



Anita Rácz
Valéria Tóth

University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary

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Anita RÁCZ
Valéria TÓTH

University of Debrecen
Debrecen, Hungary

SETTLEMENT NAMES DERIVED FROM ETHNONYMS AS HISTORICAL EVIDENCE: THE CASE OF MEDIEVAL HUNGARY

The present paper addresses some specific methodological issues in using toponymy as historical evidence of the ethnic composition of an area in the past. In the Hungarian context, there are two kinds of onomastic data that can be used for this purpose: a) place names borrowed from a language in contact with Hungarian, and b) place names (mainly settlement names) derived from ethnonyms. The authors focus on the second kind of toponymic data survived in medieval charters and historical narratives written mostly in the Latin (and, occasionally, Greek) language. Starting from the structural classification of such material and its quantitative characteristics, the paper consequently demonstrates some patterns of the chronological and territorial distribution of toponymic attestations. Although the research confirms that settlement names derived from ethnonyms may be useful for the reconstruction of the ethnic composition of the Carpathian Basin in the medieval period, such onomastic evidence must be applied with discretion, taking into account the functional specificity of ethnonyms in the studied period as well as the nature of written sources they are retrieved from. The study of Old Hungarian settlement names with ethnonymic elements shows that the latter do not necessarily refer to the ethnicity of the inhabitants, but to the ethnicity of the owner (or another important inhabitant) of the settlement. The authors point out to difficulty of differentiating secondary de-anthroponymic toponyms from actual de-ethnonymic settlement names in medieval sources, warning against straightforward historical interpretation of such onomastic material.

Keywords: Old Hungarian language, Carpathian Basin, ethnonyms, toponyms, settlement names, ethnic history.

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1. Introduction

Among other sub-disciplines of linguistics, onomastics undoubtedly has closest ties with historical research, since for certain historical issues, primarily those related to the early history of settlements and ethnic groups of Carpathian Basin, one of the most important sources for historians is the written records that have survived. Those documents are mainly charters and historical narratives (gestas and chronicles) written in a foreign language (principally Latin, more rarely Greek) which have preserved a great number of elements in Hungarian — mostly toponyms and anthroponyms. Those elements in Hungarian represent valuable source materials not only for experts in language history (including onomastic history), but also for specialists in other disciplines, including history; therefore, their linguistic identification also serves the interests of historians.¹ We rely on these linguistic elements *inter alia*, in order to specify the linguistic and ethnic composition of the Carpathian Basin during the centuries after the Hungarians have settled down in this area. This paper aims to present several ways of using early Hungarian toponymic data for the purpose of ethnic reconstruction, as well as to discuss some of the difficulties and restrictions researchers may encounter.

In the Hungarian toponymy, there are two kinds of names that can be used for the identification of the ethnic composition of an area in the given period.

1. The first type of evidence is represented by loan-toponyms, i.e. place names borrowed from a language in contact with Hungarian. For instance, during the period of name-giving and name-borrowing, toponyms with Slavic origin *Nógrád* (< Slavic **novъgradъ* ‘new castle’), *Visegrád* (< Slavic **višegradъ* ‘high castle’), *Balaton* (< Slavic **blatъnъ* ‘muddy’) etc., the toponym of German origin *Késmárk* (< German *Käsmark* ‘cheese market’) or toponyms of Wallonian-French origin *Tállya* (cf. Old French *taille* ‘cleared woodland’) reveal Hungarian-Slavic, Hungarian-German and Hungarian-Wallonian ethnic and linguistic contacts.

2. The other kind of toponyms that can be used for reconstructing the ethnic history of medieval Hungary are the place names (mainly settlement names) derived from ethnonyms: e.g. *Besenyő* (< *besenyő* ‘Pecheneg’), *Németi* (< *német* ‘German’), *Tótfalu* (< *tót* ‘ethnic Slovak’ + *falu* ‘village’).

¹ In the Hungarian context, the interconnection of onomastics and history as disciplines has been pointed out recently by István Hoffmann [2015, 19].

In this paper, we will focus on the toponyms belonging to the second category, analysed from the standpoint of their value as historic-ethnic sources.

Though we are not going to discuss the use of the toponyms of foreign origin as historical sources, some precursory remarks are due. Let us take as an example the name of lake *Balaton* which appears in an early charter dating from the 11th century, the founding charter of the Tihany Abbey, in the form *bolatin* ~ *balatin*. This name can be traced back to a Slavic common noun (and in the Slavic language it means ‘muddy’), so Hungarians must have borrowed this name form from Slavic people [see FNESz.; Kristó, 2000, 23]. However, studying early Hungarian settlement names of Slavic origin (*Visegrád*, *Zemony* etc.), the renowned Hungarian medieval historian Gyula Kristó emphasised that the period when these places received their names can barely be identified [Kristó, 2000, 20]. As to the *bolatin* ~ *balatin* variant from 1055, the only thing that can be claimed with certainty is that on the formal side, in view of the name’s etymon, it refers to Slavic name-givers (the original form might have been **blatъnъ*), yet, the sound structure of the name is unequivocally indicative of Hungarian name-users in the period of the founding charter of Tihany Abbey (the certain sign of the name’s adaptation by Hungarian language speakers being the insertion of a vowel into the initial consonant cluster: *bl-* > *bol-*).

