

The Myth of Scythian Origin and the Cult of Attila in the Nineteenth Century

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Let me begin my reflections with some citations from the work of István Horvát (1784–1846).

The Hungarians, the Cumans, the Iassians, the Horseheads [i.e. the Székely=Seklers], the Palócz, the Parthians have always been a nation of one and the same language, like they are today. But they haven't been always ruled by the same ruler. In any case, they are undeniably remains of the ancient Scythians. It is not true, consequently, that the meaning of the name Scythian was uncertain in ancient times, as stated by Herodotus and other Greek writers [...]. All these names obviously cannot be understood on the basis of the work of Herodotus or other Greek writers without true knowledge of Hungarian history [...].

Horvát then offers a summary of the “history of the Scythian nation.” They were, according to his narrative, originally Chamites, inhabitants of Africa, builders of the pyramids, and sun-worshippers. They migrated northward, to the shores of the Black Sea, and settled in Thracia, thereby becoming European Scythians. Some of them, however, returned to the work in the service of the Egyptian pharaohs: “they became the Parthian Scythians, also named Pelasgians or Philistean,” and they conquered Asia from the direction of Syria, arriving to Cilicia, Kappadocia, Armenia, and Persia. When King David sought refuge among the Parthians, he learned there how to shoot arrows, since it was the Parthians who were the first masters of this art of war, especially that of shooting backwards on horseback. (This is also supported by the etymology of the tribal name of the Iassians: *Jász- I-jász*.) The Jews then adopted many Parthian customs, as well as several loanwords. “The Holy Script is overflowing with old Hungarian names and old Hungarian orthography [...] My dear compatriots, who read the Bible day and night! How could you have failed to notice this for so many centuries?” And the story continues: Herodes was a Parthian Scythian, as was the Apostle Saint Paul, “principal pillar and author of the first holy Christian mother church [...]” Other branches of the Scythians/Hungarians who had remained in

Africa and Arabia under the leadership of the Lybian (and Magyar) Hercules conquered Greece; the Iassians (Jazygians) were at the origin of the Greek dances (*saltus ionicus*) and their metric verse. In Greece they spoke Greek and when the Pelasgians went to Italy they spoke Latin; “the history of the Argonauts was a Hungarian War; just like the Iliad, which was written by Homer among the Iassians [...]” Alexander the Great and Hannibal were Scythians as well. As for the Huns, however, the accepted view, according to which the Hungarians are simply their descendants, is wrong: the Huns were in fact Hungarians, i.e. Cumans (*Hun = Chun = Kún*). According to Horvát, “Attila was born directly of the Hungarian nation.”¹

The author of these contentions was not a dilettante antiquarian but one of the most highly esteemed medievalists of the first half of the nineteenth century, *custos* of the Széchényi Library (the would-be Hungarian National Library) from 1812 to his death, friend and teacher of many eminent intellectuals of the Hungarian Reform Age (such as Ferenc Kazinczy, Ferenc Toldy, József Eötvös, Mihály Horváth), one of the founding fathers of modern Hungarian historiography, professor of genealogy, codicology, sphragistics and heraldics (pic. 1). His learned monograph on “The well-rooted ancient noble families of Hungary” (*Magyar ország gyökeres régi nemzetségeiről*, 1821) is a respected reading among students of history and genealogy to this day—its pioneering critical merits have been celebrated by the representatives of the emerging craft of archival history in Hungary.² The above quotations were from his subsequent opus (*Rajzolatok a magyar nemzet legrégibb történetéből*—“Sketches from the most ancient period of the history of the Hungarian nation,” published in 1825), which was intended to be “a critical history of the Hungarian nation, beginning a few hundred years before Abraham, and continuing through the Holy Scriptures, the Greek and Roman

1 István Horvát, *Rajzolatok a magyar nemzet legrégibb történeteiből* (Sketches from the most ancient period of the history of the Hungarian nation) (Pest, 1825), 7, 11, 17, 19, 21, 24, 33.

2 On the oeuvre of István Horvát see Bertalan Vass, *Horvát István életrajza* (The biography of István Horvát) (Budapest, 1895); Péter Gunst, *A magyar történetírás története* (History of Hungarian historiography) (Debrecen, 2000), 174–176; there is an unpublished dissertation on him by István Soós entitled *Horvát István és a történelmi segédtudományok* (István Horvát and the historical auxiliary sciences), defended in Budapest, 1994; Péter Dávidházi, *Egy nemzeti tudomány születése: Toldy Ferenc és a magyar irodalomtörténet* (The birth of a national scholarly discipline: Ferenc Toldy and the history of Hungarian literature) (Budapest, 2004), 408–468; on Horváth's merits as an archivist, *ibid.*, esp. 410.



1. István Horvát—"custos of the Széchenyi National Library".

classics, the Armenians, Syrian, Arabian and Persian writers, and the subsequent centuries, up to the time of Árpád."³

He stresses in his introduction that while his explanations may seem surprising, even "crazy," they were founded upon the careful study of historical documents.

I read almost all the old French, Italian, Greek, German and Russian authors [...]. I discovered nearly 350 manuscripts on Hungarian history in foreign libraries, hidden there without anybody reading them [...] It is no exaggeration on my part to declare openly that I have read or at least browsed through three-hundred-thousand charters, Hungarian and foreign [...]. I have studied Roman Law, the Frankish Capitularies and the *Barbarorum Leges* [...].⁴

³ Horvát, *Rajzolatok*, 6.

⁴ Horvát, *Rajzolatok*, 2.

The fantastic reasoning following this introduction is indeed underpinned by a disturbingly broad array of erudite references and streams of linguistic etymologies. In fact the whole conceptual design of the work is methodologically related to his previous work. *Rajzolatok* is another, broader exercise in the historical genealogy, this time taking not Hungarian nobility, but the broader unit of the Hungarian tribes and the whole “noble” Hungarian nation as its subject. He very soon published a similar, more detailed enquiry concentrating on one of the tribes of Magyars, the Iassians (1829).⁵ As he describes in another study entitled “On the Hungarian word *kaján* from the Book of Genesis” (also published in 1829), he is fully convinced, “not because of blind national feeling or some boundless fantasizing, but specifically because of the strict regulations of the Science of Interpretation that in the Book of Genesis Moses described the Creation of the Hungarian Nation; that the Greek and Roman writers, like Moses, assert that the first men were Hungarian.”⁶ One may wonder if he really thought that Adam spoke Hungarian, but a letter written by him to Ferdinand Villax, Abbot of Zirc, in 1827 suggests that he did: “I am more and more of the conviction, never imagined before, that when he created the first man God Almighty created a Hungarian [...]. The fact that our father Adam was a Hungarian is as true as the fact that Troy, Carthage, and Numantzia were once cities [...].”⁷

Though it would be misleading to suggest that everyone accepted Horvát’s absurd reasoning,⁸ it is nonetheless worth mentioning that his work, though spectacularly eccentric, was supported by his use of a disturbingly rich array of modern tools of scholarship, and this put his critics in an awkward situation. Some of his contemporaries actually shared similar views on the origin of the Hungarians, like Horvát’s friend and colleague, György Fejér (1766–1851), director of the University Library and publisher of the first Hungarian edition of medieval Latin charters and documents, the *Codex Diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis*.⁹ It may well have been pre-

5 István Horvát, *Jászok* (The Iassians) (Pest, 1829).

6 István Horvát, “A Kaján magyar szóról, A Teremtés Könyvéből” (On the Hungarian word *kaján* from the Book of Genesis), *Muzárium* [previously: *Élet és Irodalom*], no. 4 (1829), 329.

7 Letter of István Horvát to Ferdinand Villax, cited by Vass, *Horvát István*, 381–82. I must thank Péter Dávidházi for calling my attention to this passage.

8 Some leading poets of the age, such as Ferenc Kölcsey, looked down on him; others, like József Eötvös only praised his “burning love of the fatherland”—cf. Dávidházi, *Egy nemzeti tudomány születése*, 453.

