

8. Between Finland and Asia

The Changing Medievalist Models in Hungarian Nation-Building during the Inter-War Period*

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‘God’s guiding hand placed the noble Hungarians to be a golden gate on the border of the ardent East and the cold West’¹

Introduction

This paper considers how the archaeological heritage of the Middle Ages was used to create and maintain two models of nationalism in Hungary in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and shows how these have survived to the present day. Each model had a different emphasis, looking to establish a sense of belonging either to the East or West. The Eastern model focused on the Asian origins of the ancient Hungarian (Magyar) tribes, and highlighted the relations with the so-called Turanist nations, with whom the Hungarians perceived a common origin. The leading figure for this model was Attila the Hun, the fifth-century king of the Hunnic Empire. In contrast, the Western model drew a parallel with the imperial models popular in Western Europe. Thus, instead of identifying with the pagan equestrian image of the Hungarian, it associated the Hungarian state with the Western Christian kingdoms and empires, and therefore looked to the Christian Middle Ages for its history. The principal figure for this model was St Stephen, the founder of the Christian Hungarian Kingdom.

To understand the shift between these two models I compared the media representation and response to two anniversaries: the Attila Jubilee in 1935, which was planned but never went ahead, and the festive and monumental St Stephen anniversary in 1938. In order to do this, I conducted computer facilitated Thematic Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis on three hundred newspaper articles and two commemorative volumes (known as albums) mentioning St Stephen’s anniversary, and then compared these results to an analysis made on newspapers discussing the Attila anniversary and Turanism. To understand the broader context,

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¹ *Előörs Szabadság*, 1930, p. 119. ‘Isten irányító keze a nemes (...) Magyar népet (...) arany kapunak állítsa oda a lángoló lelkű Keletés a hűvös Nyugat mesgyéjére.’ The author translated all the citations from Hungarian to English.

I also compared these narratives to those discourses that appeared in 120 newspaper articles written on Turanism in the period.

Hungarian poet Endre Ady called Hungary a ‘ferry-land’ (kompország) that is continuously pushed back and forth from East to West. As one of the Central European states, Hungary has often found itself part of the buffer zone between opposing sides, and never truly belonging utterly to the winning side. I hope that my study can highlight the bridging connection between the Western and Eastern archaeological and nation-building experiences, while focusing on both types of national myth-making in Hungary, the ferry-land.

Hungary in Central Europe

An overview of the significant turning points in Hungarian history is essential for understanding the research context. The Hungarian kingdom was established in AD 1001 by King St Stephen I, founder of the royal Árpád dynasty, and in the years following Hungary entered a period of relative independence and power where Hungary in itself was a significant power. However, this failed to last beyond the Middle Ages. As such it came to be perceived as a ‘Golden Age’ when Hungary was a dominant power in its own right, and its memory was later used for nation-building purposes.

The Habsburg domination in Hungary started after the Battle of Mohács in 1526 when Louis II, the last Jagello on the Hungarian throne, died and was succeeded by Ferdinand of Habsburg. However, Ferdinand could only rule the northern and western parts of Hungarian land, with the rest of the territories divided between the Ottoman Empire and the Principality of Transylvania.² The Hapsburg monarchy then continued until the National Revolution and Liberation War in 1848–1849 brought it to an end.

The Austro-Hungarian Compromise Treaty of 1867 had intended to end tensions and provide partial sovereignty to the Hungarian Kingdom by establishing a dual monarchy.³ However, both the Liberation War and the Compromise Treaty increased tensions between Hungary and other ethnic minorities living within the borders of the Habsburg Empire.

Hungary had to face an enormous loss after the end of World War I (1914–1918). On the 4 June 1920, the Treaty of Trianon was signed at the Palace of Versailles, resulting in three-quarters of Hungary’s territory being allocated to neighbouring countries. As a result of the treaty, three and a half million of the ten million native Hungarians became minorities in foreign lands.⁴ As a result of the changing borders, many of the spectacular and visible medieval archaeological sites ended up outside of the new state border. Thus, medieval heritage underwent a significant re-evaluation as the state reconsidered what medieval heritage without ownership of the physical sites meant for Hungary. It became a greater challenge to interpret the remaining heritage since what was now found within the new borders was far less striking than those attached to the neighbouring countries. It was under these circumstances that celebrations were held commemorating the nine hundredth anniversary of the death of St Stephen, the state-founder king, which gave an enormous drive to the national excavations.

This loss defined the inter-war period. From 1921, Governor Miklós Horthy ruled the country as a regent. From the 1930s onwards Nazi Germany had a notable impact on Horthy’s governance, which ultimately led to Hungary’s participation during World War II as part of the Axis powers, allied to Germany, Italy, and Japan.⁵

² Pálffy, *The Kingdom of Hungary*, pp. 37–41.

³ Péter, *Intellectuals and the Future*, pp. 2–3.

⁴ Macartney, *Hungary and her Successors*, pp. 3–4.

⁵ Szabo and Nigel, *The Royal Hungarian Army in World War II*, p. 4.

Following World War II, the communist regime was established with the help of the Soviet army. Communist rule of Hungary can be divided into two periods: the first was led by Mátyás Rákosi and ended with the Uprising of 1956. A softer form of communism under the rule of János Kádár followed the revolution. The softening of the regime ended with the Hungarian Regime Change in 1989.⁶

The Székesfehérvár Excavation Site between East and West in the Nineteenth Century

Since the largest part of the St Stephen celebrations was connected to the excavation site and human remains found at the former basilica in the town of Székesfehérvár, it is necessary to briefly introduce the significance of this site in the Hungarian nation-building narrative. Székesfehérvár was one of the medieval capital cities of Hungary. It was a royal residence, and its medieval basilica was both the coronation and royal burial place; therefore, it also had huge national-mythological importance.

