

Ethnonyms and early medieval ethnicity: Methodological reflections

Walter POHL

Abstract

This contribution will address the much-discussed issue whether 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic identity' are meaningful categories of historical research, what they mean and how we can use them in the interpretation of late antique and early medieval sources. It will present new concepts of ethnic identity and ethnicity. In this model, ethnic identity is seen as the result of a complex process of communication and interaction, and as both flexible and potentially very durable. The term 'ethnicity' describes a cognitive and strategic scheme of ordering the social world, in which ethnonyms are fundamental. 'Ethnicity' as a system of distinctions between collective social actors and 'ethnic identity' as the result of a series of identifications are of course closely linked, but they represent different aspects of 'the ethnic'. Therefore, ethnonyms do not necessarily reflect ethnic self-identification of the group concerned, although they often do. What they attest to is some shared belief that humans can be distinguished according to ethnic distinctions, that is, on the basis of 'natural' affiliations that people are born with.

About the presenter

Walter POHL is a Professor of Medieval History at the University of Vienna and the Director of the Institute for Medieval Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. His research focuses on early medieval identities, the history of the steppe peoples and the 'transformation of the Roman World'.

Selected publications

Walter POHL: *Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa, 567-822 n. Ch.* (München, ³2015, reworked English version in preparation).

Walter POHL: *Migrations, ethnic groups, and state building.* In: M. Maas (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila.* (Cambridge 2015), 247–263.

Walter POHL: 'Huns, Avars, Hungarians – Comparative Perspectives Based on Written Evidence', in: Jürgen Bemann and Michael Schmauder (eds.), *The Complexity of Interaction along the Eurasian Steppe Zone in the First Millennium CE* (Bonn 2015), 693–702.

Walter POHL: 'Political uses of ethnicity in early medieval Europe', in: *Conceptualizing Ethnicity as a Political Resource – across Disciplines, Regions, and Periods; University of Cologne Forum Ethnicity as a political Resource* (Bielefeld 2015), 201–208.

Walter POHL with Gerda HEYDEMANN (eds.): *Strategies of Identification. Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 13* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013)

'Magyar' as the name of persons, places and communities

György SZABADOS

Abstract

By a name we can identify – or at least we can try to identify – a community. But if we look at the process how people gave names during the early medieval history, we have to face many limits and problems. On the one hand, communities were organized by several ways and different kinds of identities (e. g. person, state, clan, ethnic group) which can be confusing. On the other hand, the name and its denoted object can lead into different directions: for example one name could identify more folks and on the contrary, an ethnic group could have many names.

My paper focuses on the word 'Magyar' which is now an internal name of the 'Hungarian' nation. The Hungarians entered the history during the 9th century, but the first occurrence of their internal name goes back to the first part of the 6th century and not in a group-identifying role. Ca. 530 lived a Kutrigur-Hunnic king who was mentioned as 'Muageris' by Byzantine authors. Some historians and philologists asserted that the name 'Muageris' can be related with the 'Magyars'. An important Byzantine work, the *De Administrando Imperio* (ca. 950) enumerates 'the clan of Meger' amongst the 'Turk' [Hungarian] clans, and centuries later the old Hungarian narrative sources mentioned 'Hetumoger' or 'het Mogor' both in the meaning of 'seven Hungarians'.

Comparing these datas with other ones which can be found in the old Hungarian gestas and chronicles, and systematizing the occurrences of name 'Magyar', we can see that 'Muageris' can be inserted into the frame of the written datas. The word 'Magyar' can be found as denoting 1.) Personal name: 'Hunor' and 'Magor' who are the twins of the original Hungarian ethnic myth, the forefathers of all Huns and Hungarians. 2.) Name of a place, the ancient homeland: some Hungarian chronicles mentioned 'Magor' as a synonym of whole 'Scythia' or a part of 'Scythia' with two other provinces called 'Bascardia' and 'Dentia'. 3.) Name of a clan (the aforementioned 'Meger'). 4.) Ethnic name (e. g. the aforementioned 'het Mogor').