9 Georgius Fejér, *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis*, 43 vols. (Buda, 1829–1844); on his friendship and subsequently his debates with Horvát, see János Zsidi, *Fejér*

cisely the recently discovered richness of archival resources and new historical source editions that overwhelmed the new representatives of the emerging craft of archival history and gave rise, in the first instance, to tremendous confusion.

In this study I first provide a brief prehistory of the archaic myths of origin of the Hungarians, paying special attention to notions of Scythian ancestry and the cult of Attila. I then offer a precise characterization of how the early nineteenth-century resurgence of these myths and their impact upon the emerging academic disciplines of the humanities—linguistics, orientalism, archaeology, ethnography—should be assessed.

The assertion of the identity of the Huns and Hungarians,¹⁰ supported both by the similarity of their names (*hunni*—*hungari*) and the similar terror they caused in the whole of western Christendom with their devastating nomadic fighting techniques (also labeled Scythian or associated with the Avars), was first made by ninth-tenth century European chronicle writers.¹¹ It is unlikely that this view was shared by contemporary Hungarians, and we ignore when precisely this idea has been adopted. In the eleventh century there is cursory mention in German sources of the so-called “sword of Attila,” which the mother of the Hungarian king, Solomon would have given as a present in 1063 to Otto of Nordheim, Duke of Bavaria, as a compensation for his military support, but the attribution to Attila does not seem to have origi-

György (Budapest, 1936), 38–41.

10 Broad discussions of this theme in which various theories are taken into account: Bálint Hóman, *A magyar hún-hagyomány és hún-monda* (The Hun tradition and the Hun legend of the Hungarians) (Budapest, 1925); Sándor Eckhardt, “Attila a mondában” (Attila in the legends), in *Attila és hunjai*, ed. Gyula Németh (Budapest, 1940), 143–216; Ernst Cordt, *Attila—flagellum Dei, Etzel, Atli: Zur Darstellung des Hunnenkönigs in Sage und Chronistik*, Quaderni dell'Istituto di Filologia Germanica (Trieste, 1984); Franz F. Bäuml and Mariana D. Birnbaum, eds., *Attila: The Man and His Image* (Budapest, 1993); Martyn Rady, “Recollecting Attila: Some Medieval Hungarian Images and Their Antecedents,” *Central Europe* 1 (2003): 5–17; Edina Bozoky, “La représentation idéale d'Attila et de son royaume dans l'historiographie médiévale de Hongrie,” in *Royautes imaginaires (XIIe–XVIe siècles)*, ed. Anne-Hélène Alliot, Gilles Lecuppre, and Lydwine Scordia (Turnhout, 2005), 19–31.

11 The earliest sources have been most recently critically assembled and examined by Péter Kulcsár, “A magyar ősmonda Anonymus előtt” (The Hungarian ethnogenetic myth before Anonymus), *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények*, 91–92 (1987–1988): 523–545; cf. András Róna Tas, *Hungarians and Europe in the Early Middle Ages: An Introduction to Early Hungarian History* (Budapest and New York, 1999).

nated in Hungary.¹² The Hun-Hungarian identification resurfaces in the chronicle of Godfrey of Viterbo in 1185,¹³ and we find the first Hungarian historical account of this kinship in the *Gesta Hungarorum* written by Anonymus, the notary of King Béla, a certain *P. dictus magister*, most probably at the end of the twelfth century.¹⁴ According to his account, the origins of the Hungarians lie in Scythia, among the peoples of Gog and Magog. He recounts how, “from the royal line of the Magyars, the most renowned and mighty king Attila descended,” how Attila entered Pannonia “with a mighty force,” and how he constructed a royal residence in Budavár, called “Ecilburg” by medieval German inhabitants.¹⁵ He asserted that Árpád was a direct descendant of Attila and the Hungarians had only “taken back” the Carpathian Basin as their lawful heritage.¹⁶

The notion of the identity of the Huns and the Hungarians was developed into a full-fledged mythology in the chronicle written by Simon of Kéza (1282–1285), a cleric in the court of King Ladislas IV (the Cuman), who was the son of a Cuman woman named Elisabeth, wife of King Stephen V.¹⁷ Simon’s favorable portrayal of the Huns bears the imprint of a specific historical experience: Hungary had a renewed direct encounter with the warriors from the east during the Mongolian raids in 1241, after which they ab-

12 The reference comes from the chronicle of Lambert of Hersfeld (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Series Scriptorum*, 5:185), and the attribution of this sword to Attila must have been the invention of the chronicle writer, as demonstrated by György Györffy, *Kronikáink és a magyar őstörténet* (Our chronicles and Hungarian prehistory) (Budapest, 1948), 128–129; cf. Zoltán Tóth, *Attila’s Schwert* (Budapest, 1930); Kulcsár, “A magyar ősmonda,” 540–541.

13 Godfrey of Viterbo, *Memoria seculorum*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Series Scriptorum*, 22:102.

14 *Anonymi Bele regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum* / Anonymus, Notary of King Béla, *The Deeds of the Hungarians*, ed., trans., annot., Martin Rady and László Veszprémy; *Magistri Rogerii Epistola in miserabile carmen super destructione regni Hungarie per Tartaros facta* / Master Roger, *Epistle to the Sorrowful Lament upon the Destruction of the Kingdom of Hungary by the Tatars*, trans., annot., János M. Bak and Martin Rady, Central European Medieval Texts 5 (Budapest and New York, 2010). Henceforth: *Anonymus and Master Roger*.

15 *Anonymus and Master Roger*, 6–9; on the sources of Anonymus, see Gyula Kristó, “Az Exordia Scythica, Regino és a magyar krónikák” (Exordia Scythica, Regino and the Hungarian chronicles), *Filológiai Közlemény* 16 (1970): 106–115.

16 *Anonymus and Master Roger*, 16–17, 22–23, 26–27, 32–37, 40–41, 52–53, 72–73, 100–103, 106–109.

17 *Simonis de Kéza Gesta Hungarorum* / Simon of Kéza, *The Deeds of the Hungarians*, ed. László Veszprémy and Frank Schaer, Central European Medieval Texts 1 (Budapest, 1999); János Horváth, jr., “A hun történet és szerzője” (The Hun history and its author), *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 67 (1963): 446–476.

sorbed the nomadic people of the Cumans, former enemies, who fled from the ranks of the Tartars and became allies of the Hungarians. The court of Ladislav IV was the birthplace of an identity of “proud barbarians” who scorned the “effeminate” chivalric and courtly manners of the West.¹⁸

The narrative begins with a refutation of the alleged demonic origin of the Huns as recounted in the chronicles of Orosius and Jordanes, according to which the ancestors of the Huns were the brood of witches and demons living in the marshlands of Meotis.¹⁹ Simon of Kéza links the Huns and the Hungarians to the biblical narrative instead: they allegedly are the descendants of Hunor and Magor, the sons of Nimrod, builder of the Tower of Babel. In pursuit of a miraculous stag, they wandered from the Far East to Scythia and the marshlands of Meotis, from where they later migrated to their future home, Pannonia.

The history of Attila is also embellished by Simon of Kéza. In line with thirteenth-century political theories he offers an explanation of the origin of social difference and the status of the serfs; he describes how the democratic society of the Huns elected Attila as their leader,²⁰ and how Attila built his kingdom after crossing the Danube and defeating the Lombard king, Marcinus. Simon offers a less terrifying image of Attila than the depiction based on the description by Priscus Rhethor (according to which he was short, had dark skin, a broad chest, small, shifty eyes, and a proud gait).²¹ Simon gives him a long, dignified beard and praises him as the ideal king, possessing the finest royal merits and a well-tempered boldness. He is shrewd and alert in battle, very strong, magnanimous, and generous; he surrounds himself with imperial luxury: he has a tent adorned with golden stripes and supported by golden poles. His coat of arms represents the Turul, the mythical bird of the Hungarians. The account includes his military exploits, such as the battle of Catalaunum or the destruction of Aquileia, his meeting with Pope Leo I, his unexpected death, and the dismemberment of his empire because of discord

18 Gábor Klaniczay, “Everyday Life and the Elites in the Later Middle Ages: The Civilised and the Barbarian,” in *The Medieval World*, ed. Peter Linehan and Janet L. Nelson (London and New York, 2001), 671–690, esp. 679–680; Nóra Berend, *At the Gates of Christendom: Jews, Muslims and “Pagans” in Medieval Hungary, c. 1000–c.1300* (Cambridge, 2001) 200–207.

