VIKINGS IN HUNGARY? THE THEORY OF THE VARANGIAN-RUS BODYGUARD OF THE FIRST HUNGARIAN RULERS

This article will explore the possibility of the presence of Scandinavians in early medieval Hungary on the basis of place name and archaeological evidence, along with the limited literary accounts connected to the issue.[1] Although the discussion has not yet reached Western European scholarship, in Hungarian historiography the existence of a princely, and later royal, bodyguard during the reign of Grand Prince Géza (971/972-997) and King Saint Stephen I (997-1038) consisting of foreigners—among them Varangian-Rus mercenaries—is a well-established hypothesis. This is in spite of the fact that no literary records explicitly mention the Rus' in the service of the Hungarian prince or king. Before examining the historical and archaeological data connected to the Viking bodyguard, the article will briefly discuss the relationship between Scandinavians and Ancient Hungarians prior to the Hungarian Settlement of the Carpathian Basin (from 895), as its interpretation has greatly influenced the evaluation of the later connections between the two ethnic groups in question.

Contact before the Hungarian Settlement

The Scandinavian Vikings probably first made contact with Ancient Hungarians when they appeared as warrior-merchants along the trade routes of the Russian rivers Lovat, Volkhov, Volga, and Dnieper in the ninth century. During this period, the Ancient Hungarians lived in Levedia, which cannot be located precisely (Sindbæk 2000; Langó 2005, 301) but was somewhere in the Dnieper region, in the vicinity of the Khazarian Empire, where they must have encountered Scandinavian traders.

Apart from a brief note by the Persian geographer al-Gardīzī that the Magyars had repeatedly rushed the Slavs and the Rus' (Zimonyi 2015, 309), we have no records on the nature of Hungarian–Rus relationships in the ninth century—and even with this short account the date is uncertain (Bollók 2004). Due to the lack of concrete evidence, hypotheses have arisen concerning their relationship (e.g. Tóth 1996b), which has been regarded as amicable or hostile depending on the different interpretations of Rus' and Hungarian relationships with other groups in the area.[2]

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[1] Csete Katona is a PhD student in History at the University of Debrecen, Hungary.
Abstract: The article deals with the possible presence of Scandinavians in the Carpathian Basin during the Early Middle Ages by examining literary sources, toponyms, linguistic as well as archaeological evidence connected to the issue. On the basis of these evidence, the habitual Hungarian historical thesis, namely that the bodyguard of grand prince Géza and King Saint Stephen I consisted of Varangian-Rus mercenaries, will be challenged. Albeit the settled presence of Vikings in Early Medieval Hungary is unattested, the sources hint towards some contacts of commercial and military co-operation between Scandinavians and Hungarians already from the ninth century.
Keywords: Rus, Varangian, retinue, bodyguard, Nomads, Magyar, druzhina, Kievan Rus'
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[2] On their relations in Hungarian and foreign research see: Zimonyi 2015, 320-27.

Based on Arab and Persian travellers' accounts that during the ninth century the Rus' paid taxes to the Khazars when passing through their territory, it was assumed that this must have been relevant for the Ancient Hungarians as well, since Rus' merchants had to use trade routes leading through Levedia (wherever we place it) (Bollók 2004; Fettich 1937, 26). This friendly, or at least neutral, relationship was strengthened by the 860s Rus' attack against Constantinople, for which the Dnieper routes were most likely used, implying that the Rus' had to pass through Hungarian territory. According to Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *De administrando imperio* (*DAI*), the seven waterfalls of the Dnieper were the most dangerous part of the Rus' expeditions in the tenth century, since the ships and their cargo had to be portaged and thus an opportunity arose for the hostile nomadic Pechenegs (who dwelt in the area at the time) to take advantage of the Rus' vulnerability and ambush them (Moravcsik 1949, 50-51). Based on this later account, it has been claimed that the previous 860s raid against the Byzantine capital could only have been achieved if the Rus' had secured their passage on the Dnieper's streams—which were controlled by the Hungarians—either by paying tribute or by being on good terms with the Hungarians in general (Fettich 1934, 54; Boba 1967, 128; Bollók 2004; Vernadsky 1959, 213; Zimonyi 2015, 327).[3]