Such examples prove that the dating task for toponyms borrowed from foreign languages into the Hungarian onomastic system cannot be performed based on written sources alone, as these can only clearly indicate the use of the name in the period of the given document. For that, it may be practical to rely on the principles of linguistic reconstruction. Although the main tool of linguistic reconstruction for ethnic history (for the concept, see [Hoffmann, 2007, 14; 2010; Hoffmann, Rácz & Tóth, 2017, 13–28, 162–164]) is etymology, it cannot be limited to the simple identification of the ultimate etymon of the given name form, as it was often the case in previous studies. Besides capturing the moment of name genesis, etymologists have to take into account the data that have survived: in fact, such data, mostly elements indicative of real and living language use, also show the linguistic environment of the given name, which is very important for tracing the chronology of toponym borrowings [see Hoffmann, 2007, 15].

In other words, the scholars studying loan-toponyms should keep in mind that the identification of the name’s etymon is only a sub-task in a very complex process, and that the name-giver and the name-user are by no means identical. As a consequence, our sources cannot provide (or can very rarely provide) information about the period of name-giving, and they can only serve as a basis for identifying the linguistic and thereby the ethnic context of actual name use — or rather imply one. The phonological history of the languages concerned is often of no help: given that phonological changes can last for a long time and often have complex geographical distribution, the precise period of the borrowing can be identified only very rarely.

2. Data overview

The most exhaustive data repository of medieval Hungarian toponyms derived from ethnonyms has been compiled and systematised by Anita Rácz [2011]. This includes all the Old Hungarian settlement names containing ethnonyms retrieved from medieval sources that are listed both alphabetically and according to the structural types of toponyms. The publication sorts the settlement names derived from ethnonyms in the following structural types:

- 1) simple toponyms (e.g. *Német* ‘German’);
- 2) suffixed toponyms (e.g. *Német-i*);
- 3) compound toponyms with a geographical term designating a variety of settlement (e.g. *Németfalu*, where *falu* means ‘village’);
- 4) attributive compound toponyms (e.g. *Németgörgő*, where *Görgő* is the original name of the settlement);
- 5) compound toponyms with a geographical term designating an object different from settlement, i.e. secondary settlement names (e.g. *Szászpatak* = *Szász* ‘Saxon’ + *patak* ‘brook’: brook name → settlement name).

This work constituted the basis for the monograph [Rácz, 2016] which examines the role of ethnonyms in old Hungarian settlement names. The data include more than 7 600 attestations of 1 321 forms of 915 settlement names derived from 47 ethnonyms.

The total number of ethnonyms appearing in old Hungarian settlement names is 47, and their frequency of occurrence is summarised in Table.

The frequency of occurrence of ethnonyms in Hungarian medieval settlement names

Ethnonyms	Number of attestations
<i>tót</i> ‘ethnic Slovak in Hungary’	213
<i>német</i> ‘German’	159
<i>magyar</i> ‘Hungarian’	128
<i>oláh</i> ‘Wallachian’	94
<i>orosz</i> ‘Russian’	92
<i>besenyő</i> ‘Pecheneg’	84
<i>szász</i> ‘Saxon’	83
<i>cseh</i> ‘Czech’	70
<i>olasz</i> ‘Neo-Latin speaking people’ ²	49
<i>székely</i> ‘Székely people’	40

² An umbrella term that is used to signify multiple neo-Latin (Italian and French) speaking ethnicities during the era.

Ending of the table

Ethnonyms	Number of attestations
<i>marót</i> 'Moravian'	35
<i>horvát</i> 'Croatian'	34
<i>tatár</i> 'Tatar'	20
<i>lengyel</i> 'Polish'	19
<i>böszörmény</i> 'Besermen' ³	19
<i>nándor</i> 'Bulgarian'	18
<i>káliz</i> 'Khaliz' ⁴	17
<i>kun</i> 'Cuman'	17
<i>úz</i> 'Ogouz'	17
<i>zsidó</i> 'Jewish'	17
<i>kazár</i> 'Khazar'	15
<i>várkony</i> 'Varhun (Avar ethnic group)'	15
<i>jász</i> 'Caucasian ethnic group'	11
<i>rác</i> 'Serbian'	8
<i>török</i> 'Turkish'	8
<i>cigány</i> 'Gipsy'	7
<i>bolgár</i> 'Bulgarian'	6
<i>szerecseny</i> 'Saracen'	6
<i>komán</i> 'Coman, Cumanian' ⁵	4
<i>bajor</i> 'Bavarian'	3
<i>korontál</i> 'Carinthian'	3
<i>görög</i> 'Greek'	2
<i>kölpény</i> 'Culpin' ⁶	2
<i>sváb</i> 'Schwabian'	2
<i>szerb</i> 'Serbian'	2
<i>örmény</i> 'Armenian'	1
<i>polyák</i> 'ethnic Polish'	1
Total	1321

³ A group of Ishmaelites speaking a Volga Bulgarian or Khalyzian language.

⁴ A group of Ishmaelites; Muslim Khwarezmians speaking Iranian.

⁵ Kipchak people from Western Siberia.

⁶ An ethnic group of probably Scandinavian origin.