In 1848 five bodies were found during the excavation of the grave site at the former basilica. At that time two skeletons were argued to belong to King Béla III of the Árpád dynasty and his wife Agnes (Anna) of Antioch, however, the latest research methods do bring into question whether this identification was correct.⁷ Next to the royal couple, lay a young man and a pregnant woman with a child. The excavations in the 1860s and 1870s discovered seventeen more graves, but none of them could be identified as a specific king, or the certified royal tombs were empty and looted.

My study on the nineteenth-century understanding of the Székesfehérvár site showed that the narratives about the Eastern or Western origin were crucial in the discussions around the excavations.⁸ When examining this in relation to nation-building, it is essential to remember that the opposing origin myths served as political statements. On the one hand, when the Hungarian preferred the Eastern origins, it could be understood as a declaration of opposition to Western domination over Hungarian independence, and of a mythical military power. On the other hand, emphasizing the similarities with Western culture provided a feeling of superiority over the neighbouring Slavic countries and equality with the Western empires.

For example, the question of origin appeared in anthropological texts concerning the Székesfehérvár excavations. Aurél Török, the first professional anthropologist, when making observations of the skeletons in the 1890s, drew on personal characteristics from the skeletons of the royal couple by referring to the expected virtues of a Hungarian ancestor. He described Béla as an 'elite and noble figure' and stated that the 'beautiful curvature of his nose' was indicative of a strong personality. Similarly, Anna was described according to gender expectations as 'fine and peachy'.⁹ Török also found it important to highlight that the skeleton of the king was not Mongoloid but European, with an 'elite European body'.¹⁰ He then sought to prove that the whole Árpád dynasty had European roots. With these statements the authors of these texts joined the debate regarding the Eastern or Western origins of the Hungarians.

However, the sources reveal that the Eastern version is also present. The most outstanding Eastern narratives were connected to the artefacts, namely the jewellery and arms, that King Béla was buried with: 'Wearing a sceptre was tradition, which the Middle-Asian

⁶ Saxonberg, *The Fall*, pp. 71–73.

⁷ See Tóth, *III. Béla vagy Kálmán?*; Mende, *Hogyan ne azonosítsuk az Árpádházi királyokat?*

⁸ Kocsis, 'Hungarian nation-building and the use of medieval archaeology'.

⁹ Album1_e, p. 206.

¹⁰ Album1_e, p. 203.

Turan had had before the Conquest.¹¹ Turanism became extremely popular in the inter-war period and had its roots in this professional anthropological-archaeological discourse. Turanism was a political movement based on the mythical past of Hungary coming from the East. Its supporters wanted to strengthen Hungarian and Inner Asian connections. Turanism got its name from the Central Asian area of Turan, where it was thought certain ethnic groups came from, such as the Finns, Hungarians, and Turks.¹²

Turanism before the St Stephen Anniversary: Between North and East

To understand the triggers of Pan-Turanist thinking in Hungary, it is worth looking at the Pan-Slavic thought that was present in the surrounding Slavic countries in the Carpathian Basin. Following the Czech Lubor Niederle, it was accepted in the Slavic-speaking countries that the Slav tribes were present in the Carpathian Basin before the Hungarian conquest. A similar attempt was made by the Romanian state to find archaeological proof for the Daco-Roman continuity theory.¹³ Hungarian Turanism focused on proving their right to the land in contrast to the Pan-Slavic and Daco-Roman theories. This question of who had a right to the land gained new importance following the Treaty of Trianon. As Hungary openly campaigned for revision of the newly imposed state borders, the surrounding countries put more effort into finding evidence for their rights to the lands annexed to them from Hungary. This created a state of constant competition in finding the ethnic origins between people inhabiting the Carpathian Basin.

In his book about the misuse of the archaeological remains from the Hungarian conquest period, Péter Langó argues that the ‘who was here earlier’ debate used linguistic rather than archaeological arguments.¹⁴ That is not entirely true. My research found that the linguistic, historical, and archaeological claims were not entirely separated from each other, but that the archaeological information had been misinterpreted, and then what was presented was this skewed interpretation.

There is also a lack of terminological consensus in the discussion, which separates the Turanist discourse from the scientific discourses. In some cases, the newspapers used ‘HunHungarian’ or ‘Hun-Avars’ as one word, and equate Hun-Avars with Scythians.¹⁵ This terminological chaos exemplifies the flexible use of historical knowledge, or lack of knowledge, by the debaters of Turanist ideas.

What do these ideas consist of? In the inter-war newspaper representations, being Turanist was mostly defined against the others. For example, they emphasized that the Polish and Bulgarians are more Turanist than Slavs, and the Parsi Indians are more Turanist than the Aryans. ‘We have been Aryan, Semita, Mongol, but not what we really are, Ugor’, stated the

¹¹ Album1_h, p. 231. ‘A fejedelmi buzogány viselése tehát olyan hagyományos szokás, mely a közép-ázsiai és a vele egybefüggő kelet-európai turánságnál mindenesetre megvolt már a honfoglalás előtt.’

¹² For a detailed history of Turanism see Ablonczy, *Keletré, magyar!*

¹³ See Langó, *Turulok és Árpádok*, pp. 40–41.

¹⁴ Langó, *Turulok és Árpádok*, p. 44.

¹⁵ *A Nép*, 1925, no. 199, p. 5

newspaper *A Nép* about the Hungarians in 1925.¹⁶ All these counter-definitions were in favour of proving that ‘We have earlier right to Europe than all the Aryan, Slavs and Romanians’.¹⁷

The discussion was heavily loaded with racism, ‘the superiority of the Hungarian race’ was celebrated in the *A Nép* in 1925,¹⁸ a statement that was reflected many times elsewhere. There was also a common theme to make a distinction between black and white Huns: ‘Out of the two types of Huns, the black and the white, (...) the white were the more intelligent type, as its culture was based mostly on Chinese culture.’¹⁹

The discourse blamed the German and Austrian pressure on the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for not acknowledging the Hun-Hungarian brotherhood and propagating the Finno-Ugric relationship against Hungarian–Turkish connections. ‘The Nibelung Saga created a barbarian from Etele [Attila] who was the greatest monarch of all the times’,²⁰ stated the *A Nép* putting the blame on the Western, especially the German, culture for demonizing the image of Attila and turned the Hungarians into enemies.

