

Old Hungarian River Names in the Multilingual Carpathian Basin

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Abstract

When analysing the etymological layers of Hungarian river names, it soon becomes clear that loan names make up a much larger group than in the group of settlement names, for instance. This fact can be due to the phenomenon that in the case of hydronyms, name-giving and name-usage is driven mainly by communicative needs, while other (e.g., socio-cultural or political) factors only rarely influence name-giving.

In my paper, it is my aim to provide an etymological typology of Hungarian hydronyms from the Árpád-era, for this is the group among Hungarian hydronyms which can be dated the most precisely. The Árpád-era is a period stretching from the Hungarian conquest (896) to the end of the reign of the Árpád-dynasty (1301). From a linguistic point of view, this period, somewhat extended, is termed the era of Old Hungarian. It seems to be justified to choose the Hungarian hydronyms of the Árpád-era as the corpus of my investigation, for the country was strongly multilingual and multiethnic at this period (Hungarian, Slavic, German, Turkish), which also had an effect on the system of water names.

I explore the panchronic characteristics of name-giving by looking at elements of the Hungarian hydronymic system which come from different languages. Thus, it is the semantic content expressed in the individual names which is my focus, as they are based on human cognitive processes and as such are more or less universal. At the same time, I place a smaller emphasis on the description of language-specific name-formation processes.

1. From ancient times onwards, the Carpathian basin has been Europe's most densely inhabited area. Archaeological finds (skull bones, children's milk-teeth, bone tools, etc.) found in Vértesszőlös (Hungary) imply the presence of early primitive man and lead to a conclusion that this area was already populated 350 to 400 thousand years ago. Continuous human presence in the region is suggested by numerous other archaeological finds as well. As a consequence of a Neolithic demographic boom in Southwest Asia, a huge mass of people migrated to the Balkans across Asia Minor and from there along the river Danube. The Carpathian basin ensured relative security, and in addition, plains and wide rivers and brooks made the area suitable for agriculture and animal keeping; everything promoted the habitation of the basin. In later periods, numerous other peoples inhabited the Carpathian basin (even if only temporarily): Thracians, Illyrians, Scythians, Celts, Dacians, etc. Ethnically variegated changes started in the period of ethnic migrations, approximately A.D. 300–600. In this period Alans, Huns, Goths, Gepids, Avars, Slavic people and others lived in this area.

In my presentation I would like to reflect only on a few centuries of the history of the Carpathian basin. In Hungarian history, this period is usually referred to as the Árpád age. This period lasted from the Hungarian Conquest (896) following centuries of migrations in Eastern Europe to the end of the reign of the Árpád dynasty (1301).

2. Mapping the ethnic relations of this period is a difficult task since historians lack reliable sources regarding the Árpád age. Besides, the researcher has to face the problem of applying the

term *ethnic group* to a situation which existed centuries ago. In Hungarian historian Gyula Kristó's excellent study by of ethnic relations during the reign of Stephen I (reigned from 1000 to 1038), we read: "ethnic group affiliation was a matter of an affiliation to a state framework. We can easily see, therefore, that this does not reflect actual ethnic, but rather political frames" (2000). I myself use the term Hungarian in the same way: not in the sense of ethnic group, but in the sense of "on the territory of Hungary".

At this point it seems worth noting that the population of the Árpád age in Hungary shows a rather colourful picture: Slavic people, Germans, Pecheneg, Wallons, Rumanians, Turkish people and, last but not least, Hungarians lived here.

My paper, however, is not about the ability of toponyms to determine the ethnic group living in a given area; it merely studies the river names of the Árpád age. In general, we can say that the name group of river names is not completely capable of mapping the ethnic relations of the surrounding population. If we want to get a more detailed picture of the use of hydronyms for the above purpose, we have to consider István Hoffman's remarks regarding them. On the basis of name sociology research into natural names, we may state that the name givers and name users of microtoponyms appear within the borders of one settlement; therefore, they cannot show us the ethnic relations of a broader environment, although they are suitable for conclusions about local ethnic relations. However, the use of microtoponyms to this end is rather rare. (Cf. Hoffmann 2007: 91).