A significant number of data concerns the settlement names containing the ethnonyms *tót* ‘ethnic Slovak in Hungary,’ *német* ‘German,’ *magyar* ‘Hungarian,’ *oláh* ‘Wallachian,’ *orosz* ‘Russian,’ *besenyő* ‘Pecheneg,’ *szász* ‘Saxon,’ *cseh* ‘Czech,’ *olasz* ‘Neo-Latin,’ *székely* ‘Székely people (Latin *Siculi*),’ *marót* ‘Moravian,’ and *horvát* ‘Croatian.’ Among them, the three most frequent ethnonyms figure in 38% of all settlement names, and the most frequent 12 occur in more than four-fifths of the names. The occurrence of ethnonyms in each structural type may reflect 1) the time period when the Hungarians got acquainted with the foreign population denoted by the ethnonym; 2) the period that population emerged in the Carpathian Basin; 3) whether its presence in the Carpathian Basin was long-lasting and consolidated on the territory of the country, and on how fast they were assimilated into the Hungarian ethnic group surrounding them [see Rácz, 2016, 178–179].

The distribution of the different toponym structures (except for the fifth, otherwise secondary settlement name type), is shown in Figure 1.

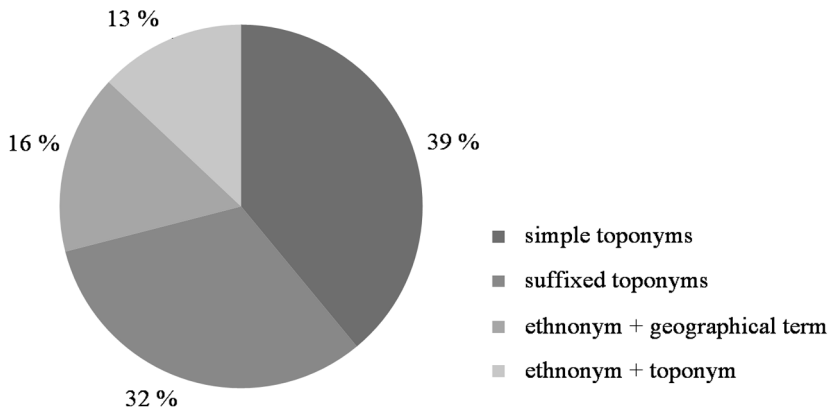


Figure 1. The structural types of settlement names containing ethnonyms

Chronological and territorial relationships of these name structures showcase significant differences that should obviously be taken into consideration since they have methodological effects on the possible value of those names as a source for ethnic history.

3. Chronology of settlement names attestations

Giving the chronological assessment of toponyms of ethnonymic origin (and toponyms in general), it must be emphasised that the emergence of toponyms in written documents coincides with the moment of naming only in very rare cases, most of the settlement names being recorded not at the moment of their creation, but at

the moment when their recording became important due to a legal case. In the absence of scientific means to help us in unequivocally identifying the period of the creation of a toponym, we can only rely on their occurrence in written sources. The random nature of these written attestations obviously applies to each name, therefore, for most of them, the relative chronology of different name types is well outlined by each first occurrence as well as by Figures 2 and 3. Figure 2 shows the chronological relationship between the structural types of toponyms of ethnonymic origin, and Figure 3 presents the relative chronology of some important, semantically coherent settlement name types developed without any formant (settlement names identical to ethnonyms, tribal names and profession names).

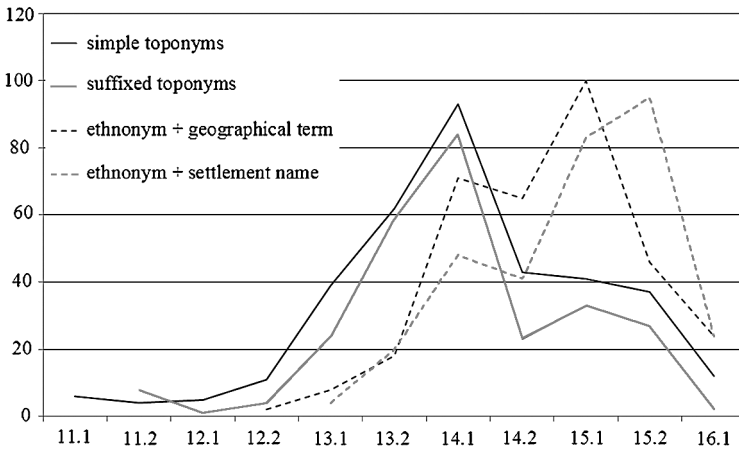


Figure 2. The relative chronology of the different structural types among settlement names of ethnonymic origin

The curves in Figure 2 indicate that among the structural types of settlement names derived from ethnonyms, the one-constituent structures (names without any formant, like *Besenyő*, *Német*, as well as suffixed names, like *Besenyő-d*, *Német-i*), after the continuous growth starting from the second half of the 12th century, reach the peak of their occurrence in charters in the first half of the 14th century, then their frequency drops gradually. In contrast, the compound name structures culminate more than a century later, in the 15th century, and their chronological curve also shows a different rhythm in terms of growth and decrease.

These processes might be influenced by the boom of charter issuing practice, as well as by the history of the Carpathian Basin, *inter alia* by the early history of the Hungarian people. Hungarians who settled down in the Carpathian Basin at the end of the 9th century, found foreign ethnic groups there, and the Hungarians themselves were accompanied by other peoples as well. Later on in history, immigration and forced settling for various reasons also led to the increase in the number

of the population belonging to different ethnic groups. Furthermore, we cannot ignore the fact that at some time the settlement structure of the Kingdom of Hungary finally developed and became stabilised despite the recurring ravages. This means that the number of new settlements gradually dropped, thus after a while there was very little need for new settlement names. This factor was obviously reflected in settlement name-giving, too. The dropping of the curves observable after the 15th century partially reflects this fact.