In contrast, French research was thought to be a followable and respected example: ‘In Thierry’s Attila there is no trace of that stupid Aryan arrogance and self-love which has been Germany’s main product for centuries’, as the newspaper *Előrs Szabadság* stated in 1933 when Thierry’s novel on Attila was published.²¹ The contrasting view on the German and French research was literally stated in some cases: ‘In contrast to the German scientist, it is validated by serious French scientists.’²²

In the newspaper discourse, two separate Turanist narratives appeared: one favoured the relationship with the Finns, the other dismissed it and focused on the Asian, and especially Indian, relationships, emphasizing the Hun-Hungarian brotherhood. By that time the linguistic debate about the Hungarian language either being related to the Finno-Ugric languages or to Turkish was already ongoing in the scientific scene and was decided in favour of the Finnish theory, which fuelled the anger of the Turkish supporters.

Regarding the Hun question, even the Turan Association, which was the society promoting Turanism, was critical of the Hun-Hungarian brotherhood theory. Therefore, the distinction between scientific and mythological interest was already prevalent in the Turanian discourse in some cases.²³ That said, the short-lived official journal of the Turan Association still published a mixture of scientific and mythological theories, which did not help to formulate a unified image of Turanism in the newspapers and public discourse.

Generally speaking, whilst in the twenties the focus was more on Turanism, including Finland, by the thirties the discourse had shifted focus and became less about Finnish connections and more about Asian relations, and articulated more around the Attila cult.

¹⁶ *A Nép*, 1925, no. 199, p. 5. ‘Voltunk, már mi árják, sémiták, mongolok, csak azok nem, akik tulajdonképen vagyunk, t. i. ugorok’

¹⁷ *Keleti Ujság*, 1928, no. 135, p. 4. ‘korábbi jogunk van Európára minden árjánál, románnál, szlávnál egyaránt’

¹⁸ *A Nép*, 1925, no. 185, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Budapesti Hirlap*, 1925, no. 186, p. 9. ‘A hunoknak két ága közül (...) a feketee hunokkal szemben a fehér hunok voltak az intelligensebb elem amelynek kultúrája sokban a kínai kultúrán alapult.’

²⁰ *A Nép*, 1925, no. 185, p. 4. ‘A Niebfulungének vandálkirálya csinált Eteléből, ki minden idők legnagyobb uralkodója és hadvezére volt;’

²¹ *Előrs Szabadság*, 1933, no. 44, p. 2. ‘Thierry Attilájában nyoma sincsen annak az idéetlen árja nagyképűségnek és önimádatnak, amelynek századok óta Németország a legfőbb termő területe.’

²² *Budapesti Hirlap*, 1925, no. 186, p. 9, ‘ezt a németekkel szemben a komoly francia tudósok is elismerik.

²³ See e.g. *A Nép*, 1925, no. 199, pp. 5.

The Role of the Finnish-Hungarian Brotherhood

The newspaper narrative of the twenties around Turanism focused on the Finnish-Hungarian brotherhood. By that time the Finno-Ugric linguistic relationship had already been proven in linguistic circles, but the Turanist idea also supposed a biological relationship between the two ethnic groups. In this kinship the Finnish were pictured as the noble and cultured relatives of the Hungarians: *A Nép* referred literally to 'our cultured relatives, the Finnish and Estonians'.²⁴ The Estonians always came second in this conversation, and the discourse was dominated by emphasizing the Finnish connection.

The Finnish represented the same resistance against oppression which fuelled Hungary after the Treaty of Trianon. The *Budapesti Hirlap* drew parallels between 'the Finns' century-long heroic fight against the Swedes and the Russians' and the fight of the Hungarians against its neighbours.²⁵ If the Turanian faith did not exist, 'our Northern brothers would already have drowned in the Russian barbarism, and we in the German or Slavic sea', summarized the newspaper *Magyarország* in 1937.²⁶

This merging of culture and militarism put the Finno-Ugric people almost in a chivalric light. 'The Finno-Ugric people are equal brothers not only in their culture but also in their valiant military values', stated the *Budapesti Hirlap*.²⁷ Emphasizing 'Finno-Ugric heroism' fitted into the inter-war World War I narrative in which the cult of heroes was essential and overarching.²⁸ However, this relationship was not equal, as the Hungarians were described as the carriers of the common culture during the centuries when the Finnish nation had no state. The Hungarian was 'the bastion of the [Finnish] culture for 1000 years', summarized the *Budapesti Hirlap* in 1922.²⁹

The newspaper representation of Turanism was mostly only found in connection to reportage on events and international visits. This was the case in both 1924 and 1927 when congresses celebrating the Finno-Ugric relationship were organized, mostly staging cultural programmes, music, and literature. These congresses are mentioned by multiple names in the papers: 'Turanian Music Congress', 'Finno-Ugric Congress', and 'Turanian Congress'. The reason for this confusion is that the Finnish and the Hungarians seemed to have different ideas of what to expect from holding the meetings.

The Finns were not willing to extend the relationship to the Turks. One of the articles summarized the difference in the following way:

As the Turkish and Mongol youth studying in Budapest sent their fraternal greeting to the first congress, from the Hungarian side there would have been a willingness to extend the meeting [from a Finno-Ugric congress], to a Turanian congress'. However the North have not yet matured enough to accept the idea of Turanism.³⁰

²⁴ *A Nép*, 1925, no. 26, p. 12.

²⁵ *Budapesti Hirlap*, 1924, no. 69, p. 7, 'a finnek évszázados hősi küzdelmeit a svédek és oroszok ellen.'