About the presenter

György SZABADOS, PhD is a Senior Research Fellow of the Research Group for Hungarian Medieval Studies – Hungarian Academy of Sciences – Institute and Museum for Military History – University of Szeged – Hungarian National Archives. He got his PhD-degree in 2003 at the University of Szeged where he is teaching since 1995. The fields of his research are: Hungarian history between 9th–13th centuries (ethnogenesis, politics, statehood, military events), Hungarian historiography between 11th–18th centuries focusing on the annalists of the Counter-Reformation. He is an author of 2 independent monographs and a co-editor of 3 other books, and he has published 121 papers (studies, reviews, etc.).

Selected publications

György SZABADOS: The annals as a genre of Hungarian Jesuit historiography in the 17th–18th centuries. From the state history to the history of the state. in: *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Upsaliensis*. Steiner-Weber, A. (ed.) Vol. 2. (Leiden–Boston 2012), 1067–1075.

György SZABADOS: Egy steppe-állam Európa közepén: Magyar Nagyfejedelemség. (A steppe-state in Central Europe: The Hungarian Great Principality). in: *Dolgozatok az Erdélyi Múzeum Érem- és Régiségtárából. Új sorozat VI–VII. (XVI–XVII.) kötet.* (Kolozsvár 2013), 119–150.

György SZABADOS: Identitásformák és hagyományok. [Identities and traditions] in: Sudár B. – Szentpéteri J. – Petkes Zs. – Lezsák G. – Zsidai Zs. (eds.): *Magyar őstörténet. Tudomány és hagyományörzés.* (Budapest 2014), 289–305.

Approaches to the value of toponyms with ethonymic origin as historical sources

Valéria TÓTH

Abstract

Beyond certain subfields of linguistics, the testimony of toponyms has also long been one of the foundations that the study of history is based upon. To understand why this is the case, one has to look no further than the fact that sources available to researchers within written records of early Hungarian history consist almost exclusively of Hungarian proper nouns, which survived mostly in Latin-language (and, occasionally, Greek) charters and historical narratives. Historians rely on toponyms primarily when dealing with issues concerning the history of particular settlements and their ownership, as well as when charting early linguistic-ethnic conditions within the Carpathian Basin, in the course of the latter of which, apart from names of foreign origin, it is toponyms with ethonymic constituents that can be used to gain information. In my lecture I demonstrate the approaches throwing some light on the value of the latter type of toponyms, i.e., toponyms (mostly names of settlements) of ethonymic origin as linguistic-ethnic sources. I also raise a related topic, that of a theory, namely, the so-called theory of historical toponym typology, its shortcomings and contradictions, and I also introduce a method which may be far more helpful in clarifying these issues: the method of linguistic reconstruction for ethnic purposes.

About the presenter

Valéria Tóth is an assistant professor at the Department of Hungarian Linguistics, University of Debrecen. Author of four monographs (*Névrendszer-tani vizsgálatok a korai ómagyar korból* [Onomatosystematical analyses in the early Hungarian age], Debrecen, 2001; *Az Árpád-kori Abaúj és Bars vármegye helyneveinek történeti-etimológiai szótára* [Historical-etymological dictionary of the toponyms of the Abaúj and Bars comitates in the age of the Árpád dynasty], Debrecen, 2001; *Településnevek változástipológiája* [Change typology of settlement names], Debrecen, 2008, *Személynévadás és személynévhasználat az ómagyar korban* [Personal Name-Giving and Personal Name-Usage in the Old Hungarian Period]) and a member of the team compiling the dictionaries of old Hungarian toponyms (*Helynévtörténeti adatok a korai ómagyar korból 1–3* [Data from the history of toponyms from the early Hungarian age], Debrecen, 1997–2012; *Korai magyar helynévszótár* [Dictionary of early Hungarian toponyms], Debrecen, 2005). She is one of the editors of the international onomastic journal *Onomastica Uralica*. At present she concentrates mainly on the database project *Magyar Digitális Helynévtár* [Hungarian Digital Toponym Registry].