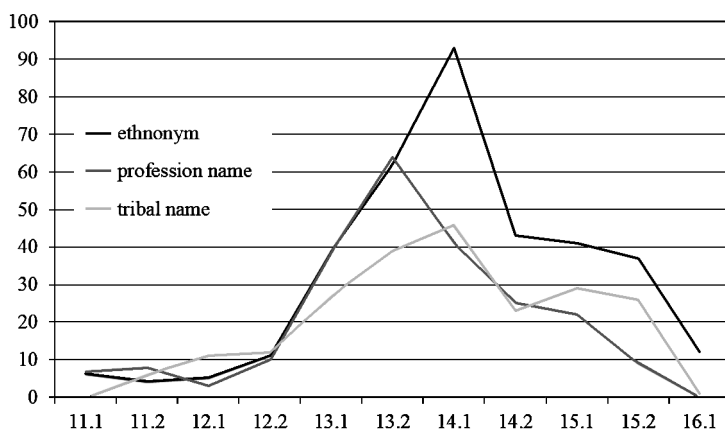


Figure 3. The relative chronology of settlement name types developed without any formant

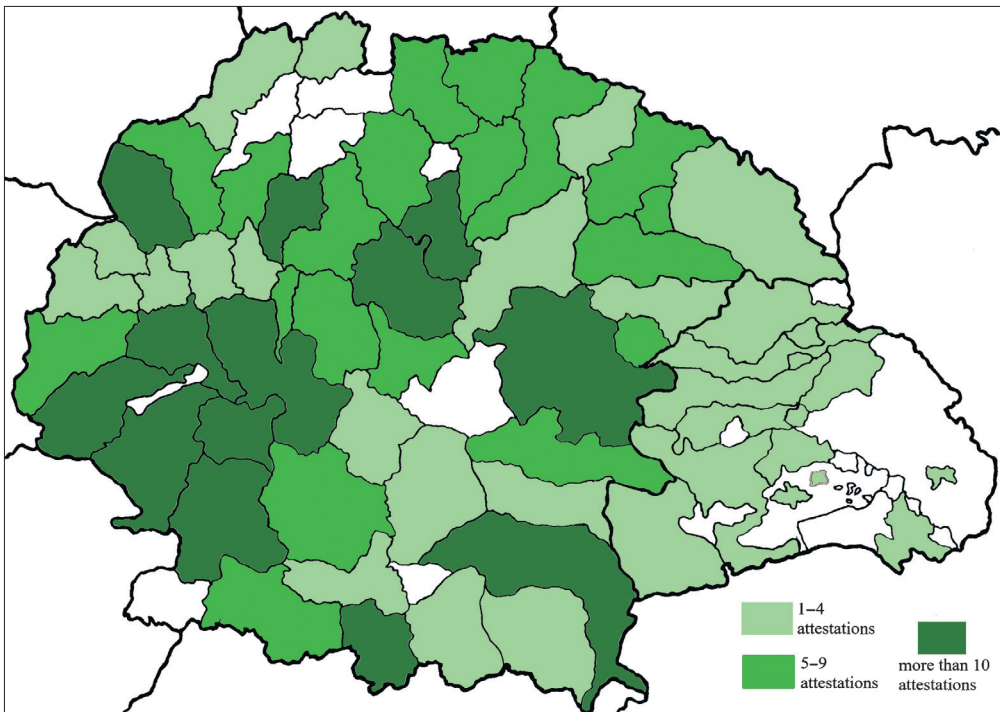
From Figure 3, it is also evident that the growing and the reduction of attestations of the three name types derived from social group names without any formant took place more or less simultaneously. It was in the 12th century, mainly in the second half, that the number of names of different types started to increase. In the case of settlement names derived from ethnonyms and tribal names, the increase culminated in the first half of the 14th century, while in the case of settlement names containing profession names this culmination took place half-a-century earlier.

The identification of chronological relationship might be important in connection with the value of ethnonymic settlement names as historical evidence, because the parallelisms displayed by the different name types presented here highlight the fact that the chronological relationship of only one name type (in our case, settlement names derived from ethnonyms) hardly let us answer historical questions, such as the time period different ethnic groups might have settled down in the Carpathian Basin; however, we do not have any real chance to come to such conclusions even if we analyse several name types jointly from a chronological point of view. These conclusions, which are in fact negative, are worth noting even though the chronological characteristics have been used by linguists and historians in relation to another type of settlement

names — those derived from tribal names.⁷ As a final caution, it can be stated that the knowledge of the chronological relationship of settlement names containing ethnonyms might contribute to historical research, but their value should not be seen as a cure-all [see Hoffmann, RÁCZ & TÓTH, 2017, 174–176].