²⁶ *Magyarország*, 1937, no. 242, p. 5. 'Ha ez a külön finn és magyar öntudat nem éltetett volna bennünket, északi testvéreink már régen belefulladtak volna az orosz barbárságba, mi magyarok pedig a német vagy a szláv tengerbe.'

²⁷ *Budapesti Hirlap*, 1924, no. 69, p. 7. 'A finn-ugor népek tehát nemcsak kultúrában, hanem hadi érényekben is méltó testvérei a vitéz nemzetnek.'

²⁸ *Budapesti Hirlap*, 1924, no. 69, p. 7; see Kocsis, 'Constructing a National Symbol?'

²⁹ *Budapesti Hirlap*, 1922, no. 273, p. 5. 'mely a kultúrának őre és védőbástyája volt egy évezreden át'

³⁰ *Kecskemeti Lapok*, 1924, no. 139, p. 1, 'Az első kongresszusra testvéri üdvözlötet küldöttek a budapesten tanuló török és tatár egyetemi ifjak is, úgy hogy magyar részről meglelt volna a hajlandóság a kongresszusnak még inkább a turáni népekkongresszusávávaló kibővítésére.[...] azonban északon nem érett még meg a turanizmus eszméje.'

Our Finn and Estonian brothers want to know only about Uralism, but not Turanism. Although they respect the valiant values of the Turkish, [...]for these Protestant, cultured Northern people the Turkish, Tatar, Chinese and Japanese are culturally and religiously distant.³¹

However, this was only the inter-war Hungarian representation of the Turanist idea. Turanism itself was born in Finland in the nineteenth century and had its own life in Finnish discourse.

The Attila Jubilee

Although the Hun-Hungarian brotherhood has a long tradition in Hungarian historiography, the Asian relationship started to come to the fore when newspapers began emphasizing Hun-Hungarian kinship and so putting it into the spotlight again. In 1930 an Indian professor, J. J. Modi, visited Hungary to give lectures about the Huns, their Asian origins, and wars. His lectures were well reported in the newspapers country-wide, and were visited by Governor Horthy. Horthy even decorated him after one of his talks earlier in 1925. Modi's research was warmly welcomed in Hungary because he treated the Hun-Hungarian kinship as fact. Therefore, everything he said about the Huns' time in Asia was understood as Hungarian ancestry.

Hun-Hungarian kinship was not the only reason which led the inter-war columnists to suppose a Turanian-Indian relationship. Some Hungarian Turanist activists, such as the collector Ferenc Zajthy, used the banal similarities between the Indian and Hungarian folk art as proof for a close relationship between the two groups.³²

Still, the Hun origin myth, especially the cult of Attila the Hun, had the most significant impact on the Asia-supporting Turanists. The main reason for reviving Attila's cult can also be found in the loss experienced after the Treaty of Trianon. This loss consisted of the loss of land, dominance, prestige, physical heritage, and the feeling of control. In response to this, by putting forward a glorious past, it was determined that the Hungarians had rights to the territory and dominance over the Carpathian Basin. Attila's empire was the foundation pillar of this dominance. As we learn from the newspapers, Attila had a larger empire than the Roman emperors or Alexander the Great, hence 'we can be proud to be his relatives' stated the *Budapesti Hirlap* in 1936.³³

The logic of this argumentation was as follows: if Attila was the greatest monarch ruling over two continents, and the Hungarian conqueror Árpád, who led his tribes to the Carpathian Basin, originated from the same tribe as Attila, then Árpád came to occupy Attila's heritage rightfully.³⁴ The conclusion of this argument would be that the claims of the Slavs and Romanians to the Hungarian territories were unjust since the Hungarians are the bearers of Hun heritage. All these explanations were supported by false historic, linguistic, and toponymic claims, cited narrative sources and chronicles, and treated the Hun-Hungarian ancestral relationship as fact.

By the 1930s the state was becoming more militarized and the revisionist attitude was also becoming more aggressive. The chivalry of the Finn brothers was no longer enough to hold onto — Attila's Asian heritage was a more powerful and compelling narrative. Although a statue of Attila had already been planned from 1925, the preparations for an Attila Jubilee

³¹ *Kecskeméti Lapok*, 1924, no. 139, p. 1. 'Finn és észt testvéreink csak az uralizmusról, de nem turanizmusról akarnak tudni. Bár nagyon becsülik a török nép vitézségét [...] épp oly idegen ezeknek a művelt, evangélikus északi népeknek a fajliag és vallásilag tőlük oly távol álló török tatár s még inkább a kínai és japán nép.'

³² See e.g. *8 Orai Ujsag*, 1934, no. 240, p. 4.

³³ *Budapesti Hirlap*, 1936, no. 33, p. 16.

³⁴ *A Nép*, 1925, no. 185, p. 7.

only began in the 1930s. The Jubilee was supposed to happen sometime between 1934 and 1938, most probably in 1935, and was conceived to celebrate the 1500th anniversary of Attila's enthronement. Activists campaigned for the event, focusing their efforts on Bálint Hóman, the culture minister at the time. It was planned as an international and touristic event, bringing together the Turanist nations and reframing the image of the Hungarians as the carriers of Attila's legacy. 'Celebrating the Attila Jubilee means informing the world that the Hun-Hungarian kinship is our incontestable truth', the newspaper *Budai Napló* stated, summarizing the aims of the Jubilee.³⁵ The purpose of the event was clear: 'This commemoration gives soul, strength, and courage'; the newspaper *Pesti Hírlap* referred to the post-Trianon despair of the Hungarians.³⁶

The National Attila Association was founded in 1935 with the aim of planning and creating an Attila World Fair and to create an Attila pantheon.³⁷ The pantheon would have been designed as a kurgan, and in its vaulted chamber, Attila's bronze statue would have stood in front of a marble peasant holding a crystal sword.³⁸ This vision of the pantheon is heavily loaded with symbols mixing Eastern barbarian archaeological heritage with the myths, originating in the chronicles, about Attila's sword ruling all four points of the compass.³⁹

The questions surrounding the Attila statue triggered local revisionism within the country. According to some plans, the statue should have stood in Budapest, on the hills of Buda, or in the middle of the Danube. The activists living next to the River Tisza, which was thought to be Attila's burial place due to an incorrect translation, were outraged on hearing these plans. 'Budapest is not entitled' the *Szentesi Napló*, the newspaper of the town where the town where Attila allegedly took his seat, stated straightforwardly.⁴⁰

Newspapers from the end of the thirties blamed economic problems for not having the Attila Jubilee. However, I suggest that there was a change of attitude by the government towards the mythological past during this time. In 1938 they spent enormous amounts of money on celebrating St Stephen's anniversary instead.