19 Jordanes, *Getica*, XXIV, c. 121–128; cf. Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, trans. C. Mierow (Princeton, 1908).

20 Jenő Szűcs, *Theoretical Elements in Master Simon of Kéza’s Gesta Hungarorum (1282–1285 a.d.)* (Budapest, 1975), reprinted in *Simonis de Kéza Gesta Hungarorum*, xxix–cii.

21 We know Priscus’s description from Jordanes, *Getica*, XXXV, c. 182.

between his sons.²² This narrative of Attila became an obligatory introductory part of subsequent medieval Hungarian chronicles, such as the fourteenth-century *Chronicon Pictum*,²³ and it remains part of Hungarian historical imagery to this day.

The Hun-Hungarian history was narrated in detail and supplemented with further historical details by the *Chronica Hungarorum* of János Thuróczi (1488), who sees in Attila (pic. 2) a glamorous forebear and a model for King Mathias Corvinus (1458–1490).²⁴ The printed chronicle of Thuróczi was the first historical narrative to propagate actively and effectively the self-conscious reinterpretation of the epithet according to which Attila had been the “scourge of God” (*flagellum Dei*), a characterization found as early as the chronicle of Simon of Kéza. The Thuróczi chronicle suggested rather that his destructive ravages were a due punishment for the sins of the Late Roman world. King Mathias flirted with the idea of presenting himself as a successor to Attila.²⁵ In 1465, as part of a carefully staged appearance, the humanist poet Janus Pannonius, who had been sent as an envoy of Mathias to Pope Paul II, presented himself in the name of the Hungarian ruler as an emissary of the heir not only to the holy rulers (Saint Stephen, Saint Ladislás) of Hungary, but also the “mighty king Attila,” who had spared Rome from devastation because he listened to Pope Leo.²⁶ In 1486 Mathias commissioned the Italian humanist Antonio Bonfini to devote particular attention to the exploits of the Huns in his *Rerum Ungaricarum decades* (1488–1496). Bonfini indeed enriched the previous accounts with copious borrowings from the Scythian accounts of Herodotus. He gave a more detailed history of the

22 *Simonis de Kéza Gesta Hungarorum*, 4–77. The *Turul* is a kind of falcon (*falco rusticolus altaicus*)—probably a totem of the Árpád clan. Anonymus describes the mythical-divine ancestry of the father of Árpád, Álmos, by the dream of his mother Emese, in which she was impregnated by this bird—cf. *Anonymus and Master Roger*, 12–15.

23 *Chronici hungarici compositio saeculi XIV*, ed. Alexander Domanovszky, in *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum tempore ducum regumque stirpis Arpadianae gestarum*, ed. Emericus Szentpétery (Budapest, 1938; repr. Budapest, 1999), 1:217–505, esp. 252–283.

24 Johannes de Thurocz, *Chronica Hungarorum*, ed. Imre Galántai and Gyula Kristó (Budapest, 1985), 20–59; cf. Marianna D. Birnbaum, “Attila’s Renaissance in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” in *Attila*, ed. Bäuml and Birnbaum, 82–96.

25 Johannes de Thurocz, *Chronica Hungarorum*, 45–47, Marianna D. Birnbaum, “Matthias, the ‘flagellum dei’ of the Renaissance,” in *The Orb and the Pen: Janus Pannonius, Matthias Corvinus and the Buda Court* (Budapest, 1996), 121–129.

26 László Szörényi, “Attila strumento di diplomazia—Janus Pannonius ambasciatore di Matia a Roma,” *Nuova Corvina, Rivista di Italianistica*, no. 20 (2008), 16–29.



2. Portrait of Attila in János Thuróczi *Chronica Hungarorum*, Augsburg, 1488, p. 14a.

Huns and Attila and he also added the Avars to the Huns as ancestors of the Hungarians and predecessors in the conquest of the Carpathian Basin.²⁷

²⁷ Antonius de Bonfinis, *Rerum Ungaricarum Decades*, ed. Imre Főgel, Béla Iványi, and László Juhász (Leipzig, 1936), 1:4–156; on Bonfini's Attila-image, see György Szabados, *A magyar történelem kezdeteiről: Az előidő-szemlélet hangsúlyváltásai a XV–XVIII. században* (On the beginnings of Hungarian history: The changes of emphases in the views on pre-history) (Budapest, 2006), 48–66.

A third humanist historian working for Mathias, Pietro Ransano, also included Attila in his *Epithoma Rerum Hungaricarum* (1490), though unlike Bonfini he adhered to the negative image of the Hun ruler persistent in medieval historiography.²⁸ This suggests that the Hungarian appropriation of the image of Attila could have been received in an ambivalent manner by contemporaries. It was quickly exploited by the enemies of King Mathias: the Italian humanist, Callimachus Experiens (Filippo Buonaccorsi), secretary and chancellor of Casimir IV, King of Poland, wrote a political pamphlet against Mathias entitled *Attila* (1488–1489).²⁹ The renewal of interest in this ambivalent ruler was also expressed by a new, romance-like biography published in Venice in 1502 as an appendix to an edition of Plutarch: *Attilae Vita per Iuvenum Celium Calanum Dalmatam edita*.³⁰

In the early modern times the Scythian self-consciousness is increasingly sketched in the tinges of the Noble Savage: valorous and honest, despite his unpolished manners, hostile to the overly elaborate fineries and courtesies of the decadent West, but staunchly defending the values of Christian civilization from the aggression of the barbarians and despots of the East (in the Middle Ages the Pechenegs, the Cumans, and the Tartars; in the early modern times the Ottomans). The refashioned narrative of Scythian and Hun origins and Attila's deeds later had a key role in the further development of the narrative of the *antemurale* and the *protecting shield* of Christianity.³¹ The impressive series of these early modern Neo-Latin and Hungarian literary and historical works begins with the *Hungaria et Athila* by Nicolaus Olahus

28 Petrus Ransanus, *Epithoma Rerum Hungaricarum*, ed. Péter Kulcsár (Budapest, 1977), 84–95.

29 Callimachus Experiens, *Attila*, ed. Tibor Kardos (Leipzig, 1932); Birnbaum, "Attila's Renaissance," 85–87; Magda Jászay, "Callimaco Esperiente e il parallelo Mattia Corvino—Attila," in *Mathias Corvinus and the Humanism in Central Europe*, ed. Tibor Klaniczay and József Jankovics (Budapest, 1994), 151–164; Enikő Békés, "Physiognomy in the Descriptions and Portraits of King Matthias Corvinus," *Acta Historiae Artium* 46 (2005): 51–97, esp. 82–84.

30 János Horváth, jr., *Calanus püspök és a Vita Attilae* (Bishop Calanus and the *Vita Attilae*) (Budapest, 1941); cf. Birnbaum, "Attila's Renaissance," 90–92; Ferruccio Bertini, "La leggenda di Attila: Fonti ungheresi e italiane a confronto," in *L'eredità classica in Italia e Ungheria fra tardo Medioevo e primo Rinascimento: Atti dell'XI Convegno italo-ungherese, Venezia, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, 9–11 novembre 1998*, ed. Sante Graciotti and Amedeo di Francesco (Rome, 2001), 261–281.

31 Sándor Csernus, "La Hongrie, le rempart de la Chrétienté: Naissance et épanouissement de l'idée d'une mission collective," *Mythes et symboles politiques en Europe centrale et orientale*, ed. Ch. Delsol, M. Maslowski, J. Nowicki, (Paris, 2002), 107–124.