4. Geographical distribution of names attestations

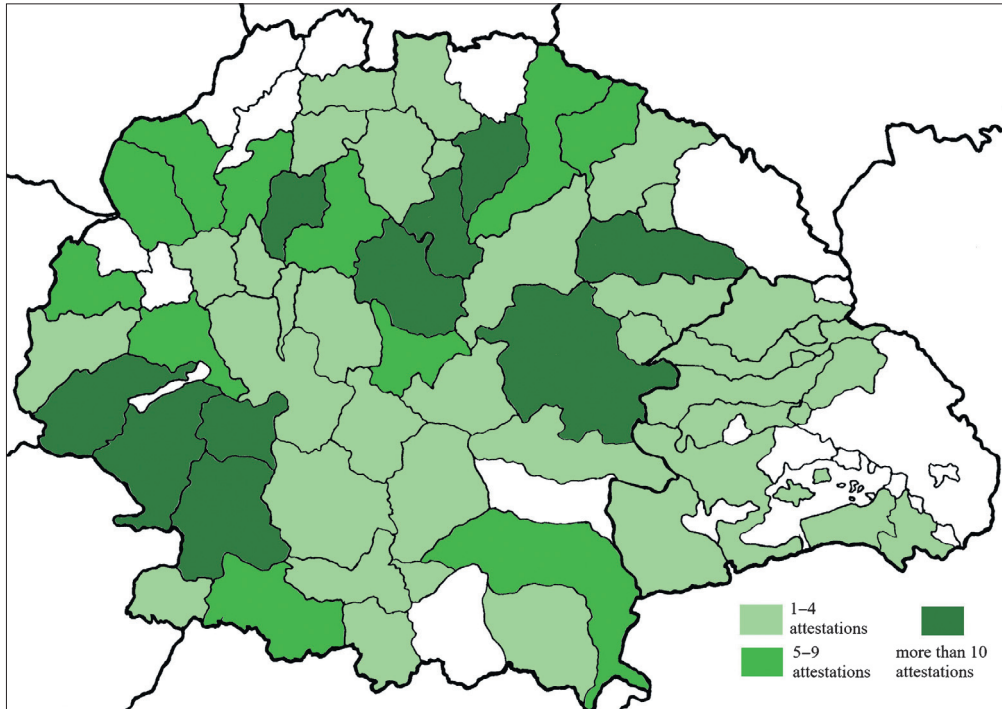
Conversely, in case of the spatial dimension, we have significantly greater chances to identify real correlations between the given ethnic group and the settlement names containing its name. The following series of maps gives a general overview of the territorial characteristics of this settlement name type. Depicting the main structural types on separate maps (for the figures see [RÁCZ, 2015, 22–24; 2016, 110, 138, 158, 171; Hoffmann, RÁCZ & TÓTH, 2017, 176–178]) and developing some ideas from them will help us to address specifically the role of some ethnonyms in settlement names.



Map 1. The territorial distribution of simple settlement names derived from ethnonyms

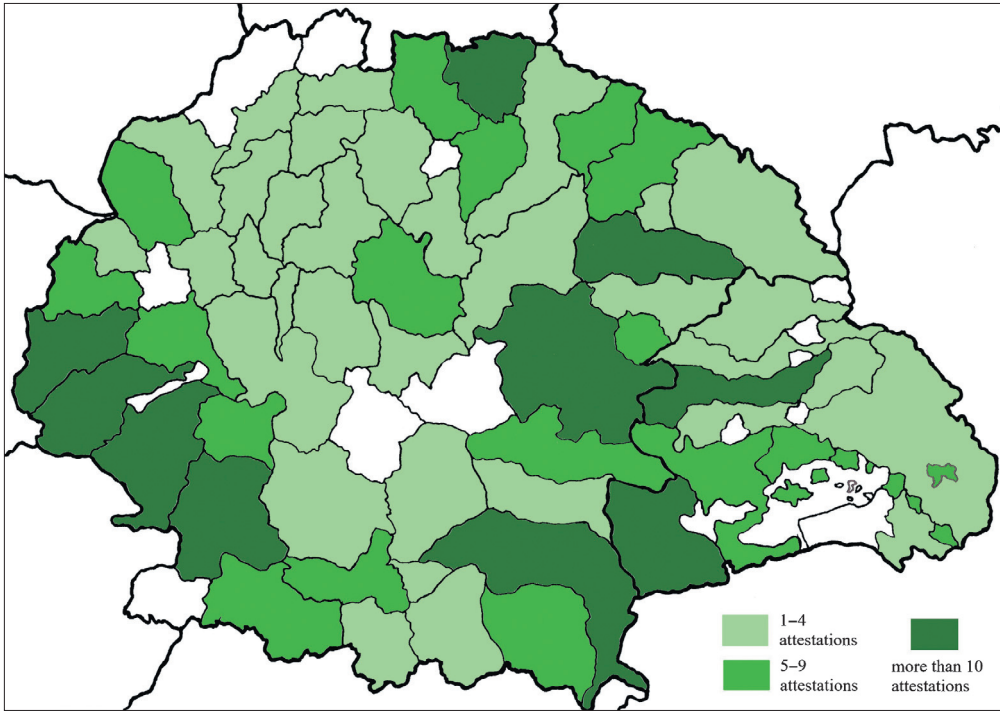
⁷ The methodological shortcomings of this approach are discussed in detail in one of our studies [cf. Hoffmann & Tóth, 2016].

In the Middle Ages, toponyms derived from ethnonyms without any formant (e.g. *Besenyő*, *Német*, *Horvát*, *Székely*) are present in almost the entire Carpathian Basin, but their number is greater and their presence is characteristic in a contiguous area in Transdanubia, essentially around lake Balaton. They may also sporadically occur in other counties, in quite substantial proportion, but in the most eastern regions, this name type cannot be found.