From Attila to St Stephen

There had already been attempts to connect barbarian heritage to the Christian past since the beginning of Turanist thinking.⁴¹ For example, some stated that the Asian Turanian groups preceded Judaism in monotheism.⁴² However, the most interesting connection between the Huns and Christianity also concerned the myth of Attila. The historical fact that Attila had not destroyed Rome was interpreted in a twisted way as evidence supporting Attila's Christian devotion: 'When Attila showed mercy to Rome, he founded Christianity for the second time.'⁴³

The discourse connected Attila's mercy towards Rome with the foundations of the Christian Hungarian Kingdom and St Stephen's coronation: 'Rome's answer to Attila's mercy for Christianity was to send the holy crown and Rome's blessing to St Stephen in order to create

³⁵ *Budai Napló*, 1934, no.1153 p. 1, 'Az Attila jubileumi ünneplésével a világnak tudomásul adjuk, hogy megdönthetetlen igazság [...]és szentiül hiszünk a hun-magyar azonosságban.'

³⁶ *Pesti Hírlap*, 1933, no. 18, p. 7, 'Lelket, erőt, bátorságot adó emlékezés ez,'

³⁷ See *Dunántúl*, 1935, no. 24, p. 3.

³⁸ *Függetlenség*, 1934, no. 291, p. 18.

³⁹ About the role of Attila's sword on inter-war Hungary see Kocsis, 'Constructing a National Symbol?'

⁴⁰ *Szentesi Napló*, 1938, no. 163, p. 3.

⁴¹ See Ablonczy, *Keletre, magyar!*

⁴² *A Nép*, 1925, 185 p. 7.

⁴³ *Függetlenség*, 1934, no. 219, p. 18. 'És amikor Rómának megkegyeltett, ezzel tulajdonképpen a kereszténységet alapozta meg másodszer.'

a Christian kingdom on Attila's legacy.'⁴⁴ Therefore, in this sense, what saved Hungary was Christianity:

It is possible that the third Turanian state, the Hungarian Kingdom, would have had a similar fate [to Attila's empire], if Géza [St Stephen's father] didn't get close to Christianity. [...] However, what was only a political consideration for Géza, was the recognition of the greatest truth for his son [King St Stephen].⁴⁵

However, not everyone thought that Turanism was compatible with the heritage of the Christian kingdom: 'But the Turanian spirit cannot triumph on the Attila's grave since it is a stranger to all the ideas of this nation, which still continues breathing in faithfully the fertile winds of the West to which St Stephen opened Hungary's windows first.'⁴⁶ It seems that this opposition caused the late thirties state leadership to decide to finance St Stephen's anniversary in place of the Attila Jubilee.

Inter-War Interpretations: Shift from Barbarism to Christian Country

In the following I will show how Turanism disappeared from mainstream narratives by the time of the St Stephen Anniversary, what this anniversary represented in contrast to the planned Attila Jubilee, and how these narratives were manifested in using the remains of the Székesfehérvár Basilica. The idea of the Anniversary was conceived by Arnold Marosi, the director of the museum in Székesfehérvár. He asked for help from Bálint Hóman, local MP and Minister of Culture, in 1932.⁴⁷ Hóman himself was a historian of the Middle Ages and the Member of Parliament for Székesfehérvár, therefore he supported the idea of a St Stephen Anniversary, and helped to design it for the governor.

Two pillars of nationalism emerged from the sources, Christianity and militarization, which integrated into the St Stephen Anniversary. The Christianity theme formed from the idea of unity and hope in the resurrection of the lost country. Ecclesial rituals connected religion to nationalism, as Christian Masses and the cult of religious relics, such as the relics of the Holy Right Hand of St Stephen, were often cited in connection with nationalist themes. The best example of this fusion is that St Stephen's Year was held together with the Eucharistic Congress, which also emphasized this link between nationalism and religion. These events were mentioned together ten times in the sources (with a further sixty-seven references to Christianity and another forty-eight to Catholicism).

Kocsis Fig. 1

Figure 8.1. References to Christianity. Figure by author.

⁴⁴ *Előrs Szabadság*, 1930, no.8 p. 7.

⁴⁵ *Nemzeti Ujság*, 1938, no. 117, p. 1, 'Valószínű, hogy a harmadik turániállamot, a magyarokét is elődeihez hasonló sors érte volna, ha [...] nem értette volna meg Géza fejedelemmel annak szükségességét, hogy szorosabb és bensőbb kapcsolatba lépjen a keresztény világgal és annak intézményeivel.[...] De ami Géza fejedelem részére csak politikai megfontolások által diktált lépés volt, volt, fia részére a legfőbb igazság felismerése volt.'

⁴⁶ *Ujság*, 1934, no. 271, p. 9. 'De a holt Attila sírján nem diadalmaskodhatik a turáni szellem, amely ennek a nemzetnek minden gondolatától idegen s amely híven szívja be tovább is a nyugati szellemnek azt a termékenyítő áramlatát, amely előtt először Szent István nyitotta ki Magyarország ablakait.'

⁴⁷ Székesfehérvár, Szent István Múzeum, L182, 3316.