(1536),³² which is included in the first full printed edition of Bonfini's *Rerum Ungaricarum decades*, edited by the great Hungarian humanist Johannes Sambucus in 1568 in Basel. In vernacular Hungarian historiography the notion of Scythian origins, the assertion of Hun-Hungarian kinship, and the cult of Attila preserved their central place, appearing in the sixteenth century on the basis of medieval chronicles and above all Bonfini's work. One also finds them in the *Krónika ez világnak jeles dolgairól* (Chronicle on the noteworthy things of this world) by István Bencédi Székely (Cracow, 1559) and the *Krónika az Magyaroknak dolgairól* (Chronicle on the things of the Hungarians) by the Transylvanian Calvinist, Gáspár Heltai (Kolozsvár/Cluj 1575).³³

Another cultural artifact, in addition to the historical narratives, emerged in the humanist period as an important component of Scythian consciousness: the ancient Hungarian runic script. This runic alphabet is supposed to have derived from the Turkic runic script and to have been preserved since ancient nomadic times till the early modern age, especially in archaic communities of the Hungarian population, such as the Transylvanian *Székely* (*sicul*, Szekler).³⁴ The earliest surviving records date from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, when a 35 character runic alphabet was recorded and began to be used by captive Hungarians in Constantinople and elsewhere. Humanist philologists took considerable interest in this Hungarian script: in 1598 a learned Catholic bishop János Telegdy wrote an entire treatise on the "old language of the Huns," and the related archaic "Hunnish-Scythian" runic script, which was introduced by a popular Lutheran writer of the age, János Baranyai Decsi, who underlined how proud the Hungarian nation should be of having its own unique alphabet. According to recent

32 Nicolaus Olahus, *Hungaria—Athila*, ed. Kálmán Eperjessy and László Juhász (Budapest, 1938); Sante Graciotti, "L'«Attila» di Miklós Oláh fra la tradizione italiana e le filiazioni slave," in *Venezia ed Ungheria nel Rinascimento*, ed. Vittore Branca (Florence, 1973), 275–316; Birnbaum, "Attila's Renaissance," 87–89; Péter Kulcsár, "Utószó" (Postface), in Miklós Oláh, *Hungaria—Athila* (Budapest, 2000), 131–143.

33 Emma Bartoniek, *Fejezetek a XVI–XVII. századi magyar történetírás történetéből* (Chapters from the history of Hungarian historiography of the 16th and 17th centuries) (Budapest, 1975), 10–117; Szabados, *A magyar történelem kezdeteiről*, 67–92.

34 Gyula Sebestyén, *Rovás és rovásírás* (Tally marks and runic script) (Budapest, 1909); idem, *A magyar rovásírás hiteles emlékei* (Authentic monuments of the Hungarian runic script) (Budapest, 1915); Gyula Németh, *A magyar rovásírás* (Hungarian runic script) (Budapest, 1934); Edward D. Rockstein, "The Mystery of the Székely Runes," *Epigraphic Society Occasional Papers* 19 (1990): 176–183; Klára Sándor (ed.), *Rovásírás a Kárpát-medencében* (Runic script in the Carpathian Basin) (Szeged, 1992).

analysts, however, we are dealing here rather with the humanist invention of an exotic and archaic tradition.³⁵

Attila remained a popular figure of historical narratives in the seventeenth century, when he was prominently represented in the *Mausoleum*, a series of engravings with historical portraits commissioned by the aristocrat Ferenc Nádasdy in 1664 (pic. 3).³⁶ The great poet Miklós Zrínyi (1620–1664) also planned to write an epic on his exploits.³⁷ In a rather more unexpected turn of events, in the eighteenth century a dozen Neo-Latin Attila epics were written by the learned Jesuits (Zsigmond Varjú, Petrus Schesz, László Répszeli, András Adányi and Ignác Mattyasovszky), who relied on the works of Jesuitic historians (Menyhért Inchofer, Gábor Hevenesi, Mihály Földvári, Samuel Timon, Ferenc Kéri Borgia) who had written on the subject.³⁸ At the same time, Hungarian Protestants also paid tribute to myths of the Scythian origins and the cult of Attila. Ferenc Fóris Otrókoci, a persecuted and imprisoned Calvinist Preacher who later studied in Holland and Oxford, published an entire book on the *Origines Hungarice* in 1693, which enriched the account of Hungarian chronicles with a whole array of non-Hungarian Latin sources.³⁹ Mathias Bél, a Lutheran pastor and erudite historian, published a treatise in 1718 that revived scholarly discussions on the Hungarian runic script.⁴⁰ He resolved to write a four-volume historical synthesis in 1723, on the Scythians, Huns, Avars and Hungarians. In 1735 he published a large

35 Johannes Thelegdi, *Rudimenta priscae Hunnorum linguae brevibus quaestionibus et responsionibus comprehensa* (Batavia, 1598); Iván Horváth, "A székely rovásírás és a latin-magyar ábécé" (The Székely runic script and the Latin-Hungarian alphabet), in *A magyar irodalom történetei: A kezdetektől 1800-ig*, ed. László Jankovits and Géza Orlovsky (Budapest, 2007).

36 *Mausoleum potentissimorum ac gloriosissimorum Regni Apostolici Regum et primorum militantis Ungariae ducum* [...] (Nuremberg, 1664; facsimile edition: Budapest, 1991), 16; cf. László Szörényi, "Attila's Image in the Poetry and Historiography of the Central European Baroque," in *Attila*, ed. Bäuml and Birnbaum, 99–105; Szabados, *A magyar történelem kezdeteiről*, 105–108.

37 *Ibid.*, 100; Szabados, *A magyar történelem kezdeteiről*, 111–116.

38 László Szörényi, *Hunok és jezsuiták* (Huns and Jesuits) (Budapest, 2003); Szabados, *A magyar történelem kezdeteiről*, 128–139, 153–171.

39 Franciscus Foris Otrókoci, *Origines Hungarice, seu Liber, quo vera Nationis Hungaricae Origo et Antiquitas, e Veterum Monumentis et Linguis praecipuis, panduntur* (Franeker, 1693); Szabados, *A magyar történelem kezdeteiről*, 145–152.

40 Mathias Bél, *De vetere Litteratura Hunno-Scythica Exercitatio* (Leipzig, 1718).



3. King Attila in the Mausoleum of Ferenc Nádasdy, Nuremberg, 1664.

collection of historical sources to lay the foundation for this ambitious project.⁴¹

With Mathias Bél we arrive at the contributions of modern historical scholarship to the explanation of the historical origins of the Hungarians. Two new academic disciplines must be taken into account: erudite historiography and historical linguistics. The former resulted in the edition of the medieval chronicles by Anonymus (1746)⁴² and Simon of Kéza (1781),⁴³ and also revived the historical investigations concerning Scythian and Hunnish origins, which increasingly took the form of a document-based historical account. This was also stimulated by the publication of the report by the Hungarian Dominican friar Riccardus on the mission directed by Friar Julianus in 1235–1237. The latter, following the indications of the chronicle by Anonymus, was leading an expedition to discover the traces of the ancestors of the Hungarians in the Caucasus region, in a country they referred to as *Magna Hungaria*.⁴⁴ Over the course of subsequent decades the outstanding Jesuit historian Georgius Pray strove to situate the history of the nomadic Huns and the Hungarians in a broad comparative analysis of the wanderings of nomadic people in late antiquity.⁴⁵ Pray relied on the results of new research by French Orientalists: the publication and translation of Chinese historical sources on Central Asia and especially on the Huns by Joseph de Guignes.⁴⁶

The other dimension of scholarly renewal, the research on historical linguistics, took a new turn with the path-breaking book by the Jesuit scholar János Sajnovics entitled *Demonstratio idioma Hungarorum et Lapporum idem esse* (1770). His theory, which paved the way for the currently accepted Fin-

41 Mathias Bél, *Adparatus ad Historiam Hungariae* (Bratislava, 1735); cf. Szörényi, "Attila's Image," 100–101.

42 Johann Georg von Schwandtner and Mathias Bel (eds.), *Anonymi Belae Regis Notarii, Historia Hungarica de VII. primis Ducibus Hungariae, in Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum* (Buda, 1746), 1:1–38; cf. *Anonymus and Master Roger*, xviii–xix.

43 First edited by Elek Horányi in Vienna, then, in 1782, with corrections in Buda—this became the *editio princeps*; cf. *Simonis de Kéza Gesta Hungarorum*, xvii.