Map 2. The territorial distribution of suffixed settlement names derived from ethnonyms

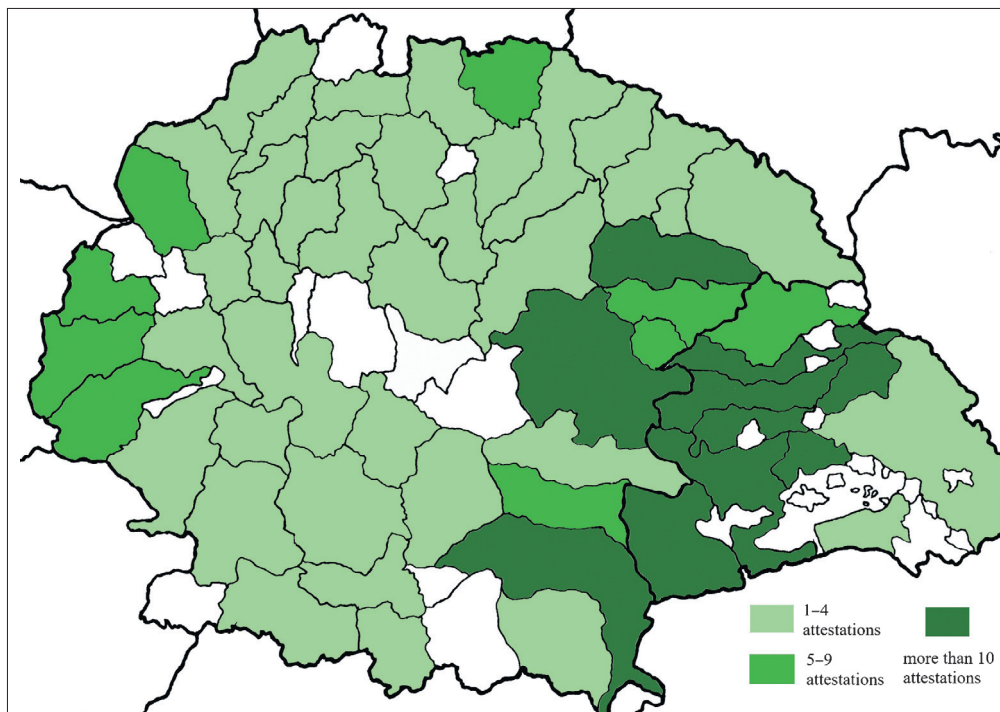
Map 2 representing the frequency of occurrence of settlement names created with different formants (mainly with the formants *-i* and *-d*, e.g. *Csehi*, *Horváti*, *Németi*, *Olaszi*, *Tóti*; *Besenyőd*, *Kálózd*, *Nándord*, *Oroszd*) shows a striking similarity with the geographical relationship of simple settlement names. The strongest blocks and the density points mainly coincide, and can be observed on the territory of almost the same counties.



Map 3. The territorial distribution of compound settlement names containing geographical terms with the meaning ‘settlement’

Compound toponyms of ethnonymic origin containing geographical common names with the meaning ‘settlement’ (e.g. *Magyarfalu*, *Olaszfalu*, *Besenyőtelek*, *Székelytelek*, *Tótlak*, *Marótlaka*) seem to be more frequent in the peripheral areas of the Carpathian Basin: their occurrence is more frequent in the frontier counties in the South-West, as well as in an Eastern-Central zone oriented from North-South. However, the inner part of the country has been left almost untouched by this name structure.

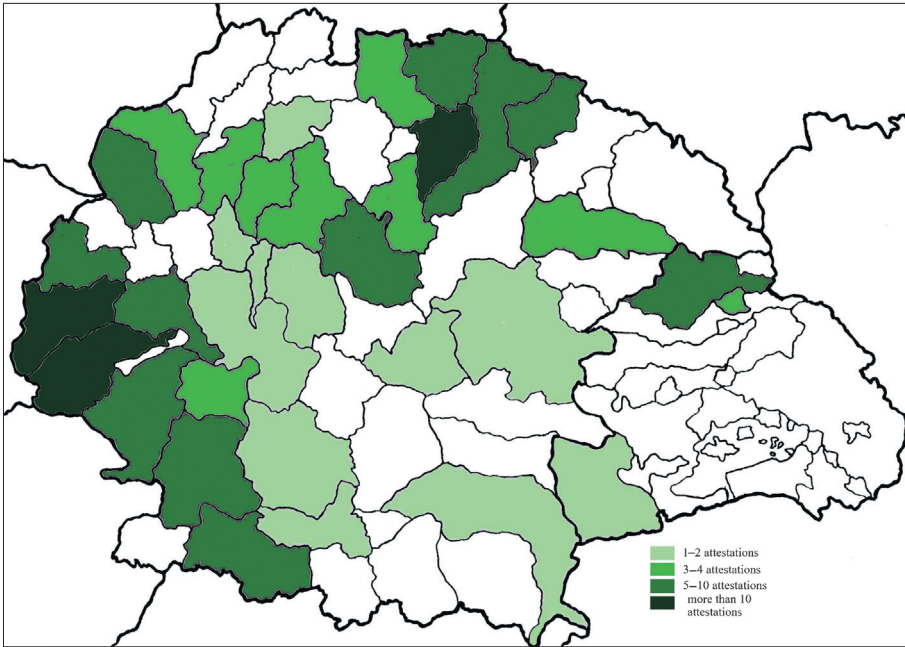
Compound settlement names, in which an ethnonym is added as an attribute to an existing settlement name (e.g. *Tótvázsony*, *Magyarbél*, *Németbél*, *Oláhterem*), are amply represented in the Eastern areas, but can be found sporadically on the whole territory of the Carpathian Basin.