In connection to the military theme, the previously discussed Eastern origins of Hungarians, and World War I, were recurring nodes in the textual analysis. Both the archetype of the independent Eastern warrior and the memory of World War I can be understood in the context of post-Trianon nationalism as proof of the power and military possibility of recreating the lost country. It also shows that although there are distinctions between the Eastern and Western models, they are not mutually exclusive. The relationship between World War I and archaeological heritage was not only rhetorical, but also practical, since veterans were employed on the Székesfehérvár excavations.

Kocsis Fig. 2

Figure 8.2. Military references. Figure by author.

Additionally, a military ritual established by Governor Miklós Horthy took place in Székesfehérvár in 1938. Horthy founded the Order of Vitéz, which is a word derived from the Hungarian equivalent of ‘valiant soldier’. At first, the title was given with a small piece of land to veteran soldiers of World War I and its admittance was based solely on military merit. Since Horthy was not a king, he was unable to bestow nobility, thus he replaced this with propaganda built around the Order of Vitéz.⁴⁸ During the St Stephen Anniversary, Béla Imrédy, the Prime Minister, was admitted to the Order alongside hundreds of men in the Ruin-Garden (discussed below).⁴⁹ The members of the Order were openly right wing and anti-Semitic. Connecting anti-Semitism to the preservation of the remains is a recurring theme in the analysis, which will be elaborated on later.

Politically two main themes framed the inter-war period and the other themes occurring in the analysed sources. These were revisionist ideas, and the personality cult built around Miklós Horthy and his politicians, such as the minister of culture Bálint Hóman.⁵⁰

Kocsis Fig. 3

Figure 8.3. Political references. Figure by author.

Revisionist ideas not only refer to revision of the modified borders, but also to the desire to gain back lost power, importance, and national dignity. They also resulted in an inner revisionist battle between Budapest, the capital city, and Székesfehérvár, since the royal remains were transported to Budapest before the war. The narrative of claiming back the remains confronted the narrative of the destruction which the remains suffered in Székesfehérvár. This local revisionist theme appeared twenty times in the sources.

The inter-war heritage management of Székesfehérvár was characterized by the work of Arnold Marosi, who was head of the museological life of the city. Marosi’s personal biography also impacted his political thoughts and professional work. The short-lived communist regime after World War I had removed him from his job at the museum. This experience caused a shift to the right in his political thinking and he identified himself with right-wing politics.⁵¹ His rhetoric is clearly evident in the analysis.

⁴⁸ See Naberhuis, ‘The Hungarian Vitéz Order’.

⁴⁹ Demeter, ‘A Romkert nagy napjai 1938-ban’, pp. 53–54.

⁵⁰ Although Hóman was not only a politician but also a historian publishing about Hun traditions, in the newspapers he was mentioned only in his political status, but not as an academic.

⁵¹ Buzinkay, *Kő se mutatja helyét*, p. 88.

Marosi convinced Bálint Hóman, who was Minister of Culture and the MP for the city, to give help to Székesfehérvár on the question of the revision of the royal tombs. Hóman managed to link Székesfehérvár into the plans of the St Stephen Year, as its political centre.⁵² The rhetorical emphasis was no longer put on the royal tombs, but on the importance of Székesfehérvár in historical politics, since it was the site of the first royal councils in the Middle Ages. This was the reason for holding the festive parliament in front of the former basilica, while the city of Esztergom was responsible for highlighting the medieval archaeological remains during the Anniversary.

Leadership was another topic explored in the newspaper coverage of the excavation. Miklós Horthy was the governor of a kingless kingdom after the war. Although he is controversial in historical interpretations, he is still a reference point for present-day right-wing supporters. He maintained an ideological and political relationship with Mussolini's fascist Italy and supported National Socialist Germany. He led Hungary to World War II and assisted in the deportation of Hungarian Jews.⁵³ One of the main pillars of his regime was building a personality cult focused on himself.

It is no exaggeration to state that the St Stephen's Year celebration was a tool used for building Horthy's personality cult, and that St Stephen was used as his alter-ego in written and visual narratives. An explicit confession can be seen in the texts, where the bishop of Veszprém mentions the direct relationship between the governor's seventieth birthday and the St Stephen's Year celebrations: 'Its aim is to perpetuate Governor Miklós Horthy's seventieth birthday and the double saint year.'⁵⁴ Not only was Horthy's name mentioned seventy-seven times in connection with Székesfehérvár, but he was also portrayed on the fresco of the newly built St Stephen mausoleum among the Hungarian kings and revolutionary leaders.

The myth of the 'strong leader' was also connected to revisionism and its earlier form was modified after World War I. The narrative of unity in the Carpathian Basin led by St Stephen, referred to uniting different ethnic groups under a strong leader. That also can be considered as a revisionist idea.

The post-Trianon revisionist narratives provided ideological legitimations for the lost territory. These were based on the supposed continuity between the Middle Ages and the inter-war Hungarians. For this reason, the thousand-year-old past was emphasized in the sources, occurring fifty times. This primordialist idea stands in contradiction to the ethno-symbolic concept of nation since the medieval ethnic core cannot be understood as equal to the modern nation. Nonetheless, this idea of continuity also provided the belief in a better future and fuelled the resurrection narrative. According to this, Hungary was a martyr expecting to be resurrected gloriously and to recover its old shine.

The Narratives in Space: From Mausoleum to Ruin-Garden

The St Stephen's Year commemorations transformed not only the site of the basilica, but also the urban space of Székesfehérvár. Stylistically the city moved from the Habsburgian baroque to a combination of 1930s monumental and neo-roman architecture. New buildings were constructed all over the city, which were pictured together with the ruins and medieval remains. The most important of these buildings was the Ottokár Prohászka memorial church built in 1933, which appeared on postcards several times in connection with the ruins. There was also

⁵² Buzinkay, *Kő se mutatja helyét*, p. 91.

⁵³ See Ungváry 2016.

