

Language and Origin of the Hungarians.

The Hungarian language.

Hungarian language belongs to the family of agglutinative languages. Officially it is a member of the Finno-Ugric language family. Structurally similar – although in a very distant relationship with it – are the Turkish, the Dravidian groups of languages, the Japanese and the Korean in the Far-East and the Basque in Europe. A large portion of ancient languages were agglutinative in their nature, such like the Sumerian, Pelagic, Etruscan, as well as aboriginal languages on the American and Australian continents.

The Finno-Ugric language family is built up from two branches: the Finnish and the Ugric ones¹. The Finnish branch contains a couple of languages related to each other relatively closely. The other branch contains far less related languages – particularly with respect to the Hungarian. Glottochronology was applied to the Hungarian and to the so-called relative languages and it showed out, that the words with common origin in the basic set of words is only 14% with the Finnish and only 23% with the Vogul and the Ostyak². It means that the separation from the Finnish and from the Vogul and Ostyak languages might have happened no later than 14 and 6-7 millennia before present respectively.

The Hungarian language is regarded as being derived from the two other members of the Ugric branch, however, it is the most developed language of the whole agglutinative groups of languages. The language uses more than 44 well recognisable sounds at its present state, among them over 14 vocals. In this sense it is one of the richest language of Eurasia. Hungarian has at least 26 cases in declination of the nouns and even more where the suffix is of two syllables and therefore is not attached to the noun. There are two complete systems in the declination of verbs, the second one is being used with direct subject – and in this Hungarian is unique in Europe. Hungarian is an accusative language, although many of the agglutinative languages are ergative ones as e.g. Basque, Sumerian, aboriginal languages of America and Australia. Hungarian uses the possessive case reversed with respect to the Indo-European languages, only the Japanese language using the same form as the Hungarian. The formation of words in Hungarian language is carried out mainly by suffixes, thus transforming one concept to another one. This is the reason why Hungarian basic words are one or two syllable long, while the spoken language uses much longer words, due to the suffixes applied within the words. See more details about the Hungarian grammar and that of its related languages in Collinder's works³.

The set of Hungarian words is often unique and in many senses ancient. The studies carried out at the Sorbonne supported this finding. They have found that 68% of the set of words of the Hungarian language as *etymon*, i.e. ancient element, which words formed the most ancient words of the languages. These words are sound imitating and words of the baby language. They are mostly short words with only one or two syllables. We can understand the importance of this percentage when we compare that to the next highest frequency of *etymons*, which is in the ancient Turk, the Turkmen language where it is 26%. The Tibetan and the Sanskrit languages have 9%, the languages of the Pacific have an average of 7%, the Latin and the Hebrew have 5% and the English has 4% of *etymons*.⁴ The main reason why the Hungarian language had been declared to be Finno-Ugric was the similarity of a portion of its words to those of these other languages. However, recent studies

¹ Crystal (1997), p.: 306.

² Cser (2006), pp.: 131-132, Table 4 in the Appendix (p.: 393-).

³ Collinder (1957) and Collinder (1977).

⁴ Cites Kiss (1999), p.: 100.

show that the similarities of many words are not generic⁵. There are, however, again a lot of similarities between the Hungarian words and those of the languages of Europe around Hungary with similar or synonymous meaning.

Sir John Bowring translated a couple of Hungarian poems to English in the thirties of 19th century. He wrote about the Hungarian language in the introduction of his book:

*“The Magyar language stand afar off and alone. The study of other tongues will be found exceedingly little use towards its right understanding. It is molded in a form essentially its own, and its construction and composition may be safely referred to an epoch when most of the living tongues of Europe either had no existence, or no influence on the Hungarian region.”*⁶

He continues to present the Hungarian language and among others he writes:

*“The roots of the Magyar are for the most part exceedingly simple and monosyllabic, but their ramifications are numerous, consistent, and beautiful. I know of no language which present such a variety of elementary stamina, and none which lends itself so easily and gracefully to all the modifications growing out of its simple principles.[...] The analogy between words and things is very striking and not only extends to objects with which sound is associated, but sometimes is observable even to the eye. [...] No eight monosyllables in any language could convey a more complete image of the horrors of war than does Kisfaludy’s poem: Mars mord dühe a’ mit ér, vág, Bont, tör, ront, dul, sujt, öl.[The ... anger of Mars cuts, dissolve, break, destroy, [...] Whatever changes the language, brought by the Magyars into Europe, has undergone on consequence of their intercourse with their neighbours, the construction has been little changed, and retains its Asiatic forms The words which have been introduced have mostly undergone an Hungarian modification, and of late the language has obtained a decided mastery over the Latin, which, for many centuries, had been the instrument of low and literature. [...] The native Hungarian cannot combine two consonants in the same syllable, The words in the language which present such a combination are foreign. [...] It has only one declension, and the possessive pronouns are suffixa to the nouns, as are the personal pronouns to the verbs, modifying both nouns and verbs to a singular uniformity [...] The prosody of the Magyar is very remarkable. There is no measure of Latin or Greek rythmus to which it does not lend itself. [...] The dialects of Hungary are much unlike; and there is no part of the country where the Magyar is so spoken, as not to be intelligible in every other part.”*⁷

Mezzofanti, the 19th century scholar of languages in Vatican spoke 60 languages and allegedly he told the following to a Czech poet in 1836:

*“Do you know – he told to the Czech poet during a conversation – which is the language that I find the most melodious before all of the other languages after the Italian and the Greek ones? It is the Hungarian. I know some of their new poets, some of their poems the melodiousness of them surprise me. Take care to me, there will suddenly be sparkling a poetical genius in this nation and will prove my opinion. Seemingly the Hungarians do not know what a treasure is residing in their language.”*⁸

Thus, Hungarian is a unique language in Europe, its population is unique along with its co-operative way of thinking and culture. Its declared relatives are very far from it both in language and culture.

⁵ Mercantonio (2002).

⁶ Bowring (1830), *Preface*. p.: vi.

⁷ Bowring (1830), *Introduction: On the Language of the Magyars*. pp.: iv, iv, iv, viii, x, xi, xvi, xvi.

⁸ Cardinal Giuseppe Mezzofanti told it to Águgust Frankl Czech poet in 1836. Dezső Kosztolányi cites in Pesti Napló 23 February 1919 in his paper entitled of *About the language of the martyrs* and this paper was referred by Kiss (1999), p.: 41.

Origin of the Hungarians

The hypotheses concerning their origin and ancient history are even more controversial than the classification of the language. Official concept of origin is the so-called Finno-Ugric hypothesis. According to this highly unconfirmed theory the Hungarians were hunting-gathering-fishing people of the Siberian riversides in the 2nd millennium BCE, living close to their so-called closest relatives, the Voguls. However, there is as many places of proposed origin as many concepts – and the concepts alone already numbering a dozen. Common to these concepts is that the Hungarians broke up from their community around the end of the 2nd millennium BCE and became steppe dwelling, horse riding and big game herding society. Their culture has turned from that time to be a warrior pastoral culture supervised by Turkish tribes and nations. At the end of the 1st millennium BCE they could have inhabited pastures around the Volga–Kama area, from where they wandered in a couple of steps to the Western side of Dnieper river. From here they conquered the Carpathian basin at 895. Here they have settled to become a farming society and formed their Christian kingdom in 1001 CE with Steven (István) I as King.

This hypothesis is based only on linguistic data, which – as we have already shown above – are very hazy and controversial. The alternative theories are partly based on a potential language connection to the Turkish family of languages as well as partly on the ancient Hungarian chronicles. These chronicles from among the oldest of which originated in the 13th century say that the Hungarian warriors arrived to the Carpathian Basin from Scythia, i.e. from the Russian steppe. They were the ancestors of the former steppe power, the Huns.

It is true, that leaders of the Conquest carried out in 895 CE were from the tribe of the Hun King Attila, but there is a strong debate how much their conquering people was counted. The chronicles speak about 7 captains each heading an army of 3 thousand warriors. The historians transformed the concept of captains to be heads of tribes in order to increase the number of conquering people up to the potential population of the Carpathian Basin after the conquest, that should have been over a half a million. However, the people of the conquest have settled only in the steppe area of the Basin thus the non-steppe area should have been occupied by the aboriginal people of the Carpathian Basin. Their number should have exceed considerably the number of conquering warriors, therefore their language should have been found in this area. The only mass spoken language, however, was the Hungarian in this territory.

The recent human-genetic studies showed a complete different picture with respect to the official 'scientific' theory. The alleles of the Y-chromosome of the Hungarian population do not show any resemblance to those of its ethnic relatives. Their alleles are basically ancient European (over 74%) and additionally there is even older genetic variation from the Middle-Eastern population of around 10%. TAT an allele characteristic to the north-European people is missing from the Hungarian people⁹. The genetically closest relatives to the Hungarians are the Ukrainian, the Polish and then the Croatian people.