Selected publications

Valéria TÓTH (ed.): 2011. *Patrociny Settlement Names in Europe*. *Onomastica Uralica* 8. Debrecen (Helsinki, Debrecen University Press 2011).

Valéria TÓTH: *Strata of Ethnicity, Languages and Settlement Names in the Carpathian Basin*. *Namenkundliche Informationen* (2010) 98: 135–146.

István HOFFMANN–Valéria TÓTH: *A nyelvi és az etnikai rekonstrukció kérdései a 11. századi Kárpát-medencében*. *Századok* (2016) 150: 257–318.

Barbarians at the gate: Frontiers and ethnic identities in Late Antiquity

Salvatore LICCARDO

Abstract

Drawing upon case studies from geographical texts and panegyrics, the presentation aims to appreciate the richness and the adaptability of ethnographic nomenclatures that Late Antique and Early Medieval mapmakers, geographers and orators had at their disposal. Because of the vague disciplinary definition of geography and a very widespread lexical conservatism, authors that dealt with barbarian peoples could easily blur distinctions between genres, historical events and even between languages. In Late Antique geographical works and panegyrics one can find names of coeval peoples right after names of groups who had disappeared from historiographical records centuries before or even of peoples that never existed, like dog-headed or all-ears men. Citing ancient and extravagant ethnonyms writers could display their erudition and exercise their rhetorical expertise. Ethnonyms taken from mythology or with a telling etymology served to trigger readers' imagination and revoke known literary commonplaces, which could shape images of distant places. Listing names of gentes according to a geographical or an alphabetical order, geographers and orators created inventories that served to nurture and perpetuate Roman conceptions of the world and the imperial rhetoric. In conclusion, the analysis of a few captions from the Tabula Peutingeriana will shed light on the way ethnonyms function as structuring devices in cultural and political discourses.

About the presenter

Salvatore LICCARDO is working at the Institute for Medieval Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. His research interests include the ethnical interactions between Roman and Barbaric communities, the gradual formation of the national identities in Early Medieval Europe and the social role assumed by the ecclesiastical institutions during the last centuries of the Roman Empire and after.

Selected publications:

Salvatore LICCARDO: Filling in the blanks: Ethnonyms on the Tabula Peutingeriana. In: Stefan Donecker (ed.): *Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters*. Band 21, VÖAW (forthcoming).

Social Integration, Spatial Separation? Ethnic Diversity in Medieval Yemen

Odile KOMMER

Abstract

This paper aims first to shed light on social frontiers that manifest spatially in the form of separate living quarters for minority communities within medieval South Arabian settlement structures and then to contrast this with the idea of integrating and "protecting" minority groups within the general population. Regarding questions of integration, a spatial component proves relevant for social organization in the Yemeni highlands. While a picture of divided settlements relates to social loyalties and alliances as well as to collective categorization and distinction within a shared (urban) space, it also represents a certain notion of community for minority populations. By focusing on Arabic terms and group designations in Yemeni sources, categories of social inclusion or exclusion become explicit. Drawing on linguistic or religious conceptions, they also feed processes of ethnic identification and influence social cohesion. The notion of a secluded space for minority community life as a privilege granted by the local rulers provides common ground for further comparison over time and across regions.

About the presenter

Odile Kommer is recipient of a DOC-team fellowship of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and a doctoral researcher at the Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA). She completed her MA in 2011 at the University of Vienna's Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology. Her main research interests are Historical Anthropology and the Anthropology of the Arab Peninsula. Currently, she is working on her dissertation on Ethnonyms in 9th and 10th Century CE Yemen from a Historical Anthropological Perspective: A Survey on the Basis of al-Hamdānī's Main Work as part of the DOC-team project Ethnonyms by Comparison: An interdisciplinary Survey in Medieval Western Europe and Southwest Arabia.

Selected publications:

Odile KOMMER: Von „Söhnen“ und ihrem Erbe: Persische Minderheiten im mittelalterlichen Jemen, *Jemen-Report*, (2016) 47 1/2, pp. 32–35.