Others have imagined the relationship between the Rus' and Hungarians as similar to that between the Rus' and the Pechenegs. After driving the Hungarians out of the area at the end of the ninth century (Zimonyi 1990, 158-75)[4], the Pechenegs reportedly waged wars against the Rus territories from the tenth century onwards, according to the *Russian Primary Chronicle* (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953, 71; Font and Varga 2006, 56). The Hungarians and Pechenegs were both nomadic groups, deriving their livelihood from raids. The Hungarians were deeply involved in the slave trade of the region (Zimonyi 2015, 309-15), and took tribute from the Slavs (supposedly as mediators of the Khazars). Likewise—according to the theory—they must have been capturing slaves from the Rus' as well, since, as early as the 880s, the Hungarians were leading campaigns even beyond the Carpathian Basin (Font 2007; 1998, 27-28). It has also been suggested, however, that these campaigns became endangered and inhibited by Oleg's occupation of Kiev and his consolidation of power in the 880s (Tóth 1996a, 21-22, 26), though this only emphasized the hypothesis that before Oleg there had been wars between the Rus' and the Ancient Hungarians. The 'ferocious tribes' of the *Annales Bertiniani* from the year 839 who blocked the way of the returning Rus' envoys from the Franks were identified with the Hungarians, again emphasizing the hostile nature of their relationship (Györffy 1984, 338; Kristó 1996, 86, 128). The 860s assault against Byzantium was then explained by placing the starting point of the expedition not in Kiev but in Tmutarakan, which was further east on the northern shores of the Black Sea (Font 2007; 1998, 27; see also: Vernadsky 1959, 218).

The Pechenegs and Khazars, despite their occasional alliances with the Rus', were mostly hostile towards them in the tenth century. The same can be said about the Pecheneg and Khazar attitudes towards the Hungarians, supporting the assumption that, because of their common enemies, Hungarian–Rus' dealings were fairly peaceful in the period when the Hungarians still lived in the steppe. This is corroborated by archaeological research, which has unearthed Scandinavian objects in and around Kiev, presumably datable to the ninth or tenth centuries, that show nomadic traces, as well as Magyar artefacts that incorporate Nordic elements (Fettich 1937, 36, 42, 51, 54). The pioneer of this hypothesis was Nándor Fettich, who was one of the first to study the material of the Russian museums in person. Fettich pointed out certain details of the Hungarian archaeological records of the tenth century and

[3] The most recent international interpretation accepts this: Petrukhin 2015.

[4] Some even raised that the Hungarian migration at the end of ninth-century could have been also caused by the Rus' who were advancing southwards (see discussion in: Kristó 1996, 161)

identified specific Nordic metalwork techniques, in particular niello embellishment and red copper overlay (1937, 51, 55; 1933). He proposed that these were picked up by the Ancient Hungarians during their stay in Levedia. On this basis, he regarded some famous products of the Kievan workshops as Hungarian (or Hungarian-influenced), among them the Sword of Charlemagne and the Chernigov drinking horns (Fettich 1931; 1937, 55). Although most of his examples have been rejected by later research (cf. Fodor 1986),[5] some, such as the Viking sword from Grave 108 near the Golden Gate of Kiev, with its decorated grip of palmetta motives (Fig. 1; Androshchuk 2012, 97), indeed seem to be the products of a merged culture (Arne 1914, 125; Hampel 1904, 113; Fodor 1986, 220; 1994). As a result, today the thesis of lively commercial interaction and the exchange of style and craftsmen between the Rus' and the Ancient Hungarians in the ninth and tenth centuries is generally accepted in Hungarian archaeology (Marosi 1938; Kalmár 1942; Mesterházy 1989-90; Fodor 1994, 51-55; Fodor 2001, 19; Kovács 2003), despite the fact that the evidence does not go beyond a few particular objects.

[PLACEHOLDER FOR FIG. 1: Viking sword from Kiev with palmetta decoration (Fodor 1994, App. II.)]