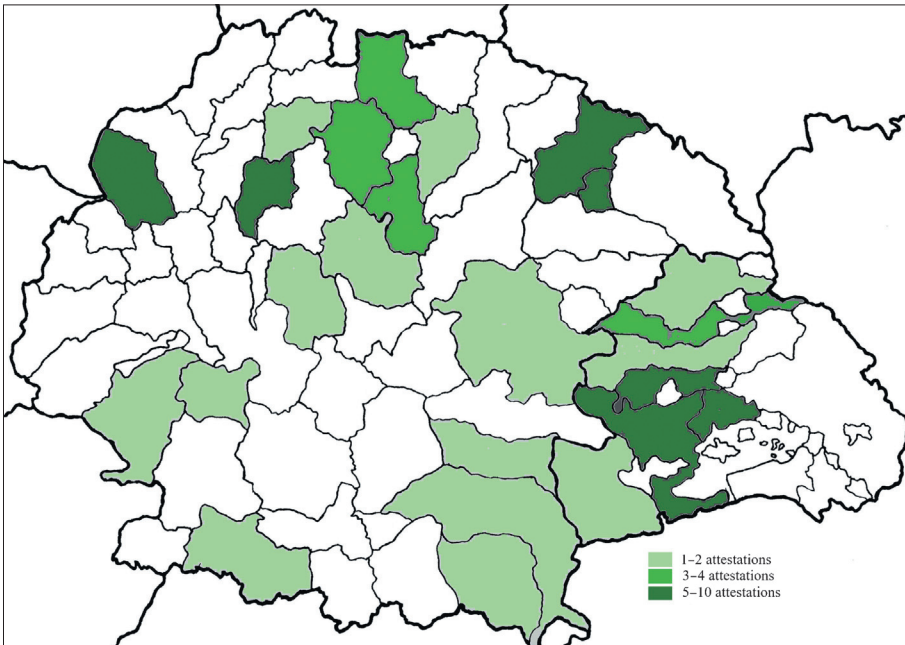
Map 4. The territorial distribution of secondary settlement names containing an ethnonym as an attribute

The prevalence and the structural specificity of the latter name types also show that the peripheral areas of the country became populated significantly later than the central regions. So the structural analysis of settlement names may give extra proof to the findings made by historians otherwise.

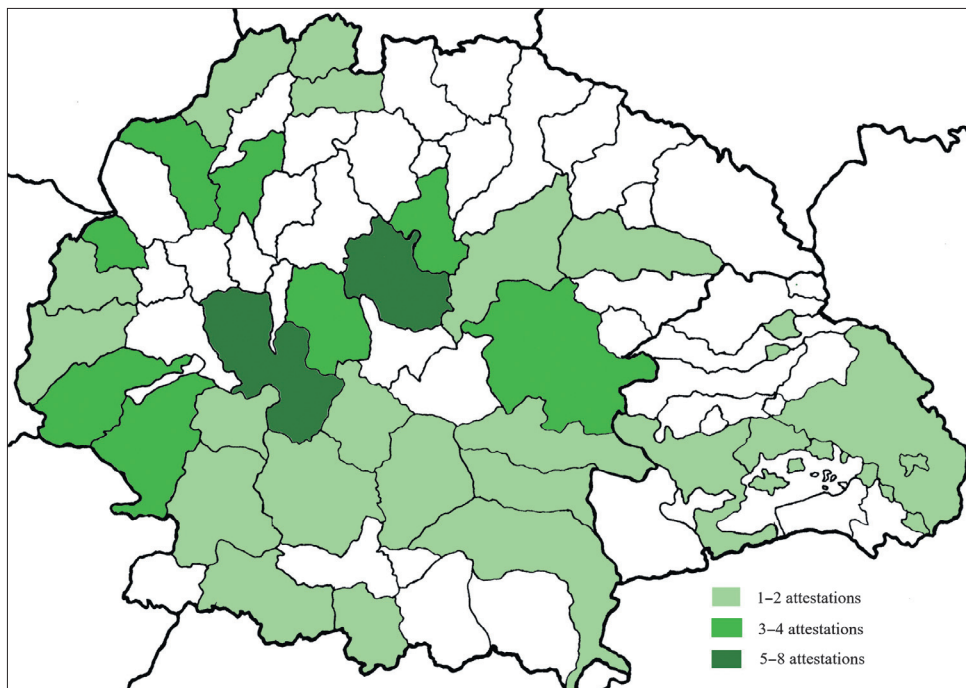
The analysis of the occurrence of certain ethnonyms in settlement names on a map can also bring productive results, since those toponyms — under cautious consideration — can really indicate the ethnicity of people living there. The following maps illustrate the occurrence of the lexemes *német* and *szász* referring to the German ethnic group in settlement names (for details, see [Rácz, 2011]). There are more than one hundred settlement names containing the ethnonym *német*, in the western and northern parts of the Carpathian Basin, while more than 50 settlement names containing the lexeme *szász* concentrate on the territory of three counties, in the southern part of Transylvania. Furthermore, it occurs quite frequently in some northern counties, where Saxon ethnic groups are also mentioned in historical literature [cf. Kristó, 2003, 121–165; KMTL, *németek*; Rácz, 2011, 77–78; 2016, 67, 86].



Map 5a. The territorial distribution of settlement names containing the ethnonym *német*



Map 5b. The territorial distribution of settlement names containing the ethnonym *szász*



Map 6. The territorial distribution of settlement names containing the ethnonym *besenyő*

The ethnonym *besenyő* ‘Pecheneg’ appears in the names of 65 settlements in medieval Hungary, their number is greater in the central counties of the country (in Bihar, Heves and Fejér counties), but the number of attestations occurring there is also below ten [Rácz, 2016, 36]. The evidence of Pecheneg settlements in those counties relies on other sources [cf. KMTL, *besenyők*, *besenyő-magyar kapcsolatok*; Kristó, 2003]. Therefore, the data on these maps primarily suggests that the analysis of the occurrence of different ethnonyms from the perspective of onomastic geography cannot replace, but can rather complement the ethnic map outlined (of course broadly) with the help of historical, archaeological, and other kinds of sources.