Strategies of setting boundaries between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ in Medieval Yemeni Sources

Andrea NOWAK

Abstract

The paper examines Ibn al-Muğāwir's travelogue (13th century Arabia) and discusses the author's use of ethnonyms such as “Arabs” and “Persians”, but also of various smaller groups living in medieval South Arabia. A thorough analysis of this literary mixed narrative aims to identify different strategies of setting boundaries between the “Self” and the “Other”. The concepts used in this endeavor are (i) real and imagined genealogies, (ii) the distinction between the civilized and the barbaric, and (iii) notions of spatial division and territorial claims. In the course of describing the communal life of ethnic groups, their trade customs, relationships and sexual practices the author gradually distances himself from the “Other”. A comparison to contemporaneous writings of different genres, such as al-Ḥazraǧī's “Pearl Strings” and ‘Umārah al-Yamanī's “Tariḥ al-Yaman” will shed further light on the usage of ethnonyms as conceptual tools in different medieval settings.

About the presenter

Andrea NOWAK is a researcher and teaching assistant at the Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Vienna and holds an MA in Arabic language with specialization in philology. She received a OeAW Doctoral Fellowship for teams (Humanities, Cultural Studies and Social Sciences) and started to work on her PhD in 2014, examining South Arabian primary sources from the Late Middle Ages, focusing on ethnonyms and proper names.

Mapping Turkic peoples and tribes in the 9–11th centuries

Zsuzsanna ZSIDAI

Abstract

The identification of the various people living on the medieval Eurasian Steppe has always been a serious and often discussed problem by the scholars researching the early history of this territory. The Arabs came into contact with Central Asian peoples from the 7th century onward during the course of the Islamic conquest hence we can find many details about the Steppe peoples in the Arabic sources too.

The Arabic geographer Ibn Rusta mentions the Hungarians among the Turkic peoples in the beginning of the 10th century. However, the Arabic sources relate that we can find many Turkic tribes or peoples in different regions, such in Ferghana, Khorasan, Transoxania, Samarkand and near to Armenia. Based on this fact, the name ‘Turk’ may be interpreted in different ways. My aim is to point at some difficulties regarding the translation and interpretation of terms referring to peoples or tribes like ‘*djins*’ or ‘*kaum*’ and to show some examples for the occurrences of ethnonym ‘Turk’ in the medieval Arabic texts.

After the examination of the methodological questions I will argue that we can use the name ‘Turk’ as a group-identifying term more carefully in the wider context of the early medieval world of the Eurasian Steppe.

About the presenter

Zsuzsanna ZSIDAI is an Assistant Research Fellow at the Early Hungarian History Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and holds MA in Arabic Language and Literature and History. She has started her PhD studies at the University of Vienna in 2013 autumn about the Early Hungarians and the Turkic peoples in the medieval Islamic sources. Her research focuses on the early history of the Eurasian Nomadic peoples based on the Arabic sources.

Selected publications

Zsuzsanna ZSIDAI: Al-Idrīsī a baskírokról – adalék a „baskír kérdés” arab forrásaihoz. [Al-Idrīsī's account on the Bashkirs – addenda to the Arabic sources]. In: Cs. Balogh–Zs. Petkes–B. Sudár–Zs. Zsidai (eds.), ...In nostra lingua Hringe nominant. Tanulmányok Szentpéteri József 60. születésnapja tiszteletére. (Budapest–Kecskemét 2015), 231–242.

Zsuzsanna ZSIDAI: Ismā’īl ibn Aḥmad 893-as hadjárata és a magyar honfoglalás. [Ismā’īl ibn Aḥmad's raid in 893 and the Hungarian conquest] In: MÓT Források és Tanulmányok 2. (forthcoming).

From nomadism to ethnicity

Dávid SOMFAI KARA

Abstract

International scholarship on Inner Asian studies – including Hungarian scholarship – examined several stock-breeding and horse-riding nomadic societies that could help to obtain a better picture about the social structure of the land-conquering early Hungarian State if it is possible in a hypothetical way. The social and ethnic processes of Inner Asian nomads are well documented in the 19th and 20th centuries, sometimes even from an earlier period, while scarce information on early Hungarian history is not sufficient for that.