Another central point of the argument is the Hungarian march past Kiev. As has been said, due to the Pecheneg migration around 895, the Hungarians were forced to leave their homeland in the Dnieper region and moved westward into present-day Hungary. On their way to the Carpathian Basin they passed the Rus' capital Kiev. This event is erroneously recorded in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* as taking place in 898 (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953, 62); the correct date is 895 (Font 2007, 39; Györffy 1959, 75-76, Kristó and Tóth 1996). Again, the nature of this encounter is dubious (Kristó 1982). It is recorded in the chronicle without any further comment other than stating that Hungarians passed by Kiev over the hill named after them (*Ugorskoye*) and pitched camp nearby (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953, 62). In contrast, in his *Gesta Hungarorum*, Anonymus (a mysterious scribe under the name 'P. dictus magister' and our twelfth-century Hungarian source for the event) reports that, in a Hungarian attempt to conquer all of Russia ('*Rutenorum*'), serious fighting broke out in Kiev, ending with the ultimate victory of the united Hungarian tribes, who then forced the '*Ruthenes*' to pay tribute and send them their sons as hostages (Bak and Rady 2010, 20-27). It is unclear whether the battle was left out of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* in order to spare the reputation of the Rus' or included in the *Gesta Hungarorum* to provide a powerful account of the Hungarian ancestors. A later scribe, Simon of Kéza, building on Anonymus's *Gesta*, simply notes that the Hungarians passed Kiev, without mentioning any warlike activities (Domanovszky 1937a, 165; Veszprémy and Schaer 1999, 79).

Moreover, the *Russian Primary Chronicle* also refers to a place by the name of '*Olmin dvor*', castle of Ol'ma, where prince Oleg buried his rival Askold and where Ol'ma later erected a Christian church (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953, 61). This has generated much debate. Some identify the Slavic name Ol'ma with the Hungarian Álmos, the leader of the Hungarian tribes at the time, suggesting that Kiev was in fact a Hungarian centre in the middle of the ninth century, likely developed from a previous community that the Khazars had established there as tax-collectors (Franklin and Shephard 1996, 96-97; Soloviev 1960; Fodor 2007; Kristó and Tóth 1996; Bóna 2000, 22; Vernadsky 1959, 101). Others have regarded the name as completely Slavic (Kristó and Tóth 1996) or even Khazarian (Bartha 1988, 364-65). However, not only the transliteration of the name Álmos into Ol'ma is in

[5] This is partly due to the widespread presence of the mentioned techniques in different archaeological cultures. One of Fettich's most well-known examples, the Benepuszta strap-tag, was interpreted in various ways (see: Langó 2005, 194).

doubt (Balogh 2015, 300, with references) but also the inclusion of the hill *Ugorskoye*. The latter seems to be a legend spread by the chroniclers to explain the place name (Hölbling 2010, 33-50; Balogh 2015, 300-01).

The only certain thing is that numerous objects related to Turkic peoples of the steppe have been discovered in the prestigious tenth-century graves of the town and its surrounding settlements (Chernigov, Gnezdovo, Krylos) (Fettich 1937, 55-56; Fodor 1986, 218; Franklin and Shephard 1996, 123-24; Duczko 2004, 221, 241; Movchan 2007; Androshchuk 2013, 64). Some of these are interpreted as the remains of Hungarians who did not make the full journey to the Carpathian Basin but were left behind in the friendly area of the Rus' and entered the *druzhina*, the retinue of the Rus' princes (Tagán 1941; Borosy 1981, 34; Mesterházy 1989-90; Fodor 1994, 55; 2007, 197-98; Erdélyi 2008, 20). The possibility of a more nuanced explanation (cf. Duczko 2004, 94; Bálint 1994), such as the presence of other Turkic tribes besides the Hungarians in these graves (e.g. Khazars, Volga Bulghars) or the acquisition of these 'nomadic' objects by a population of mixed ethnic background (Melnikova 1996), has been disregarded.