44 Josephus Innocentius Desericzky, *De Initiis ac Majoribus Hungarorum commentaria* (Buda and Pest, 1748).

45 Georgius Pray, *Annales veteres Hunnorum, Avarum et Hvngarorum* (Vienna, 1761).

46 Joseph de Guignes, *Histoire Generale des Huns, des Turcs, des Mogols, et des autres Tartares Occidentaux, &c. Avant et depuis Jesus-Christ jusqu'à present*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1756–1758); István Vásáry, "Az őstörténész Pray" (Pray as a historian of Hungarian prehistory), *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 83 (1979): 287–292; repr. in idem, *Magyar őshazák és magyar őstörténetek* (Hungarian proto-homelands and scholars of Hungarian prehistory) (Budapest, 2008), 153–160.

no-Ugrian theory of Hungarian ethnogenesis, was based on some older observations by central European Humanists on the kinship of Hungarian and Vogul languages. Sajnovics found few experts in Hungary among his linguist colleagues, such as Samuel Gyarmathy (1794) and Nicolaus Révai (1799), but his theories were taken up by the German historian August von Schlözer, a considerable international authority of the age.⁴⁷ Hungarian historians mounted strong resistance to the new ethnogenetic account of the linguists: Franciscan Joakim Szekér (1752–1810), author of *Magyarok eredete* (The origin of the Hungarians, 1791), Pauline Benedek Virág (1754–1830), author of *Magyar századok* (Hungarian centuries, 1805), and above all Piarist András Dugonics (1740–1808), author of *Szittyiai történetek* (Scythian histories, 1808) reasserted the theory of Scythian origins. The notion of the identity of the Huns and Hungarians remained the unshaken foundation of the biggest achievement of Hungarian historiography of the age, the 47 volume *Historia critica Regum Hungariae* (1805–1817) by Jesuit István Katona (1732–1811), though he started his detailed discussion of Hungarian history only with the Conquest.⁴⁸

The upswing in the production of schoolbooks, popular calendars and chap-books added a powerful new tool to the dissemination of the theory of Scythian-Hunnish origins and the nurturing of a historical consciousness based on this theory. “Threefold small mirror” (*Hármas kis tükör*), the most popular handbook of Hungarian history (compiled by István Losonci in 1771, it was reprinted in 50 subsequent editions), was used in secondary schools for the education of the youth, providing catechism-like answers to basic questions of history (I quote from the expanded version published in 1846):

47 János Pusztai, *Az “ugor-török háború” után* (After the “Ugric-Turkic war”) (Budapest, 1977), 9–17; Péter Domokos, *Szkitiától Lappóniáig: A nyelvrokonság és az őstörténet kérdésének visszhangja irodalmunkban* (From Scythia to Lapponia: The echo of the question of linguistic relations and pre-history in Hungarian literature) (Budapest, 1998), 51–78.

48 Szabados, *A magyar történelem kezdeteiről*, 201–221; Gunszt, *A magyar történetírás*, 171–174; László Szörényi, “Dugonits András,” in *Memoria Hungarorum* (Budapest, 1996), 77–107; István Vásáry, “Őstörténet és nemzeti tudat a reformkorban,” *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 84 (1980): 15–25, repr. in idem, *Magyar őshazák és magyar őstörténeszek*, 161–174.

III. History of the Hungarian Nation

III/I. Cumans, Chuns, Huns (*Kunok, Chunok, Hunnok*)

Q. Which nation are you from?

A. Hungarian.

Q. Where do the origins of the Hungarians lie?

A. The Scythians.

Q. Where did they live in ancient times?

A. In Asia, in the eastern regions.

Q. How many times did they come to Hungary?

A. Three times: first as the Huns (*Kúnok*, i.e. Cumans), second as the “Castle-Cumans” (*Vár-Kunok*), i.e. the Avars, and third as the Magyars.

Q. Who came to Hungary first?

A. The Cumans (Huns), a nation speaking the same language as the Hungarians, undeniably descended from the ancient Scythians, came to Hungary around the year 374.

After the description in the second chapter of the conquest of Dacia by the “Castle-Cumans” (*Vár-Kunok*), i.e. the Avars around 550, the third chapter presents the Hungarian conquest:

Q. What kind of nation came to Pannonia around the year 890 after the birth of our Lord?

A. The Hungarian nation. The ancient Greeks called the Hungarians a land-cultivating Scythian people: Macarians, Constantine, the Greek emperor called them Turks (Turci), and the Romans called them “Hungari.”

Q. Where did their origins lie?

A. In the east [...] they were real descendants of the old Parthian and Scythian nation—the Hungarian people is a “people of the east.” ([In footnote:] And they did not come from Finland or icy Lapland, as the scholars Schlötzer and after him Schwartner, these two eminent denigrators of the Hungarian nation, assert)—the Huns and the “Castle-Cumans” were their brothers.⁴⁹

As for chap-books, the *Magyar Országai és új kalendárium* (Hungarian old and new calendar) series published in Pozsony (Pressburg, Bratislava) by

49 István Losonczy, *Hármas kis-tükör* (Threefold small mirror), (Buda, 1846), 177–178, 208.

Mathias Trattner between 1797 and 1801 provides a detailed account of the deeds of the Huns and the admirable exploits, tragic death, and mythic funeral of Attila, colourfully elaborating the early modern text of Gáspár Hel-tai.⁵⁰

These various scholarly and popular historical works of the late eighteenth century laid the ground for the theories of István Horvát, who became the principal exponent of the renewed vogue of Scythian consciousness in the early nineteenth century. In order to better understand this resurgence, which took place precisely in the age of the rise of critical, archival historical scholarship, it might be worthwhile to recall other manifestations of the search for “national antiquities” that provided a new paradigm for a number of new scholarly disciplines in the nineteenth century.⁵¹ One of them, archaeology, also helped stir up public interest in Hungarian history of the nomadic and Conquest periods. In 1788 a book by Ferenc Molnár identified a carved ivory horn held in Jászberény as the horn of a tenth-century pagan Hungarian chieftain Lehel. According to a myth included in medieval Hungarian chronicles, this horn had been used by the captive Lehel to kill his victorious opponent, the German king. (A good symbolic object around which to rally for Hungarian nobles resisting the reforms of Emperor Joseph II).⁵² The discovery in 1799 of the treasure of Nagyszentmiklós (Sânnicolau Mare, Ro.) caused another sensation. It consisted of a find of 23 gold vessels, probably of Avar origins,⁵³ which were later erroneously attributed to Attila.⁵⁴

The foundation of the Hungarian National Museum in 1802 by count Ferenc Széchenyi (1754–1820) gave added incentive for the collection of books, manuscripts, and various artefacts related to what came to be labeled

50 Éva Mikos, *Árpád pajzsa: A magyar honfoglalás-hagyomány megszerkesztés és népszerűsítése a XVIII–XIX. században* (The shield of Árpád: The redaction and popularization of the tradition of the Hungarian Conquest in the 18th and 19th centuries) (Budapest, 2010), 138–150.

51 Cf. the studies in Ernő Marosi, Gábor Klaniczay, and Ottó Gecser, eds., *The Nineteenth-Century Process of “Musealization” in Hungary and Europe*, Collegium Budapest Workshop Series 17 (Budapest, 2006).

52 Péter Langó, “Lehel kürtje” (The horn of Lehel), in *Történelem-Kép* (History—Image), ed. Árpád Mikó and Katalin Sinkó (Budapest, 2000), 520–526.

53 Éva Garam, ed., *The Gold of the Avars: The Nagyszentmiklós Treasure* (Budapest, 2002); Csanád Bálint, *A nagyszentmiklósi kincs* (The treasure of Nagyszentmiklós) (Budapest, 2004).