3. In what follows, I would like to present the different linguistic (and indirectly: chronological) layers of Hungarian river names. These names naturally refer to people once or still living in the Carpathian basin. As an aside to research on river names I have chosen the name-giving motivation: in other words, I will take into account those model types which could have served as a basis for name giving. These cognitive categories of human thinking are not linguistic classes but extralinguistic components of name giving.

I have used two sources to compile a name corpus with more than 1,200 names which served as a basis of this study: the 2nd, 3rd and 4th volumes of György Györffy's *Az Árpád-kori Magyarország történeti földrajza* (The historical geography of Árpád age Hungary) and *Korai magyar helynévszótár* (The early Hungarian dictionary of toponyms) (Ed. István Hoffmann. Debrecen, 2005.)

3.1. The oldest group of Hungarian river names are, after Hans Krahe, referred to as the Old European (alteuropäisch) layer (1964). In Krahe's interpretation, the attribute 'Old European' signifies the historical linguistic period between the Proto-Indo-European and the development of specific languages. His student, Wolfgang P. Schmid already defines the term as a special linguistic-chronological layer of the hydronymicon: the hydronyms of today's Europe, developed from elements of the Indo-European language, starting from 1500 B.C., belong here (1981).

Among the names of major rivers, those that belong to the Old European hydronymicon are, for example: *Árva* (< *er-, *or- 'to move, to start to move'), *Dráva* (< *drouos 'waterflow'), *Duna* (< *danu- 'river'), *Garam* (< *ghren- 'to dig, to pick the ground'), *Ida* (< *ei-, *oi-, *i- 'to go, to be in a hurry'), *Lajta* (< *loidhos 'mud'), *Marcal* (< *murs- 'marsh'), *Maros* (< *mori ~ mōri 'sea, pond, lake, still water'), *Rába* (< *ēreb(h)-, *ōrob(h)- 'dark red, brownish'), *Szamos* (< *s(w)om-īsyō 'rich in catfish'), *Tisza* (< *Tīsjo 'muddy' < *tí 'to defrost, to make defrost'), *Zala* (< *sal- 'brook, river, stream').

3.2. Among the river names from Árpád age Hungary, quite a few are of Slavic origin. While we cannot really say the name giving motivation of the Old European layer varied, the names mentioned in this group show a more colourful picture.

The most common motivation for the names borrowed from Slavic is the flora surrounding the river. The majority of names were formed after trees found along the river bank: *Orbó*, *Varbó*, *Varbóc*, *Varbók*, *Verbelice* and *Verbice* are names which can by means of different methods be traced back to the Slavic **vrba* ‘willow tree’ plant name. The Rivers *Lipcse*, *Lippa*, *Lipó*, *Lipok*, *Liponok*, *Lipóc* and *Lipva* received their names after the linden trees framing the water (Proto-Slavonic **lipa* ‘lime, linden’), while the word **jelchъa* ‘alder’ can be discovered in the names *Ilosva*, *Ilsuk*, *Jósva*, *Oleska*, and *Ósva*. The names *Berzence*, *Breznice* and *Brizona* probably denoted water streams framed by birch trees (< *berza* ‘birch tree’), oak trees stood on the banks of the *Dobó*, *Dubnica* and *Dubróka* rivers (< **dobъ* ‘tölgyfa’), beech trees bordered the *Bukova* and *Bukóca*, while hornbeam bordered the *Gerbece*, *Harabó* and *Hrabice(s)* brooks (< *grab(r)ъ* ‘hornbeam’). Besides trees, other plant names could have served as a basis for name giving: *žito* ‘rye, wheat’ lexemes could have been the terminal source of names *Zsikva*, *Zsitva*, while the reed along the river banks appears in the names *Rohozsnica* (< Proto-Slavonic *rogozъ* ‘reed’) and *Szikince*, *Szitznyice* (< Proto-Slavonic **sita* ~ **sitъ* ‘rush; a type of reed’).