The nature of the relations discussed above is of crucial concern to our investigation, since they give credence to the idea of a princely, and later royal, Varangian-Rus' bodyguard of the Hungarian rulers Géza and Saint Stephen I. There are three main factors supporting this notion: the fairly good relationship between the two cultures in question during the ninth century, their temporary common place of residence in Kiev, and the archaeological evidence suggesting that Hungarian soldiers entered the Rus' princely service. These views evolved parallel to each other and often one view influenced another. Fettich, for instance, stated that, judging by the archaeological evidence, the bonds between the Rus' and the Ancient Hungarians were so friendly that the Kievan march was only hostile (if Anonymus' account is accepted at all) because the Hungarian tribes travelled with their whole families and livestock and the Rus' obviously could not provide such a huge mass with supplies (1937, 42-43). Márta Font has also claimed, even in a recent article, that the presence of Rus' warriors in Hungarian service and the existence of a retinue in Kiev that included Magyar elements clearly indicate the high flexibility of retinue members of the era (Font 2015, 307). She has also noted that the Rus' retinue members must have arrived in Hungary after the death of Vladimir I in 1015 (Font 2015, 307), which would challenge the possibility of a Rus' presence in the Hungarian court during the reign of Grand Prince Géza. Also, István Fodor after discovering bronze miniature axes, related to the Kieven Rus' *druzhina*, near the border settlements of Hungary, concluded that 'the bodyguards of King St. Stephen (1000-1038) were mostly made up of Rus mercenaries, some of whom were given the task of guarding the border' (Fodor 2014, 618). He seems to be adjusting the archaeological findings to a known theory, even though the interpretation of the archaeological material on its own might have suggested another possibility. Basing a historical thesis on archaeological investigations (or the reverse) is dangerous, however, if the evidence from the other discipline is not fully confirmed. This is indeed the case with the three points discussed above. Building hypotheses on the unverified results of other disciplines will lead to false or contradictory outcomes. This has been a serious flaw of the Hungarian research concerning the Scandinavian bodyguard of the first rulers.

A historical discourse on the Varangian-Rus bodyguard

The hypothesis concerning the Varangian presence in early medieval Hungary derives from the writings of one of the most influential Hungarian medievalists, György Györffy. In various works he argued that Varangian-Rus' elements were involved in the retinue and bodyguard of Grand Prince Géza and the first king, Saint Stephen I (Györffy 1958; 1959;

[1977] 2013). This view has been widely accepted in Hungarian scholarship with little or no revision (for a list of works see Borosy 1984; 1994).[6] Györffy based his argument mainly on three different pieces of evidence. The first was a lone note in a Western chronicle about the death of Saint Stephen's son, Emeric, who was labelled in the *Annales Hildesheimenses* as '*dux Ruizorum*' (Waitz 1878, 36), or 'prince of the Rus'. According to Györffy, this means that Emeric, as the heir to the throne, was the leader of the Rus bodyguard (1958, 574; [1977] 2013, 313-14). Györffy's second bit of proof was the secondary meaning of the Hungarian word 'orosz' (primarily meaning 'Russian', deriving from the word 'Rus') meaning 'bodyguard', 'janitor', or 'doorkeeper' (1958, 574; [1977] 2013, 313). Thirdly, he believed that the numerous place names with the prefix 'orosz' and the two place names including the stem 'varang' (*væring*) in Medieval Hungary testified to the widespread settlement of Varangian-Rus groups in the country (Györffy 1958, 577; [1977] 2013, 119, 314). He supported his ideas with analogies, mentioning similar institutions at the time, such as the *druzhina* of the Kievan princes or the Polish king Mieszko I and the Varangian bodyguard of the Byzantine emperors (Györffy 1958, 575-77; [1977] 2013, 108). Györffy later adjusted his arguments to fit some archaeological finds in the country—mostly double-edged swords—that could be related to the retinue ([1977] 2013, 108).

Györffy observed that Stephen's successor, Peter Orseolo, brought German and Italian bodyguards with him when he won the throne for himself, suggesting that upon his arrival the Varangian-Rus bodyguard ceased to exist in Hungary (1958, 579; [1977] 2013, 510). This view seems entirely correct. The sources explicitly mention King Peter's new German and Italian servants (Domanovszky 1937b, 323). Thus, Györffy provided a clear chronology for the application of the bodyguard, placing its end at Stephen's death (1038) and its beginnings in the 980s—when the Pechenegs began to seriously threaten the Dnieper waterways and the safest route from Byzantium to Kiev led through Hungary, where some of the passing Varangian mercenaries entered Géza's service (1958, 580). On the nature of the organization, Györffy noted that this was a Kievan or Byzantine type of retinue (and bodyguard) that migrated from one court to the other (1958, 580).