One of the aspects is the complex relation between ethnonyms (autonyms and exonyms), their different meanings in historical and political context, their occurrences on different levels (political, tribal, ethnic, etc.). Question arises whether we can really call them ethnonyms? Some of the modern ethnic groups of Inner Asia are the product of recent development and often were created by political and not ethnic processes. Some of the ethnonyms were not autonyms and their usage was decided by a small circle of people (political or cultural elite) and they were later accepted as autonyms. The altering of ethnonyms due to political changes is also significant. It is also interesting to see the attempts of modern nations and ethnic groups to explore their early political and ethnic history (ethno-genesis) based on their languages and ethnonyms and to observe their obvious mistakes.

About the presenter

Dávid SOMFAI KARA is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Ethnology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He holds a PhD degree in Mongolian studies since 2005. Besides Mongol, he speaks English, Russian and many Turkic languages like Kazak, Kyrgyz, Bashkir etc. He has done a lot of fieldwork in Central Asia and was a lecturer at the department of Inner Asian studies at the Eötvös Loránd University. He spent a year in Bloomington at the Indiana University in 2010 with the HAESF Senior Leaders and Scholars Fellowship where he studied the religious life of the western Siouan (Lakota) people. His research focuses on the folklore and religious life of the peoples of Central Asia and Siberia.

Selected publications

Dávid SOMFAI KARA: Kalmak: The Enemy in the Kazak and Kirghiz Epic Song. *Acta Orientalia ASH* (2010) 63, 167–178.

Dávid SOMFAI KARA: Baba Tükli and the Swan Girl. Legitimising Elements in the Turkic Epic Edge. *Acta Orientalia ASH* (2010) 63, 117–132.

Dávid SOMFAI KARA: Religious Traditions among the Kazak and Kirghiz. In: Thierry Zarcone – Angela Hobart (eds.): *Shamanism and Islam: Sufism, Healing Rituals and Spirits*. (London: Tauris. 2013), 47–58.

Dávid SOMFAI KARA: Kazak. *Languages of the World: Materials*; 417. (München: LINCOM Europe), 2002.

Dávid SOMFAI KARA: Kyrgyz. *Languages of the World: Materials*; 423. (München: LINCOM Europe), 2003.

Evenki hunter-gathering style and cultural contact

Tatiana SAFONOVA – István SÁNTHA

Abstract

This presentation is based on several periods of long-term field research conducted between 1995 and 2009 among various groups of Evenki, who inhabit the Baikal region of East Siberia. During these expeditions the researchers recognized that it was problematical to categorize the Evenki as exclusively hunter-gatherers, although compared to other people, especially their neighbors, they seemed to maintain a lifestyle best described as hunter-gathering. Based on evidence collected by other ethnographers, mainly Shirokogoroff and Shubin, we will argue that the hunter-gathering lifestyle is always framed by contacts with cattle-breeders, traders, peasants, miners and people with other occupations. Very often transformations and transitions in a hunter-gathering lifestyle are caused by either social or environmental changes. As a conclusion it could be said that the hunter-gathering lifestyle can be defined as a strategy of adaptation to external circumstances, and in this respect temporary inclusion of cattle, horse and reindeer breeding, as well as wage labor, do not mean complete assimilation. On the contrary, these strategies help to maintain hunter-gathering activities in the long term. We would like to show? a critical approach of the connections between hunter-gathers and their neighbors preferring not to operate through ethnicity rather to analyze how the content of hunter-gatherer determinations has been changed in a particular region over the last century.

About the presenters

Tatiana SAFONOVA is a candidate of science (2009) at the Saint-Petersburg State University (2003–2013) and she worked at Centre for Independent Social Research. She published articles on the problems of natural and cultural conservation in post-soviet Russia, anthropology of Siberia, and ethnomethodological studies. She has an MPhil in Social Anthropology at Cambridge University (2014). Recently she works on her PhD project at Central European University (Budapest) on the relationship between human and plants in Hungary.

