find was that the extreme Europoid Ostyak skulls showed a similarity with the extreme Mongoloid (Sibirid) Hungarian skulls. In other words, when he compared an atypical Hungarian skull with an atypical Ostyak skull, he was able to establish a certain degree of similarity. With the Voguls who are linguistically closer to the Hungarians than the Ostyaks, even such an atypical relationship could not be established.⁴⁵

Lipták also made some significant findings concerning the typological classification of the old Hungarian skulls examined. The so-called Sibirid type, which he regarded as characteristic of the Voguls and Ostyaks, could not be found in its pure form among the Hungarian skulls but only with a fairly strong admixture of proto-Europoid racial characteristics. Even such mixed cranial types formed a minority. The overwhelming majority of the skulls exhibited Turkic characteristics.

It is, of course, obvious that a comparison of atypical elements among any two given peoples is entirely useless, as such elements are clearly the result of outside racial influences. We must therefore regard Lipták's findings as quite conclusively negating any anthropological relationship between Hungarians on the one hand and Voguls and Ostyaks on the other.

It may be argued, however, that even though an ethnic relationship between Hungarians and Voguls and Ostyaks cannot

Sons of Nimrod

be established, the affinities between their languages show that they must have lived in close proximity over an extended period. We would not quarrel with this but there is nothing to show that such cohabitation took place within the suggested Finno-Ugrian *Urheimat* or that the Magyars now in the Carpathian Basin ever had anything to do with these two peoples.

It is necessary to point out at this stage how insignificant in numbers the Voguls and Ostyaks are. According to latest statistics, Vogul is spoken by 6,000 persons and Ostyak by 19,000.⁴⁷ Even if they are now on the way to extinction and were previously more numerous, their numbers do not appear to have been substantially greater when they were found in a comparatively undisturbed state in the thirteenth century. They must therefore always have consisted of very small populations dispersed over a large area and pursuing a simple hunting and fishing way of life. A change of language for such kind of peoples is not a unique phenomenon and is generally accepted in the case of the Lapps and Samoyeds. It is quite likely that the Voguls and Ostyaks, too, abandoned their original language or languages — the two are still so closely related today that they may be considered dialects of the same language⁴⁸ — through contact with a branch of the proto-Hungarians in the distant past.

Indeed, the languages of the Ob-Ugrians still preserve the memory of such a contact, for they have words related to horsebreeding, whilst possessing no horses themselves. Their myths and sagas also refer to horses but possession of these is reserved for the gods and heroes.⁴⁹ The Voguls and Ostyaks therefore must have acquired their words connected with the horse from a people superior to them, engaged in horsebreeding, and since those words have their exact parallels in Hungarian, that people must have been the proto-Hungarians or a branch of them.

We have repeatedly referred to a 'branch' of the proto-Hungarians because present-day Hungarians, in spite of their extremely heavy ethnic losses in the course of their wanderings and their turbulent history in the Carpathian Basin, still outnumber the Ob-Ugrians 500:1 so that it would only have required a comparatively small branch of the ancient Magyars to lend their

Fish-Smelling Relations

language to the Voguls and Ostyaks. (It is worth thinking about that if these small peoples had come into close contact with the entire body of Hungarians, they would have been completely absorbed by them and would not exist today.)

Indeed, we know of past separations of the Hungarian ethnic body, for, as we have already seen, two substantial branches of the Magyars survived in Transcaucasia and Bashkiria respectively for centuries, although they were geographically far less protected than their brothers in the Carpathian Basin. It is therefore quite likely that a similar separation took place at a much earlier age and a branch of the Hungarians, swept away later by the constant turbulence of peoples in that region, moved into the neighbourhood of the Voguls and Ostyaks — then living perhaps further to the south — and gave its language to them.