54 József Hampel, *Der Goldfund von Nagyszentmiklós* (Budapest, 1885).

national antiquities. The rich holdings of the museum quickly grew in the patriotic upswing of the Hungarian "Reform Age." They were supplemented with treasures assembled by other private collectors, among whom Miklós Jankovich (1772–1846) was the most important. His *Bibliotheca Hungarica* consisted of thousands of medieval manuscripts, incunabula, and other old prints, which the National Museum purchased in 1832.⁵⁵ Jankovich took a particular interest in Hungarian prehistory: in 1824 he took contact with the renowned Orientalist of his age, Julius Klaproth, in order to inquire about the possible Asian origins of the Hungarian language (thereby continuing to resist the Finno-Ugric thesis). In 1824 he also sponsored an expedition undertaken by a Hungarian traveler, Gergely Nagylaki Jaksics, who had been wandering around Russia since 1804, retracing the route of medieval Dominican friar Julianus in his attempt to find the ancestors of the Hungarians in the Caucasus. He also sponsored a second expedition undertaken in 1829 by János Ógyallai Besse with the same goal in mind.⁵⁶ In the same decade famous Hungarian orientalist Sándor Kőrösi Csoma (Alexander Csoma de Kőrös) of Transylvanian origin (1784–1842) set out to explore the Central Asian traces of the Magyars, though he ended up studying the Tibetan language instead and compiling the first English-Tibetan Dictionary.⁵⁷

As in most eighteenth and nineteenth-century European national cultures, the cult of national antiquities and the vogue of related collectionism created fertile ground for forgeries in Hungary. The spectacular reports of the "Orientalist" Jaksics, published by the poet and notary László Percsényi Nagy in 1825, described how the travellers found "millions" of Hungarian speaking Scythian Huns in the Caucasian mountains, and how these Scythians bewailed the degeneration of their descendants in the West and their ignorance of ancient customs. These accounts, however, quickly raised suspicion and were proven false. Percsényi Nagy was not beyond suspicion: in 1820 he had published a book on the same subject entitled "Rivalry among the Scythian-Hun-Hungarian and related confessions concerning their characteristics" (*Vetekedés a' közös Szittha Honnos-Magyar, és ehhez tartozó fele-*

55 Hedvig Beliska-Scholtz (ed.), *Jankovich Miklós, a gyűjtő és mecénás (1772–1846): Tanulmányok* (Miklós Jankovich, collector and maecenas: Studies) (Budapest, 1985); Árpád Mikó (ed.), *Jankovich Miklós (1772–1846) gyűjteményei* (The collections of Miklós Jankovich) (Budapest, 2002).

56 István Vásári, "Jankovich Miklós és a magyar őstörténet" (Miklós Jankovich and Hungarian prehistory), in *Magyar ősbazák és magyar őstörténeteszek*, 179–191.

57 József Terjék (ed.), *Collection of Tibetan mss. and xylographs of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös* (Budapest, 1976).

kezetek között az őminden tulajdonságok eránt). It contained a medieval Hungarian-language charter of 1396 which also proved to be a fake.⁵⁸ Another fake “Scythian” artefact was made by the well-known antiquarian and also prolific Transylvanian forger of the age, Samuel Literati Nemes (1794–1842), who produced (and sold to Jankovich, together with a dozen other fakes) the allegedly medieval “Wooden book of Túróc” (*Túróci fakönyv*), a piece of birch-bark (cortex) with fragments of Hungarian runic script on it.⁵⁹

Among the forgeries related to Hungarian-Scythian consciousness, the most notorious was the *Csíki Székely Krónika* (Székely Chronicle of Csík), a Latin text allegedly compiled from older documents in 1533, copied in 1695, and surfacing, together with a Hungarian translation, in 1796. It constituted the basis of an argument for the special privileges of Hungarian Székely clans on the grounds that they were directly descending from the Scythian Huns of Attila. This descent is narrated in a fabulous historical account according to which the legendary Székely chief (*rabonban*) Zandirham and his noble descendants assisted and arranged the “second coming” of the Huns under Árpád. For most of the nineteenth century this chronicle was held to be an authentic source. Later, however, the chronicle was proven to be a late eighteenth-century forgery by Sigismund Sándor (the nobleman who “discovered” the manuscript in the family castle where it had allegedly been compiled by his ancestors 250 years earlier).⁶⁰

Historical forgeries represent an illicit domain of literary fiction: they fill the gaps of historical record and supply passionately sought pseudo-documents on the glorious mythical past of the nation when historical-archival research is slow or unable to produce them. The most famous maneuver of this kind was the “discovery” (or rather production) of the Songs of Ossian

58 *Művészi archaizálás és a régi magyar nyelv* (Artistic archaization and the old Hungarian language) (Budapest, 1972), 283–289.

59 On the literary forgeries of Literati Nemes, see József Tompa, “Művészi archaizálás és nyelvemlékhamisítás 1772 és 1873 közt” (Artistic archaization and forgery of literary monuments 1772–1873) *MTA I. Osztályának Közleményei* 24 (1967), 97–116; idem, *Művészi archaizálás és a régi magyar nyelv*, 278; Benedek Láng, “Invented Middle Ages in the 19th Century: The forgeries of Samuel Literati Nemes,” in *Authenticity and Forgery in Nineteenth Century Medievalism*, ed. János M. Bak, Patrick Geary, and Gábor Klaniczay (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

60 Géza Nagy, “A csíki székely krónika” (The Székely chronicle of Csík), *Székely Nemzet* (1886): 140–169; Lajos Szádeczky, *A csíki székely krónika* (The Székely chronicle of Csík) (Budapest, 1905); idem, *Még egyszer a csíki székely krónikáról* (Once more on the Székely chronicle of Csík) (Budapest, 1911); Tompa, *Művészi archaizálás és a régi magyar nyelv*, 278–282.

by James Macpherson, which were proven, after the death of the scholar, to have been no historical documents but rewritten fragments, basically forgeries.⁶¹ A forgery geographically closer to Hungary and to the problem of the mythical prehistory of the nation was the “discovery” in 1818 of the Königinhof manuscripts, containing the long fragment of an Old Czech epic poem on the legendary prehistoric queen Princess Libuše, a collection of texts proven by the end of the century to have been forgeries by the learned Czech librarians and linguists Václav Hanka and Josef Linda.⁶²

In Hungary the zeal to have more lively details concerning the much dreamt of Scythian prehistory and the glorious times of the Conquest was satisfied in part by the eighteenth-century discovery and publication of the chronicles of Anonymus and Kézai and by in part through fiction. The literary recreation of the “lost Hungarian epic” was taken up as a central task of nineteenth-century Hungarian poetry. The project of writing an *Árpádiász* was supported by one of the greatest talents of the late eighteenth century, Mihály Csokonai Vitéz (1773–1805), well read in contemporary linguistic and historical debates on Hungarian prehistory, and, exceptionally among his contemporaries, not disdainful of the “Lapponian-Finno-Ugrian” thesis altogether, but rather willing to combine it with the theory of Scythian origins.⁶³ This task was taken up by the would-be leading poet of the first half of the nineteenth century, Mihály Vörösmarty (1800–1855), who gave an early expression of his feelings on the issue in 1821 in a poem entitled *A szittya gyermekek* (The Scythian children). He also closely followed the first realized attempt to craft a national epic on Hungarian prehistory, the *Dierniasz: Székelyek Erdélyben* (Diernias: The Seklers in Transylvania), by Sándor Aranyosrákosi Székely (1823). Vörösmarty’s path-breaking epic *Zalán futása* (The Flight of Zalán) is based on thorough knowledge of the chronicle of Anonymus and the historical debates concerning the Scythian prehistory. It became a founding text of Hungarian identity in the nineteenth century.⁶⁴

61 Howard Gaskill, *The Reception of Ossian in Europe* (London, 2002).

62 Milan Otáhal, “The Manuscript Controversy in the Czech National Revival,” *Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture* 5 (1986), 247–277; Pavlina Rychterová, “The Manuscripts of Grünberg and Königinhof. Romantic lies about the glorious past of the Czech nation,” in János M. Bak, Patrick Geary and Gábor Klaniczay, eds., *Authenticity and Forgery in Nineteenth Century Medievalism*, forthcoming at Brill, Leyden.

63 Domokos, *Szkitiától Lappóniáig*, 86–88; Dávidházi, *Egy nemzeti tudomány*, 446–447.

64 Domokos, *Szkitiától Lappóniáig*, 95–97; János M. Bak, “From the anonymous *Gesta* to the *Flight of Zalán* by Vörösmarty,” in János M. Bak, Patrick Geary and Gábor Klaniczay, eds., *Authenticity and Forgery in Nineteenth Century Medievalism*, forthcoming at Brill, Leyden,



4. »Árpád on the Pannonian Mountain«, engraving in *Aurora*, 1822, illustrating the essay by István Horvát.