Among the names of Slavic origin which were incorporated in the Hungarian hydronymic system, the semantic content ‘the relation of water to another place’ often appears. The closeness of the water to a forest, a plain, a meadow provided the motivation for the following names: *Dervence* (< Proto-Slavonic **dervo* ~ *drъvo* ‘tree; wood; forest’), *Gáj* (< **gajъ* ‘grove, grounds, forest’ or *gol’a* ‘grassy mountain without trees, mountain pasture’), *Gozd* (< *gvozďъ* ‘forest, mountain forest’), *Ladica* and *Lászó* (< **lazъ* ‘clearing, pasture’), *Proszek* (< *pro-* ‘upper, over’ and *-sěka*, *sěkъ* ‘deforestation’), *Tereblye* and *Terpesz* (< **trebiti* ‘to deforest’). The *Debrece* and *Dobraca* hydronyms can be retraced to the Proto-Slavonic word **dъbrъ* ‘valley’ and *Dolina* (< Slavonic *dolina* ‘völgy’). They named waters after the island in the water: cf. for example, the names *Kompa* (< Slavonic ‘stream island covered in bushes’ and *Osztro* (< Slovak *ostrov* ‘island’, in the sense of ‘water dam’). The names *Gerence* (< ‘border’), *Lomnica* (< **lomъ* ‘break, quarry, mine’), and *Szeleden* (< Proto-Slavonic *slědъ* ‘push, blow, parcel’) refer to the local position of the denotatum.

The third most common motivation type is of hydronyms referring to the animal world. Several names are of animal origin: the Slavonic **bebrъ* ‘beaver’ (*Beberc*, *Bebre*, *Bobróc*), the Slavonic **rakъ* ‘crab’ (*Rakaca*, *Rakovic*, *Rákóc*), **srъna* ‘deer’ (*Szernye*, *Szirna*) and the Proto-Slavonic **turъ* ‘ox, cattle’ (*Túr*, *Tura*, *Túróc*). The name *Szince* (< Proto-Slavonic **svinja* ‘pig’) received its name after the pig(s) living around the water, but it is also possible that the original lexeme is Slavonic **sinъ* ~ *sinъ* ‘blue, grey’ or the hydronym *Veperec* (< **veprъ* ‘wild-boar’). Rarely, other animal names appear, too: *Hucina* (Slavonic *gosъ* ‘goose’), *Kerepec* (cf. Ukrainian *кópon* ‘carp’), *Kobolya*, etymologically connected to the Slavic predecessor of Hungarian *kabala* ‘mare’, *Kurca* (cf. Slavonic *kúrica* ‘pullet’; Ukrainian *кúриця* ‘hen’).

The following hydronyms of Slavic origin developed from common names denoting water: *Baláta* (< *bolto* ‘marsh, mud, pond’), *Baraca* and *Baróc* (< **barъ* ‘marsh’), *Bernece* (< **brъn-*, *bryn-* ‘mud’), *Bornanó* (< *brъnъje* ‘mud’), *Galga* and *Klaszita* (< *kalъ* ‘mud, marsh’), *Jamna* (< **jama* ‘trench, pit, hole’), *Luzsa* and *Lúzsna* (< *luža* ‘puddle, marsh’), *Malicska* (< **molka* ‘puddle, marsh’), *Rékas* (< *rěka* ‘river’), *Recske* and maybe *Rocska* (< **rěčъke* ‘small river’), *Szalatnya* (Serbo-Croatian *sl,tina* ‘acid spring’, Czech *slatina* ‘swamp, marsh, moor’), *Szomoga* (cf. Ukrainian N. *смыга* ‘a side bed of a small river with still or flowing water’), *Sztudnyica* (< *studňa* ‘well; cold water’) *Temence* (< Proto-Slavonic **timěňъ* ‘marsh, paddle, mud’).

Among the rarer semantic categories, we can mention the name group referring to the state of the water: *Szuha* (< **suchъ* ‘dry’), *Ilóc* and *Jalóc* (< Proto-Slavonic **jalovъ* ‘infertile, sterile’), *Mertvice* (< **mьrtvъ* ‘dead’), *Panyóca* (< **ponaviti* ‘languish, die’), may be names for water which occasionally dried up, but the latter one also may signify water which streams very slowly. Rivers

Gölnic (< *Gnilьcъ* ‘with stale water’) and *Beredinca* (< **brud-* ~ **brod-* ~ **brid-* ~ **bred-* ‘dark, blurry, muddy’) got their names after their stale and muddy, murky water.