The question now remains as to the period in which such transfer of language might have taken place. Peter Hajdu, who puts the date of separation between Hungarians and Ob-Ugrians at about 500 B.C., makes the surprising statement that the rate of evolution of the Hungarian language during the following fifteen hundred years must have been 'strikingly conspicuous in comparison with the linguistic development of the Ugric period', because 'the Hungarian language of the eleventh century can be fairly well understood with a knowledge of modern Hungarian but a Hungarian of the Conquest period could not have made himself understood to an ancestor of Ugric times'. He explains that 'this is due to the fact that the Hungarian language has undergone fewer substantial changes during the last thousand years than it had during the thousand years following its separation from the Ob-Ugric branches'.⁵⁰ He therefore postulates a language which is slow in its development during its 'Ugric period', then undergoes revolutionary changes for the next fifteen hundred years and thereafter slows down again for a thousand years, although exposed to a series of substantial linguistic influences in its new habitat. This simply does not make sense and the obvious answer is that the date when contact ceased between the Hungarians and the Ob-Ugrians, quite arbitrarily fixed by Hajdu and others as 500 B.C., must have been very much earlier. Indeed, some scholars have realised this and Bárczi puts the

Sons of Nimrod

same date at 1000 B.C.⁵¹ whilst László considers that the separation must have taken place about two thousand five hundred years before the Conquest period, that is, around 1600 B.C.⁵² Having regard to the highly conservative nature of the Hungarian language, a characteristic which is possessed to a probably much greater degree by Vogul and Ostyak, even these dates may be unrealistically late and it appears more likely that the Hungarian and Ob-Ugrian contacts occurred around 2000 B.C., which coincides with a period of great upheavals in the Mesopotamian area.

The relationship between the languages of the Hungarians and the Ob-Ugrians, distant as it is, is therefore a secondary phenomenon and has no bearing on the ethnic formation of the Hungarians.

We may now turn to the question of the Hungarians found near Bashkiria in the thirteenth century. According to the Finno-Ugrian ethnic theory, these represent the Magyars who remained behind in their original ancestral home. If this is correct, then one would expect some references to this Bashkirian homeland in the early chronicles and sagas of the Magyars in present-day Hungary. However, such references are conspicuously absent. There is no suggestion even of the remotest kind either in Hungarian or foreign sources that the Hungarians ever lived in the Bashkirian region or anywhere near it. When the monk Julian went to look for the eastern Magyars in the thirteenth century, he was searching for them in the Caucasian region and only turned north when he found out about the Hungarians living there by sheer coincidence.⁵³ These northern Hungarians were completely lost and forgotten at that time.

On the other hand, it is recorded by Constantinus Porphyrogenetus that in the tenth century, the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin still exchanged regular messages with their relatives south of the Caucasus (see Chapter 2). There is a reasonable inference from this that the Hungarians in the west regarded these Transcaucasian Hungarians as remaining in their original homeland and were simply 'writing home'. Similar contacts with the Bashkirian Hungarians were completely lacking.

We have also seen the very clear statement in Kézai's *Gesta*

Fish-Smelling Relations

and other sources, including some foreign chronicles, that the ancestral home of the Hungarians was in the region of Persia. This location is so far distant from Bashkiria that a confusion of areas cannot be supposed.

Through an analysis of early foreign sources, we have also traced the movement of the Hungarians from the Caucasus to the Carpathian Basin. Many of these sources would have to be ignored or falsified in order to render the Bashkirian homeland acceptable.

Occasionally, attempts have been made to adduce archaeological evidence in support of the Bashkirian homeland of the Hungarians by attributing the so-called Ananyino and Pianobor cultures to them.⁵⁴ These cultures which follow one another and extend from about 700 B.C. to about 500 A.D., reflect a fairly simple way of life in which the horse played a very minor role. Yet only three hundred years later when the Hungarians make their definite appearance on the Lower Danube, they are fierce horsemen, a steppe-people to the hilt. Considering their earlier appearances north and even south of the Caucasus which can only be explained by extreme mobility necessitating heavy reliance on the horse, the Pianobor-people — if they were Hungarians — would have had to undergo a revolutionary change in the fifth century A.D., turning them overnight from a simple sedentary people into semi-nomadic horsemen. Quite apart from the inherent improbability of such a sudden transformation, there is no archaeological evidence of such a change. The Pianobor culture ends abruptly in about 500 A.D. without any significant change in its character. Tallgren attributes this sudden end — although somewhat hesitatingly — to the migration of the Magyars to the south and the Ostyaks and Voguls to the north.⁵⁵ There are two basic objections to this assumption. Firstly, as we have already seen, the separation of the Magyars and the Ob-Ugrians must have taken place very much earlier. Consequently, if the Voguls and Ostyaks were still in the Pianobor region around 500 A.D., the Magyars just could not have been there. Secondly, the Magyars did not disappear from the area until the end of the thirteenth century. Up till then, they were present in substantial numbers as the placenames of Hungarian origin