⁵⁴ *Esti Kurir*, 1938, no. 250, p. 5, 'célja Horthy Miklós kormányzó 70. születésnapjának ésa kettős szentévének megörökítése'

a park named after Prohászka right next to the excavation sites. Ottokár Prohászka was an influential and charismatic bishop of Székesfehérvár, who spread anti-Semitic publications all over the country. Therefore, he is considered one of the ideological instigators of the Hungarian Holocaust.⁵⁵

The World War I memorial dedicated to the ‘fallen heroes’ carved into a former baroque church also belonged to the 1930s memorialscape of inner city Székesfehérvár.⁵⁶ This attempt emphasizes the previously mentioned martyr narrative of the land which was born alongside the cult of the World War I heroes. There was a direct connection between the St Stephen commemorations and memories of World War I, since the new statue of St Stephen unveiled during the Anniversary was the work of Ferenc Sidló, who was the most well-known sculptor of World War I memorials in Hungary. The discourse surrounding the inauguration of the St Stephen statue also contained a distinctly military narrative. The sources mentioned not only the warrior-like posture of the king, but also referred to the abovementioned Turanism and Eastern origins:

Here on the horse the warrior missionary stands who is ready to fight for the faith and for the state offered for God as a man and a hero. This picture, which the artist created of St Stephen, is based on the notion of the Hungarian of Turan.⁵⁷

Next to the statue stood the openly revisionist National Flag memorial. The military theme continued in other visual discourses, such as the seccos (wall paintings done on dried plaster) decorating the town hall made by Vilmos Aba-Novák, who painted the seccos of St Stephen’s mausoleum in the Ruin-Garden as well. The monumental mural in the town hall pictured the announcement of the new members of the Order of Vitéz by Horthy and other recognizable inter-war politicians dressed in Hungarian national dress above the coat of arms symbolizing the lost territories and below the glorious Holy Right Hand and World War I heroes in battles, while Christ’s cross is falling down. These murals encompass the Horthy cult, imagined continuity, militarization, the saviour of Christianity, and resurrection themes, therefore they can be considered a useful summary of the discourses around St Stephen’s year in Székesfehérvár.

Kocsis Fig. 4

Figure 8.4. Mural depicting the new members of the Order of Vitéz by Vilmos Aba-Novák in the town hall in Székesfehérvár. Photo by author. 2017.

By the year of the St Stephen Anniversary, the reconstruction of the excavation site had finished. This was the birth of the notion of the Ruin-Garden. Since there were no significant wall remains of the former basilica and the excavation site was built-in, the possibilities for reconstruction were limited. As a solution, a neo-Roman L-shaped building with arcades was constructed in the eastern end of the former basilica. It hosted the lapidarium and the St Stephen mausoleum. Construction of the Ruin-Garden was hurried in order for it to be finished by the Anniversary. Because of these time constraints, it is possible to compare the differing levels of richness of detail and this can reveal which parts of the Ruin-Garden were most important to the organizers of the Anniversary.

The name ‘Ruin-Garden’ suggested a wilful leaving visible of the destruction of the basilica, and created a new way of commemorating the dead kings. In fact, it made them invisible and

⁵⁵ Gyurgyák, *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon*, pp. 295–301.

⁵⁶ For memorialscape see Carr, ‘Examining the Memorialscape of Occupation and Liberation’.

⁵⁷ Album2, p. 23.

reduced the possibility of remembering them. Although the pre-war discourse supported a Hungarian ‘Pantheon’ or ‘Westminster Abbey’, the inter-war Ruin-Garden did not reflect this notion, since the locations of the royal tombs were only signified in a subtle, minimalist way without any inscriptions. Not only the location of tombs, but also the whole structure of the Ruin-Garden is barely understandable. The structure of the construction can only be followed from a bird’s-eye view, which is not possible for visitors. The garden could give an impressive view only from one angle which became the typical view pictured on photos and postcards.

Kocsis Fig. 5

Figure 8.5. Ruin-Garden. Photo by author.2017.

Kocsis Fig. 6.

Figure 8.6. The regular angle in 1938. Fortepan / Adelhardt Márta. No. 212338. Reproduced with permission.

Misuse of the human remains did not change with the birth of the Ruin-Garden. Székesfehérvár did not get back the remains of King Béla III and his wife, only their marble coffins and even these were placed into the new cathedral rather than the Ruin-Garden. However, all the other bones discovered during the excavations of the basilica were put into a common ossuary in the eastern end of the Ruin-Garden.

The excavation pictures from the 1980s depict the state of the inter-war ossuary during the discovery. It can be seen that the placement of the royal bones neglected ‘piety’ similarly to their treatment in the pre-war period.⁵⁸ The bones were messy, lacking labels, thrown on top of each other in boxes standing in water.

Kocsis Fig. 7

Figure 8.7. The ossuary discovered in 1984. Budapest, Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, MNM.239.XVI/1985. Reproduced with permission.

Kocsis Fig. 8

Figure 8.8. The ossuary discovered in 1984. Budapest, Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, MNM.239.XVI/1985. Reproduced with permission.

From the outside, the ossuary invoked the Memorial Stone of the Unknown Soldier standing on the Heroes’ Square in Budapest. It also made a connection between the inter-war World War I commemorations and St Stephen’s Anniversary.

Kocsis Fig. 9

Figure 8.9. The memorial stone of the Unknown Heroes. Zempléni Múzeum. 0114736. Reproduced with permission.

⁵⁸ See Kocsis, ‘Hungarian nation-building and the use of medieval archaeology.’

Kocsis Fig. 10

Figure 8.10. The crypt. No. OSZK 0189550. Reproduced with permission.

In the most elaborate part of the St Stephen's mausoleum stands the sarcophagus, which was rediscovered in the National Museum and assigned to St Stephen in the inter-war period. It is clear from the focal points of the Ruin-Garden that the emphasis was only on St Stephen's mausoleum created for his cenotaph, and not on the remains of the basilica or the actual bones found there.