Among names of the Hungarian hydronym system borrowed from Slavic, we may also find a smaller number of those which denote a characteristic of the water or of the water’s environment. The names *Bernece* (< ‘muddy, out of clay’), *Helednek*, *Hlinik* (< *glina* ‘clay’) and *Kálló* (< Proto-Slavonic **kalъno* ‘muddy, sloppy’) refer to a clay bed of the water, while the names *Kamunuska* and *Kemence* (< **kamy* ‘rock’) and *Iskolt* (< **skala* ‘rock’) refer to a rocky bed. The bed of brooks *Revisnye* and *Revistye* must have looked as if torn (< Proto-Slavonic **rъvati* ‘tear, rip’) and the brook *Gorbó* got its name after its meandering feature (< Proto-Slavonic **gъrbъ* ‘lump’). Even the temperature of the water appears in the semantic content expressed in hydronyms; the names *Tapolca*, *Tepla*, *Teplice* and *Toplica* signify the warm temperature of the water, the original antecedent of the names may have been the **toplъ* ~ *teplъ* ‘warm’ adjective. The sound of water running fast may have motivated the names *Gortva* (< **grochotъ* ‘clatter, rattle’), *Revuca* (cf. Slovak *revúci* ‘roaring, mooing, howling’), *Rima* and *Rimóca* (Russian N. *рым’нуть* ‘howl, cry’), *Torockó* (< **trěskati* ‘boom, blare’). The velocity and the manner of water running may have been the motivation in other names, such as: *Beszterce*, *Bisztirc*, *Borza* which were probably fast running waters (< Proto-Slavonic **bystrъ* ‘fast-running (and for this reason usually see-through, transparent)’). The names *Klokocsóc* and *Klukucs* came perhaps from the Slavonic lexeme *klokotati* ‘bubble, gurgle, fume’. The colour of the water sometimes also appeared as a motivation for hydronym forming; several *Béla* and *Belecs* names refer to the white colour of the water (< Slavonic **bělъ* ‘white’); the **čъrnъ* ‘black’ colour name may have been the basis for *Csarnavoda* and *Csarnolta* names, but maybe even *Zagyva* can be listed here (< Proto-Slavonic **sadja* ‘smut’).

3.3. Naturally, the largest number of hydronyms is of Hungarian origin. Similarly to the names of Slavic origin, this group also shows a wide variety of name-giving motivation.

Among Hungarian river names, the most common semantic content is the ‘relation of water to another location’. Water may run to or from the denotatum serving as a benchmark, but it may also refer to the place which the water runs through. It is important to note that this name type is common in the Slavic layer, too; but while waters in the Hungarian hydronymicon usually received their names after a settlement, the Slavic denotata were most usually named after a region or relief in their environment. On the basis of this assumption, we can explain why the names mentioned have not served as a basis for naming settlements, because they have been created before stable settlement systems developed and became consolidated. We can find names representing neighbouring regions and relief in the Hungarian toponym system as well – but in a far smaller number. In the case of the names *Bótrágy*, *Dengeleg*, *Nyésta*, *Szerencs*; *Damak pataka*, *Fúzi-patak*, *Kesző pataka*, *Ózd pataka*, *Told pataka*, and *Zselizi-sár*, the name giving motivation was offered by the local relationship with the settlement.

In the Slavic layer, the most common name-giving basis is the flora surrounding the water, whereas in the Hungarian hydronymicon this is only the second most common motivation. This semantic content appears in *Alma* ‘apple’, *Eger* ‘alder tree’, *Füzegy* ‘willow’, *Kenderes* ‘hempy’, *Nádas* ‘reedy’, *Nyárád* ‘poplar’, *Bükk-patak* ‘beech stream’, *Fenyő-sevnice* ‘pine acid stream’, *Hárs-patak* ‘lime stream’, *Mohos-patak* ‘mossy stream’, *Somos-patak* ‘dogwoody stream’ names.

The third most frequent category consists of hydronyms referring to a person or a group of people somehow connected to the water. Besides personal names, this semantic content is expressed by ethnic group names and profession names, too. The most numerous category is the former, though. To determine the semantic function of the river names belonging to this group is also the researcher’s task. The names usually denote the person on or near whose property the water denotatum can be found. Besides, the water may get its name after a person with whom

something happened in or surrounding the water, for example, if somebody drowned or fished there. We can find personal names in the old Hungarian hydronyms such as *Gény*, *Hasznos*, *Kápás*, *Kara*, *Mile*, *Úz* and *Csákány pataka*, *Csikló-patak*, *Détmár pataka*, *Fancsal ere*, *Tiba pataka*.