István SÁNTHA, PhD (2004, Eötvös University, Budapest) is a Senior Research Fellow at the Research Centre for the Humanities at the Hungarian Academy of Science. He has published articles on the problems of modern hunter-gatherers in East Siberia and their culture contact strategies with hierarchical societies. Recently he initiated a new project in the frames of Regional History Research Team in collaboration between Research Centre for the Humanities and the Institute of National Remembrance on the topic How the World War II and the post war period forms the life and strategies of the people in South Vertesh Mountain (Hungary).

Selected publications

T. SAFONOVA – I. SÁNTHA: *Culture Contact in Evenki Land: A Cybernetic Anthropology of Baikal Region*. (Brill: Global Oriental, Leiden), 2013.

Ethnic levels and ethnonyms unraveled in situations

Three ethnological case studies of ethnicity and ethnonyms – in Hunza (Pakistan),
in Kunashak rayon (Russia), and in the Carpathian basin

László Koppány CSÁJI

Abstract

My presentation is based on three of my social anthropological case studies: 1. among Hunzakuts, Shinas, Berichos and Wakhis (Gilgit region, North Pakistan) 2. among Bashkirs and Tatars of Kunashak rayon (Chelyabinsk Oblast, Russia); 3. among new religious movements and neo-pagan groups in Romania, Serbia and Hungary. I will analyze ethnic interpretations and interactions in real life (in spite of declarations in interviews), which can only be studied during an anthropological fieldwork. If we consider the emic terms, ethnicity is a quite ambivalent phenomenon. Different levels of ethnic-like social knowledge (based on experiences, discourses, memories and value-preferences) are unraveled by the actors in the given situations. Ethnonyms become fluid. Even opposite meanings can be recognized when situations catalyze different registers of knowledge. My theoretical interpretations are based on some examples of my case studies: a) what are the levels of ethnic (and quasi ethnic) categories among the given social environment? (question of compatibility) b) what kind of exonyms and autonyms arose in situations? (question of situation-dependence) c) what can be the role of territorial and local differences in study of ethnicity? (question of locality and other social networks). One of my main conclusion is that it is not obvious to choose which level can be called the ethnic unit with our etic terms, and with what content.

About the presenter

László Koppány CSÁJI is an ethnographer, cultural and social anthropologist. His main fields of research are NRMs, neo-pagan movements, community studies, ethnicity, cultural construction of social groups, subcultures, mentality studies, methodology of discourse analysis, online ethnography, ethnology of religions, historical anthropology. He is a member of the SIEF (Ethnology of Religion Working Group), Hungarian Ethnographical Society (MNT), Hungarian Anthropological Society (MAKAT), Hungarian Association of Writers (MÍ). He conducted anthropological fieldworks in Serbia, Romania, Hungary, Russia, Pakistan, and shorter researches in Nepal, India, Japan and Indonesia.

Selected publications

László Koppány CSÁJI: About the role we could imagine for the White Huns (Hephtalites/Var-Hiuns) in the ethno-cultural roots of the Hunza's current population, and placing the Hunzakuts' shamanic practices within the Eurasian shamanic repertoire. Was Hunza a refuge of the White Huns? In: Sz. G. Botalov – N. N. Kradin – I. E. Ljubanskij (eds.): *The Hun Forum*. (Origin and identification problems of the Eurasian Huns' culture). (Chelyabinsk 2013), 384–404.

Чайи Ласло Коппаны: Вопрос этницизма и образа жизни на примере мадьяров (венгров) периода „Обретения Родины”. In: Botalov, S. G. (ed.): *II-й Международный Мадьярский Симпозиум*. (Chelyabinsk: Russian Academy of Sciences – South Ural State University 2013), 71–75.

László Koppány CSÁJI: Flying with the Vanishing Fairies: Typology of the Shamanistic Traditions of the Hunza. *Anthropology of Consciousness* Vol. 22, Journal of the American Anthropological Association, 2011: 159–187.