Vörösmarty's epic poem appeared in the same year as *Rajzolatok a magyar nemzet legrégibb történetéből* (Sketches from the most ancient history of the Hungarian nation) by István Horvát, and the close cooperation between the two has been discussed in Hungarian historiography. Vörösmarty was inspired by Horvát's essay published in the newly founded romantic literary journal *Aurora*, entitled *Árpád Pannónia hegyén* (Árpád on the Pannonian Mountain), in which Horvát compares the light shining forth from the "God of the Turul clan" to the benefits of Christianization.⁶⁵ The essay is nicely illustrated with an engraving (pic. 4) that itself influenced Vörösmarty.⁶⁶ A curious historical treatise by Horvát written more than a decade later, comes back to these issues of common interest. It discusses the "Panther-skin as the Hungarian warriors' adornment in olden times,"⁶⁷ which became an *epitheton ornans* of Duke Árpád (*párducos Árpád*) in the epic by Vörösmarty, who was probably inspired by a poem by Benedek Virág (1797) and the recurrent mention of the motif in the 1822 "Árpád on the Pannonian Mountain" essay by Horvát. He assembled hundreds of scholarly references to the decorative use among the Parthians and Persians of panther skins, and he complained bitterly about the scandalous negligence of Anonymus and other medieval Hungarian chronicle-writers, who "forgot" to mention this glamorous feature of their apparel (which came very much into vogue in early modern times).⁶⁸

Horvát's historical treatment of Scythian-Hungarian myths of origin harmonized well with the general literary imagination of his age, and, even more broadly, with the scholarly and popular trends to come in nineteenth-century Hungary. This partly explains his great popularity. The puzzling aspect of

65 István Horvát, "Árpád Pannónia hegyén" (Árpád on the Pannonian Mountain), *Aurora Hazai Almanach* (1822), 321–341.

66 András Martinkó, "'Magyar' vártól Magyarvárig" (From "Hungarian" castle to Hungarian castle), *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 68 (1964), 425–448; Szilárd Borbély, "Horvát István és Vörösmarty Mihály: történelmi és irodalmi fikció találkozása" (István Horvát and Mihály Vörösmarty: the meeting of historical and literary fiction), in *Vörösmarty és a romantika*, (Vörösmarty and romanticism) ed. József Takáts (Pécs and Budapest, 2001), 111–126.

67 István Horvát, "A Párdutzbőrről, mint hajdani Magyar Vitézi Ékességről" (Panther-skin as the Hungarian warriors' adornment in olden times), *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* 21(1837), vol. I.

68 Péter Dávidházi, "A nemzet mint *res ficta et picta* keletkezéséhez: 'Párducos Árpád' és 'eleink' útja a költészettől a történetírásig" (On the emergence of the nation as *res ficta et picta*: "Árpád with the panther-skin" and the road of our "ancestors" from literature to historiography), in *Vörösmarty és a romantika*, 95–110.

this success, however, was that his blind national enthusiasm was coupled with an unusual determination to mobilize the tools of emergent historical scholarship (the so-called “auxiliary disciplines,” such as etymology, genealogy, sphragistics, heraldics). In the Preface to the infamous *Rajzolatok* he proudly stepped up as the “*custos* of the Széchényi National Library,” defying with scathing contempt the “swarm of historian-dabblers,”⁶⁹ only then to assemble meticulously in the book the various bits of evidence (all of which he considered reliable scientific proof) allegedly demonstrating that every significant nation of history had been Hungarian in one way or another. The startling conclusions of his determined treatise provoked both astonishment, admiration, and then, increasingly, doubt.

Horvát had an increasingly ambivalent relationship developed with Ferenc Toldy (1805–1875), the founding father of the discipline of “national literary historiography.” In 1821 Toldy became Horvát’s disciple, adopting from him the noble aim of studying historical sources rather than relying on the judgment of secondary analyses. Later, however, he grew increasingly skeptical of Horvát’s claims.⁷⁰ Toldy’s laudable admiration for the reliance on original and archival sources happened to mislead him in other cases as well: he was among the many renown experts whom the Czech forger Václav Hanka managed to deceive with his forgeries. Toldy personally examined the manuscripts in 1829 and offered his confirmation of their authenticity.⁷¹ In 1844 he praised Horvát, contending that “there is no one who knows the internal life of our nation, its public and private branches, as well as he, using all existing sources and charters so far hidden from most [...].”⁷² In the biographical portrait on Horvát published in 1856, Toldy characterizes Horvát’s historical-etymological methods as “a historical aberration [...]. Here I would stop on the issue had István Horvát’s attempts remained an isolated, localized wound on the body of historical scholarship. But instead, they infected it for a generation.”⁷³

This characterization of Horvát’s methods as an “infection” was fitting: Horvát’s oeuvre engendered a lasting tradition of cultivating and developing the obsessively broadened prehistory of the Hungarians. His first prolific disciple was György (Beleházi) Bartal (1785–1865), a man who turned to historical research after having had a career in law and parliament lasting

69 Horvát, *Rajzolatok*, X–XI (*a’ sok Historicus Kontároknak*).

70 Dávidházi, *Egy nemzeti tudomány*, 408–469.

71 *Ibid.*, 518–532.

72 Ferenc Toldy, *Irodalmi arcképek* (Literary Portraits) (Budapest, 1985 [1856]), 75–93 at 82.

73 *Ibid.* 87.

several decades. After publishing a useful legal-historical manual in Latin and several polemical works maintaining the identity of the Huns and the Hungarians, in 1859 he tried to defend the *Székely Chronicle of Csík* from the critical arguments according to which it was a forgery.⁷⁴ In 1860 he published a monograph on the “Parthian Hun-Hungarian Scythians” with a preface and recommendation by Ferenc Toldy, who, though he distanced himself from Horvát, apparently did not reject such theories altogether.⁷⁵ The history of the Scythians became a privileged subject for the nascent discipline of classical philology in Hungary. János Telfy, professor of Greek at the Pest university and translator of Homer and Plato, published a special source collection on the Greek sources related to Scythians in 1862.⁷⁶

Much of the research undertaken in classical archaeology was also inspired by Horvát: Izidor Mátyus, a Hungarian émigré lieutenant gunner fighting in the Italian Hungarian Legion (*Legione Ausiliare Ungherese*) of Garibaldi in Southern Italy, organized a minor excavation during a break in the fighting in October 1861 in Rionero, near Salerno—in fact the very first Hungarian excavation in classical archaeology. Several dozens of works of antique (principally Etruscan) pottery were transported to Hungary in 1862, ultimately ending up in the Museum of Fine Arts of Budapest. They were of particular interest to the amateur archaeologist-lieutenant: they were held to be the artifacts of Pelasgians, whom Mátyus identified, on the basis of Horvát’s much quoted *Rajzolatok*, as the ancestors of the Hungarians. His contemporary letter, narrating his discoveries, clearly betrays his interpretation:

These vases originated among the Pelasgians, who came in masses to Southern Italy and Sicily after the fights at Troy, i.e. before the Greeks, and became the indigenous people of these countries [...]. In consequence, if Horvát’s irrefutable assertion, according to which the Pelasgians were Iassians, i. e. our ancestors, proves indeed to be true, then the inhabitants of Southern Italy are also our ancestors, and the antiquities unearthed here are partly of Hungarian origin, so they are doubly valuable for us [...].⁷⁷

74 György Beleházi Bartal, “A magyar vérszerződés és a csíki székely krónika, az Anonymusról adott cikk folytatában” (The Hungarian blood contract, the Székely chronicle of Csík and an article on Anonymus), *Új Magyar Múzeum* (1859): 413–427.

75 György Beleházi Bartal, *A pártus és Húnmagyar Scythákról* (On the Parthian Hun-Hungarian Scythians), ed. Ferenc Toldy (Pest, 1860).