The mausoleum is fully decorated by a monumental mural painted by Vilmos Aba-Novák. These frescos were incorporated into the thematic analysis made on visual narratives surrounding the medieval remains. The main narratives are the long continuity of the Hungarian past, the equality of Horthy and the Hungarian kings, as well as revisionism.

Kocsis Fig. 11

Figure 8.11. The mausoleum. Photo by author. 2017.

Kocsis Fig. 12

Figure 8.12. Hungarian kings and the three Hungarian governors, Hunyadi, Kossuth, and Horthy. Pre-war coat of arms. Photo by author. 2017.

Kocsis Fig. 13

Figure 8.13. Horthy (right), Kossuth (left) in front of the coat of arms of the lost territories. Photo by author. 2017.

The last theme connected to the use of space at the excavation site is anti-Semitism. The Neolog Synagogue stood behind the Ruin-Garden. The new building of the Ruin-Garden was originally planned to fit with the view of the synagogue, which can be seen by its proportions and arrangement.

Kocsis Fig. 14

Figure 8.14. Ruin-Garden and the synagogue in 1941. Fortepan / Lissák Tivadar. No. 72425
Reproduced with permission.

Nevertheless, a discourse started in the newspapers supported by the mayor for the removal of the towers of the synagogue:

The towers of the synagogue in Székesfehérvár will be demolished, because the church lies next to the royal tombs. After the excavations [...] the synagogue bothered the righthwing society of Székesfehérvár for a long time. Three years ago, the mayor ordered the community to deconstruct the towers.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ *Népszava*, 1941, no. 237, p. 9. 'A hatóság lebontatja a székesfehérvári zsinagóga tornyait, mert a templom a királysírok közelében fekszik. A székesfehérvári ásatások után [...] zsinagóga régóta szemet szúrt Székesfehérvár jobboldali társadalmának. Három évvel ezelőtt a polgármester fölhívta a zsidó hitközséget, hogy a templomtornyokat bontassa le'

As a result of this debate, by 1941 the synagogue had been demolished based on the anti-Semitic narrative that developed, the reasons put forward covered architectural and aesthetic explanations.

Kocsis Fig. 15

Figure 8.15. Memorial stone of the synagogue in front of the Ruin-Garden. Photo by author. 2017.

Conclusions

The Székesfehérvár excavation site was rediscovered due to the St Stephen's Year celebration. The results of this analysis have shown that the primary purpose of this was as a propaganda event in 1938 to support Governor Miklós Horthy's power. The memory of St Stephen and the celebration of the figure of Governor Horthy melted together. Christian and military rituals took place on the site of the basilica emphasizing national integration. In the visual narratives, the revisionist themes claiming the lost territories back were obvious and emphasized. The narrative around the St Stephen Anniversary created and maintained the myth of a strong and authoritative leader who could unify the nations of the Carpathian Basin.

This stood in contrast to the model of the planned Attila Jubilee, which had initially been organized. Although Attila the Hun was also a unifying symbol, he was used as an expression of brotherhood rather than dominance in the Turanist ideology. The Turanist ideology claimed that the Turanist nations, which in its broadest definition included the Hungarians, Finnish, Estonians, Bulgarians, Turkish, Mongolians, Japanese, some Indian groups, and even the Polish, all had the same Inner Asian origin. Attila and the Huns symbolized the worldwide spread of these nations. Hungarian Turanism also claimed Hungarian-Hun brotherhood which named the Hungarians the heirs of Attila's empire, which therefore put them in an important hierarchical position.

As Hungary's relationships with fascist Italy and Germany grew stronger, the Christian Middle Ages became a better heritage reference for the inter-war Hungarian state than the barbarian past. I suggest this is why the planned Attila Jubilee in 1935 was cancelled in favour of St Stephen's Anniversary in 1938.

Turanism never really died out, rather its propaganda shifted focus from around Horthy's culture to alternative narratives. Although these Western and Eastern models are two distinct forms of nationalist myths, with different intended messages, they are not mutually exclusive, and borrow elements from each other, such as mixing pagan elements whilst still emphasizing Christianity.

I used the two anniversary events to exemplify the contrast between the two opposing views of Hungarian nationalism during the inter-war period. The memory politics had an attempt to manoeuvre both *lieux de mémoire*, trying to incorporate them into its propaganda, despite the two models being controversial, carrying different messages about past and future. To fully prove my hypothesis about the cancellation of the Attila Jubilee, media discourse analyses might not be an adequate method, and it requires further archive research to connect the members of the political establishment to the organizers and initiators of the commemorations. However, the discourse analysis clearly shows the two distinct discourses articulated around the two studied anniversaries.

Extreme nationalism today in Hungary still uses the binary opposition of East and West, and abuses the barbarian heritage of the Carpathian Basin for claiming territorial rights and local dominance in the region. The current political climate also supports an Eastern political

opening, and emphasizes relationships with Turkey, Russia, and China instead of strengthening the bond with the European Union. Therefore, the Turanist idea slowly slips back into the mainstream nationalist thinking with one key difference to the inter-war version. When the brotherhood with Turkey or Inner Asia is emphasized in the discourse, the Northern European region is missing from the narrative.

The Turanist idea now stands in contrast to linguistic understanding of the Finno-Ugric relationships of Hungary. Since the Finno-Ugric theory proving the linguistic similarities between the Hungarian and Finnish languages has become scientifically accepted, it became demonized in the eyes of the Turanist supporters emphasizing the Turkish and Inner Asian brotherhood. They are reviving the late nineteenth-century–early twentieth-century origin debate, not progressing with the professionalism of linguistics, anthropology, and archaeology, forgetting the distinction between ethnicity, language, and culture. This way, although the roots of the Turanist idea could be found in the Finnish Finnomania,⁶⁰ Finland and Estonia are excluded from the Turanism of the present extremist right-wing nationalism in Hungary. The present chapter aimed to show that the roots and patterns of abusing the national origin myths can be found in the late nineteenth century and inter-war political discourses.

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