5. Conclusion

The collected materials clearly exemplify that in the Old Hungarian period ethnonyms often served as a basis for settlement names. However, the important question is whether these can be universally indicative of the real ethnic presence on this territory.

From the semantic point of view, these denominations do not necessarily refer to the ethnicity of the inhabitants, but to the ethnicity of the owner (or another important inhabitant) of the settlement. For instance, sometimes the charters may prove

the fact that the inhabitants of some *Besenyő*-like settlements were not Pechenegs and that the village got its name from its owner, who himself was a Pecheneg lord. This is the case, for instance, with the settlement *Besenyő* (today *Besenyőtelek*) in Heves county, which was owned by the person named *Tekme* who died without any successor and who is named *Bissenus* (‘Pecheneg’) in Latin, by the writer of the charter (cf.: “*terram Botond fratris Botiz [quondam] Tekme Bissenii*” (1287) [HOKl., 83; Györffy, 3, 72]). Such instances confirm that toponyms with ethnonymic elements must not be analysed by default as directly derived from the ethnic name of inhabitants or of a neighbouring ethnicity. In fact, in many cases, we are dealing with settlement names derived from anthroponyms built, in turn, on ethnonyms, as the use of ethnonyms as part of anthroponymic designations was widespread in medieval Hungary. To understand the importance and difficulty of differentiating secondary de-anthroponymic toponyms from actual de-ethnonymic settlement names in order to make such settlement names reliable sources for reconstructing the ethnic history of an area, it suffices to say that among all the ethnonyms analysed by Anita Rácz there were only ten names for which no anthroponymic use is attested in medieval charters.

Finally, a note of caution must be made against cross-subject studies of the medieval ethnic composition of the Carpathian Basin, as it was attempted by several researchers who have sought to rely on the testimony of history and archaeology besides linguistics. The problem lies in researchers’ trying to look for arguments supporting their own results on the basis of their general knowledge of other subjects, and jumping at the wrong conclusions.⁸ This does not rule out the use of multidisciplinary approach as such, but such a process requires the coordination of the participating researchers’ work from the very beginning. Addressing complex entholinguistic problems like the one tackled here, genuinely new results can only be obtained by collaborative effort.

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⁸ For that, see [Hoffmann & Tóth, 2016, 317–318], but the same preoccupation of the methodological risks of “mixed argumentation” is shared by the archaeologist László Révész [2014, 63–64].

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Rácz, Anita

PhD, Associate Professor
Department of Hungarian Linguistics
University of Debrecen
Debrecen, Egyetem tér 1. 4032 Hungary
E-mail: racz.anita@arts.unideb.hu

Tóth, Valéria

PhD, Professor
Department of Hungarian Linguistics
University of Debrecen
Debrecen, Egyetem tér 1. 4032 Hungary
E-mail: toth.valeria@arts.unideb.hu

Рац, Анита

PhD, доцент
кафедра венгерского языкознания,
Университет Дебрецена
Debrecen, Egyetem tér 1. 4032 Hungary
E-mail: racz.anita@arts.unideb.hu

Тот, Валерия

PhD, профессор
кафедра венгерского языкознания,
Университет Дебрецена
Debrecen, Egyetem tér 1. 4032 Hungary
E-mail: toth.valeria@arts.unideb.hu

А. Рац**В. Тот**Университет Дебрецена
Дебрецен, Венгрия**ОТЭТНОНИМИЧЕСКИЕ ОЙКОНИМЫ КАК ИСТОЧНИК ИЗУЧЕНИЯ
ЭТНИЧЕСКОЙ ИСТОРИИ СРЕДНЕВЕКОВОЙ ВЕНГРИИ**

Настоящая статья посвящена некоторым методологическим проблемам использования топонимического материала в исследованиях по этнической истории. Применительно к Венгрии можно выделить два типа ономастических данных, которые могут использоваться в указанном контексте: а) топонимы, заимствованные из языков, контактировавших с венгерским, и б) топонимы (преимущественно ойконимы), образованные от этнонимов. В данной работе авторы анализируют отэтнонимические ойконимы, засвидетельствованные в латиноязычных (реже грекоязычных) средневековых хартиях и нарративных документах. Авторы дают структурную классификацию выявленных ойконимов, описывают некоторые закономерности их хронологической и территориальной дистрибуции. Несмотря на то, что авторы признают возможность использования отэтнонимических ойконимов в качестве источника информации об этническом составе Среднедунайской низменности в средневековый период, привлечение подобных ономастических данных, по их мнению, должно учитывать специфику функционирования этнонимов в исследуемый период, а также особенности самих источников. Проведенное исследование показывает, что этнонимический компонент в составе ойконимов необязательно указывает на этническую принадлежность населения соответствующей местности, часто этот элемент мотивирован этнической принадлежностью владельца или иного жителя поселения. В связи с этим авторы подчеркивают трудность разграничения вторичных отантропонимических и собственно отэтнонимических ойконимов, предостерегая от прямолинейной этноисторической интерпретации подобного ономастического материала.

К л ю ч е в ы е с л о в а: древневенгерский язык, Среднедунайская низменность, этнонимы, топонимы, ойконимы, этническая история.

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