76 János Telfy, *Magyarok Őstörténete: Görög források a Scythák történetéhez* (Prehistory of the Hungarians. Greek sources for the history of the Scythians) (Pest, 1863).

77 János György Szilágyi, *Pelasg ősök nyomában: Magyar ásatás az Appennineken 1861-ben* (On the trail of our Pelasgian ancestors: Hungarian excavation in the Appenines in 1861) (Budapest, 2002), 163; idem, “‘Unsere pelasgische Urahnen:’ Das ‘nationale’ und das ‘univer-

One could continue to trace the further twists in this convoluted and pathologically obsessive historiographic tradition (needless to say, the heritage of Horvát survives to this day; his *Rajzolatok* was reedited in 2002 in a series entitled “the obscured millenaries of Hungarian history”),⁷⁸ but the chapter on the nineteenth century at least comes to a close here. As a conclusion it might be important to stress that the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the triumph of more professional historical scholarship: the leading representatives of the historian’s craft, Mihály Horváth and Henrik Marczali, offered a critical interpretation of the Hungarian myths of origin.⁷⁹ The international historiography of Attila, who again attracted considerable attention on the European scene because of the opera of Verdi (1846),⁸⁰ has found a dedicated and prolific expert in the person of Amédée Thierry.⁸¹ There were several more passionate rounds in the linguistic debate, which came to be known as the “Ugric-Turkic war” when, following the ascent of the Finno-Ugrian thesis on the basis of the observations and work of travelers, ethnographers and linguists such as Antal Reguly, Pál Hunfalvy, Josef Budenz, the polemical writings by the Turcologist Ármin Vámbéry reopened the controversy in 1869.⁸² The Hungarian “runic script” maintained its fascination for dilettante historians,⁸³ and folk art collector and amateur art historian József Huszka offered new art historical-ethnographical explanations concerning the Scythian heritage, formulating a whole theory of Middle Asian “national ornamentics” in the 1890s.⁸⁴

sale’ in der klassischen Archäologie Ungarns,” in *National Heritage—National Canon*, ed. Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, Collegium Budapest Workshop Series II (Budapest, 2001), 219–226.

78 István Horvát, *Rajzolatok a magyar nemzet legrégebb történeteiből*; repr. as *A magyar múlt eltitkolt évezredei III* (Budapest, 2002).

79 Gunst, *A magyar történetírás története*, 197–203; Mónika Baár, *Historians and Nationalism: East-Central Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2010), 35–39, 167–195.

80 James W. Porter, “Verdi’s *Attila*: An Ethnomusicological Analysis,” in *Attila*, ed. Bäuml and Birnbaum, 45–54; Ian Wood, “*Adelchi* and *Attila*: The Barbarians and the Risorgimento,” *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 76 (2008): 233–255.

81 Amédée Thierry, *Histoire d’Attila et de ses successeurs* (Paris, 1856); it was translated into Hungarian as *Attila és utódai történelme a magyarok Európába telepedéséig* (Pest, 1865).

82 Pusztai, “*ugor-török háború*,” 92–107; Domokos, *Szkitiától Lappóniáig*, 105–144; Mihály Dobrovits, *A megtalált örökség: Nemzetközi Vámbéry konferencia* (The rediscovered heritage: International conference on Vámbéry) (Dunaszerdahely, 2003).

83 Antal Károly Fischer, *A hun-magyar írás és annak fennmaradt emlékei* (The Hun-Hungarian writing and its surviving remnants) (Budapest, 1889); cf. n. 34.

84 Katalin Sinkó, “Viták a nemzeti ornamentika körül 1873–1907 között” (Debates on the national ornamentics between 1873 and 1907), in *Romantikus kastély: Tanulmányok*

The continuing search for an “oriental archaic tradition,” which was gradually marginalized in the humanities, remained markedly present in nineteenth-century literature. The path blazed by Vörösmarty was trodden by the revolutionary poet Sándor Petőfi (1822–1849), who speculated on the triple coffin in which Attila had been buried.⁸⁵ János Arany (1817–1882), the celebrated epic poet and for more than a decade also Secretary of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, lamented the loss (or the lack) of “our naive epic song.” He envied the Czechs for their Königinhof manuscript (only later unmasked as a forgery).⁸⁶ He strove to craft a substitute for it, the “Csabatrilogy,” based on thorough study of all relevant works on Hun-Hungarian archaic history, especially the *Hungarian Mythology* (1854) by the contemporary ecclesiastic historian and folklorist Arnold Ipolyi.⁸⁷ Mór Jókai (1825–1904), the most prolific romantic novelist of the century and an admirer of Horvát in his youth, resolved to write a “romance-like” history of the Hungarian nation (1854), starting with the stories on Attila, the Scythian Hungarians and the mythic Caucasian “Magyarvár” (Hungarian-castle).⁸⁸ Jókai’s marked interest in the Hun-Hungarian tradition was honoured in his *Jubilee Album* (1893), which contains an image dedicated to Attila and surrounded by an army of seductive muses (pic. 5). Many other historical paintings of

Komárik Dénes *tiszteletére*, ed. Ferenc Vadas (Budapest, 2004), 399–433; József Huszka, *A magyar turáni ornamentika története* (The history of Turanian Hungarian ornaments) (Budapest, 1996); Zoltán Fejős (ed.) *Huszka József, a rajzoló gyűjtő* (József Huszka, the draughtsman collector) (Budapest, 2006).

85 This connection has been discussed by László Szörényi in an unpublished paper presented at Collegium Budapest in Spring 2009. Cf. Mihály Hoppál, “Attila temetése: Egy folklór-motívum a történelmi tudatban” (Attila’s burial: A folklore motif in historical consciousness), in *Bennünk élő múltjaink: Történelmi tudat—kulturális emlékezet*, ed. Richárd Papp and László Szarka (Zenta, 2008), 27–46.

86 János Arany, “Naiv eposzunk” (Our naive epic), in *Arany János Összes művei*, ed. Dezső Kereszturi, vol. 10 (Budapest, 1962), 265–274; cf. Pál S. Varga, “‘Népies-nemzeti,’ ‘nemzeti klasszicizmus’—a nemzeti irodalom hagyományközösségi szemlélete: 1860, Arany János, *Naiv eposzunk*” (‘Populist-national,’ ‘national classicism’—the tradition-communal view of national literature: 1860, János Arany, Our naive epic), in *A magyar irodalom története, 1800–1919* (Histories of Hungarian literature, 1800–1919), ed. Mihály Szegedy-Maszák and András Veres (Budapest, 2007), 445–460.

87 László Szörényi, “Arany János *Csaba-trilógiája* és Ipolyi Arnold *Magyar mythológiája*” (The *Trilogy of Csaba* by János Arany and the *Hungarian Mythology* by Arnold Ipolyi), in *A két Arany: Összehasonlító tanulmányok* (The two Arany: Comparative studies), ed. János H. Korompay (Budapest, 2002), 67–79.

88 Mór Jókai, *A magyar nemzet története regényes rajzokban*, vol. 1, in *Jókai összes művei*, ed. Dénes Lengyel and Miklós Nagy, vol. 67 (Budapest, 1969); on the impact of Horvát on Jókai, see *ibid.*, 343–346.

the age offer testimony to the continued presence of the cult of Attila, such as the “Feast of Attila” by Mór Than (1867) (pic. 6) or the “Death of Attila” by Ferenc Páczka (1883) (pic. 7). This all lay the groundwork for a the new surge in the representation of the Hun-Hungarian myth of origin that came with the Millennial celebration of the Hungarian conquest, held in 1896, a vast subject meriting a separate study of its own.⁸⁹



5. »Attila's Chariot« in the Jubilee Album presented to Mór Jókai (1893).

89 For an analysis of this continuing evolution, see Tamás Hofer, “Construction of the ‘Folk Cultural Heritage in Hungary’ and Rival Versions of National Identity,” in *Hungarians between “East” and “West:” National Myths and Symbols*, ed. Tamás Hofer (Budapest, 1994), 27–52.



6. »The Feast of Attila« by Mór Than (1867).



7. »The Death of Attila« by Ferenc Pácza (1883).