The aboriginal settlers of the Carpathian Basin and the close area at the north-eastern and eastern slopes and plains of the Carpathian Mountains were farmers and metal producers. Their culture corresponds to the later Hungarian folk culture but not to the Slavic culture now in the same area. These people did not have tribal or city-dwelling social organisation up to the end of the last millennia BCE, however they had their own writing, known now as the Székely runic script. The Hungarian people have over 300.000 folk songs and sagas characterised by non-subordinating perception and the melodies of pentatonic order. The Hungarian folk art uses only floral elements and non-predatory animals i.e. birds or roe, deer. These elements are all representatives of the

⁹ Semino (2000).

traditional elements of the living soul (air, water, fire and earth)¹⁰. This kind of characteristics of the folk art can be seen at the archaeological findings during the known history of the Hungarian country back even before the so-called Conquest.

Cultural characteristics of the steppe appeared several times during the archaeology of the Carpathian Basin at each time when pastoral people of the steppe arrived there but disappeared soon indicating that the people of the incomers were dissolved in the old settlers of the Basin. It happened also after the Conquest but disappeared again very soon indicating an amalgamation of the warrior tribe with the settled aboriginal population of the conquered land. Tribes of Pechenegs and Kuns – pastoral people from the steppe at the end of the first and beginning of the second millennia CE – did arrive here too, comprising here approximately one hundred thousand of population occupying mainly the steppe area of the Carpathian basin, but their cultural effects have also vanished very soon.

A double cultural character of the settlers in the Carpathian Basin could have only been detected from the time of the conquest of the Huns. Before that time there was a farmer society within the Carpathian basin and at its eastern outer region called Przeworsk or Cjernjakov cultures with dominantly egalitarian graves. The peoples of the former culture “*from the upper Dneestr valley to the Tisza river in Hungary and northward to the valleys of the Oder and Vistula*” were characterised by their farmer style of life, they produced metals – including weapons – however, the people from this area did not conquer any of their neighbouring areas. “*The cultural unity of the Przeworks came to a sudden end in the early fifth century, probable as a result of major shifts southward and westward following the advent of Huns and the diaspora Goths*” as Todd¹¹ writes. The latter one had “*risen to prominence between the Danube and the Dnepr*”. “*It reached its peak in the fourth century, by which time it had extended southwards to the Danube*”. “*Cjernjakov was a remarkably dynamic and innovative culture, characterised by fine, polished pottery, metalwork of high quality, and excellent iron equipment*” – as was characteristic to the later Hungarian culture within the Carpathian Basin after the Conquest.

Both cultures were on the area of the former Bükk- and Cucuteni (Tripolye) cultures (5th and 4th millennia BCE)¹² developed on the bases of the old Bükk culture – the Szeletian and the Istállóskő (from the middle period to the end of the Würm Ice Age)¹³. The latter one was the first culture with definitely characteristics of the modern man – the 'birthplace' of the Aurignacian culture. The Old European cultures of the Carpathian Basin¹⁴ and the ones followed them on the same area were settled, egalitarian ones with very strong metallurgy including the earliest copper smelting, the earliest iron foundries¹⁵ and the earliest runic script. Their art showed the very same characteristics as the much later Hungarian folk art. Thus the symbols of the soul were broadly represented in the folk art, the grave supplements and localities show highly equivalence of the people but not a god-religion dominated subordination. This nature characterises the Hungarian settled people just after the Conquest and during their history up to the 20th century. The Hungarian language shows similar characteristics.

A highly developed settled society having been in existance for a couple of millennia seeking a successor language at the same area where there is a highly developed language seeking an ancestor society with a long-term high density settled population. The logical answer is that these two belong together.

¹⁰ Lükő (1942), Visky (1928).

¹¹ Todd (1998), p.: 452.

¹² Gimbutas (1982), Gimbutas (1991).

¹³ Gáboriné (1980).

¹⁴ Gimbutas (1982), Gimbutas (1991).

¹⁵ Renfrew (1974).

Conclusion: The Hungarian language and the people of a culture speaking the Hungarian language was born in the Carpathian Basin and reached its very rich state of development by many millennia settled life within the Basin and in its close eastern and north-eastern environment. The Hungarian people are the aborigines of the Carpathian Basin.

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