Sons of Nimrod

indicate.⁵⁶ Consequently, it is much more likely that the sudden end of the Pianobor culture, far from being connected with the departure of the Magyars, signifies the arrival of their northern branch in that area, wiping out or dislodging the primitive settlements existing there. This accords with the view of a number of historians that the branch of the Hungarians living near Bashkiria migrated there with the Volga Bulgars about the seventh century A.D.⁵⁷

As already stated in Chapter 2, these northern Hungarians were probably the White Ugors or Saragurs, who were first to leave the Transcaucasian homeland of the Hungarians and whose memory gradually disappeared. They represent an interesting, if sad, episode in the ethnic history of the Hungarians but furnish no support for the Finno-Ugrian ethnic theory.

The Finno-Ugrian ethnic theory is therefore left with the slender relationship between Hungarian and the Finnish branch of languages as its sole supportable argument. We have already expressed the view that this cannot furnish a sound basis for the assertion of any ethnic relationship. Indeed, the German ethnologist and prehistorian Haensell has come out strongly against the assumption of a Finno-Ugrian *Urvolk* or common ethnic stock on the basis of linguistic affinities.⁵⁸ It stands to reason that the slight similarities shown by these languages may well have come about through contacts between ethnically different peoples in the distant past. Even if these contacts eventually resulted in some ethnic connection through intermarriage, the extremely remote nature of linguistic relationship indicates that such connection must have ceased such a long time ago that it cannot throw any real light on the origin or prehistory of the Hungarians.

The feeling of remoteness created by comparative linguistics and examination of other arguments of the Finno-Ugrian theory, is more than backed up by the findings of other disciplines relevant to the study of prehistory. Thus, supposedly Finno-Ugrian elements are either hardly discernible or totally non-existent in Hungarian folklore,⁵⁹ music⁶⁰ and archaeological finds.⁶¹ Even when some writers report discovery of some such elements — and such reports have been rare — one is tempted to ask whether

Fish-Smelling Relations

such 'discovery' is not the product of preconceived notions attributing a Finno-Ugrian origin to cultural elements atypical of Hungarians or simple artifacts common to certain primitive occupations all over Eurasia.

Over the last fifty years, attempts have been made by the Hungarian anthropologists Bartucz,⁶² Nemeskéri⁶³ and Lipták⁶⁴ to find an anthropological basis for the Finno-Ugrian ethnic theory. Their researches have indeed established the existence of two major ethnic types among the Magyar conquerors. One of these which was more characteristic of poorer graves of the Conquest period and was in any event in the minority, was classified by Bartucz as belonging to the East Baltic racial type and he therefore assumed that this represented the Ugric element among the Hungarians. More recent studies by Lipták, however, show that this type among the early Hungarian skulls has a more composite and complicated character. In any event, the so-called East Baltic type is well-represented not only among some members of the Finnish group of peoples but also among Latvians, Lithuanians and even Slavic populations in eastern and north-eastern Europe. This anthropological type is therefore not confined to Finno-Ugrian peoples, nor are Finno-Ugrian peoples predominantly of this type,⁶⁵ and even if it can be regarded as more characteristic of the early Finnish and related tribes, than their present-day successors, its origins — like those of all anthropological types — go back well before the beginnings of ethnic formations resulting in the various peoples of the world as we know them today.⁶⁶

The significant finding of anthropologists concerning the early Magyars, therefore, is not that one of their racial types bears some relationship to Finno-Ugrian types but that they consisted of two distinct ethnic strains. This duality, of course, is clearly stated in the Nimrod-legend (Chapter I) and the real question which we now intend to investigate is who these two peoples were the merger of which made up the Hungarian nation.