Reference to the size of the water appears in one-part names such as *Keskeny* ‘narrow’ and *Mélyes* ‘deep’, but there are many among two-part ones as well: *Kis-patak* ‘small river’, *Mély-ér* ‘deep brooklet’, *Széles-víz* ‘broad water’, *Nagy-Balog* ‘big Balog’, *Kis-Duna* ‘small Duna’, *Mély-Kürtös* ‘deep Kürtös’.

In certain cases an inner feature of the water may have inspired the name-giving community. In the Hungarian toponymicon, a component referring to the state of the water appears only in two-part names: *Romlott pataka* ‘rotten river’, *Száraz-ér* ‘dry brooklet’, *Holt-Duna* ‘dead Duna’, *Száraz-Horhod* ‘dry Horhod’.

Among old Hungarian toponyms, we find few hydronyms of sole geographical common name form. We can mention *Ér* ‘brooklet’, *Patak* ‘stream’, *Sár* ‘mud’.

Compared to the proportion of this name group among names of Slavic origin, there are fewer names representing the relation between water and fauna: *Hodos* ‘beavery’, *Ludas* ‘goosy’, *Rákos* ‘crayfishy’, *Férges-ér* ‘wormy brooklet’, *Hattyas pataka* ‘swany stream’, and *Pisztrángos-patak* ‘trouty stream’.

The remaining names can be characterised by a semantic content even rarer than what has been mentioned already. Typical of hydronyms is the name-giving motivation apparent in the name *Sós-patak* ‘salty stream’ which refers to the salty taste of the water. The names *Hideg-ér* ‘cold stream’, and *Hideg-Tepla* ‘cold Tepla’ refer to the temperature of the water. The sound effect of the water appears in the names *Hangos* ‘loud’. The waters *Agyagos* ‘clayey’, *Köved* ‘stone’, *Sáros-patak* ‘muddy stream’ were named after the specific form of their bed. In the names *Csorgó-ér* ‘flowing brooklet’, *Lassú-ág* ‘slow branch’, *Sebes-Vajas* ‘rapid Vajas’ we can see the way the water runs.

3.4. A few hydronyms of German origin can be found in the Árpád age corpus too. The name *Vág* can be connected to the word *wāg* ‘billowy, surging water’; in the hydronym *Dudvág*, the same second constituent (-*vág*) is connected to the first component (here the attributive) derived from the Old High German *tot*, *tod* ~ Old Saxon *dod* ‘dead, deceased’. The antecedent of the *Bódva* hydronym could have been **Fuldahwa* (< *Fult* ‘land, country’ + *Ahwa* ‘water’).

We may presuppose German name givers in the case of *Cód*, from Middle High German *sot* ‘well, mineral water well’. In the river name *Viza* we may find the Middle High German lexeme ‘white’. The Transylvanian *Hortobágy* river name can be traced back to the German *Hartobach* (< *Hart* ‘forest’ + *Bach* ‘stream’).

3.5. There are just a few hydronyms of Turkish (Avar, Pecheneg, Bulgarian-Turkish) origin. We may consider the Pecheneg word *buday* ~ *budaq* ‘branch’ the terminal source of the name *Budak*, and **qara-šuy* ‘black water’ the terminal source of the *Karasó* and *Krassó* names. The hydronym *Okor* received its Turkish name after the Old Turkish *aq-* ‘flows, runs’; see also Ottoman *akar* ‘flowing, fluid’, *akarsu* ‘river, stream’. The name *Tartlau* (< *Tortillou* < **Tortiliy* ‘sedimentary’) came to our system via German but is probably of Turkish origin.

4. As a summary of Árpád age Hungarian names, we can state that loanwords are quite common among hydronyms. We can explain this phenomenon by the fact that conscious name giving does not play a vital role in the case of this toponymic group, so simple usage satisfies the language users’ communicative intention (Hoffmann 2007: 88).

The survey of the linguistic layers of river names shows that largely the same semantic content appears in river names originating from different languages – Slavic and Hungarian

names show this phenomenon the best, since names from these languages are represented in greater numbers. The semantic types appearing in river names belong to the so-called panchronistic feature of the hydronym system, in other words, they show signs of universal human thinking.

International conferences such as this one may prove useful in finding universal features of a given group of toponyms through the sharing of work by experts who are processing the name systems of different languages.

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