There are several problems with Györffy's theory. From the outset, it has to be emphasized that not a single surviving written account refers to Scandinavians, Varangians, or Rus' as being among the staff of the Hungarian bodyguard during the period in question. On the other hand, the sources do mention German knights as the leaders of such troops (Domanovszky 1937a, 188-189). Interestingly enough, while Györffy accepted this fact ([1977] 2013, 117), he noted that the German contingent contained 'Scandinavian-Varangian' mercenaries ([1977] 2013, 119). Exactly what he meant by Varangians and Rus' was not specified in his works; sometimes the terms are used interchangeably, while occasionally Varangian seems to denote Scandinavian elements with Rus' meaning Slavic, though sometimes also including both Scandinavians and Slavs at the same time.[7] What is certain, however, is that he applied the terms as markers of ethnicity and not profession. This leads to the major problem with his interpretation: he tried to identify and locate uncertain medieval ethnicities as tangible and easily recognizable groups, while it is obvious that even he himself was not sure of the terminology on this. This problem will be scrutinized later, together with the archaeological findings.

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[6] Others not mentioned by Borosy: Székely 1975; Engel 2005, 76; Fodor 2001, 24-25; Font 2015, 307. The firm implantation of this thesis in scholarly thought is testified to by its application in popular works as well, e.g. newspapers (Zsoldos 2014; Veszprémy 2015) and radio: Hidán 2015.

[7] Rus' as Slavic: Györffy 1958, 574-76. The term 'oroszvarang' (Russo-Varangian) in one word: Györffy 1958, 576. Varangian as purely Scandinavian: Györffy [1977] 2013, 119.

When Györffy assumed that the safest route from Byzantium to Kiev led through Hungary, he was most likely building on the theory expounded above that the Scandinavian ethnic groups had previously a good relationship with the Hungarians. He did not seem to consider whether they were coming from Greek or Russian territories. It may very well be erroneous that there was a conscious, standard way of thinking among the Scandinavian ethnic groups of the tenth and eleventh centuries, especially since the Rus' and the Varangians were mixed with Slavic and/or Greek populations and had developed a new identity of their own (Hedenstierna-Jonson forthcoming; Androshchuk 2013, 1). Vikings were not the same in any part of the world, and hiring Vikings against Vikings was a very common practice throughout the Viking Age. Consider, for instance, the Viking chief Hrólfr, who became Prince Rollo, and others like him operating in Western Europe (Coupland 1998) or the conflict between the Viking leaders Askold, Dir, and Prince Oleg (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953, 61). Therefore, it is far from certain that 'Scandinavians' coming from both directions would have regarded the route as safe, especially not in the 980s, when the relationship between the Rus' and the Greeks was still subject to misunderstandings. There were even two recorded Rus' campaigns in the year 988: the siege of the Byzantine city of Cherson by Vladimir I and his military aid to the Byzantine emperor Basil II against the revolt of Bardas Phokas—though the chronological sequence of these events is unknown.[8] It has been suggested that the campaigns were run by different commanders and that the Varangian mercenary force that supported Byzantium against the rebellion was led by a vassal of Vladimir I, namely the Norwegian Viking Óláfr Tryggvason, whose support could conceivably have been bought by the Greeks, as he was fascinated by their glory (Petrukhin 2015). Thus, different groups of Vikings operated in the area, whose identities and loyalties are too uncertain to permit a generalization about their attitudes towards the route from Byzantium to Hungarian territories or their relationship with Hungarians in general. Moreover, according to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, it took approximately 17 to 28 days from Kiev to reach the end of the Dnieper (ten days from Kiev to the rapids, one or two days to pass them, plus four days to reach the mouth of the river) (Moravcsik 1949, 57-63; Petrukhin 2006). In contrast, a Swedish group of scholars and experimenters in 1985 sailed down the Eastern European rivers, taking the Hungarian Bodrog and Tisza rivers down to the Danube to prove that Vikings were indeed able to travel with their own boats from the North to Constantinople (Edberg 2009). The journey, however was started from the river Vistula (thus did not pass Kiev) and all in all took 131 days to complete, to which it should be added that the boat was pulled on land by a cart for 658 kilometres (Andersson 2000). Therefore, even if such a road existed, it is also unlikely that Scandinavians would have preferred the 'Hungarian way' to the river voyage, as it was much longer and more time-consuming. The *DAI* also explicitly states that the ending point of the Rus' expeditions was in the Bulgarian territory of Mesembria (Moravcsik 1949, 63).

The idea of a Rus' presence in Hungarian service before Saint Stephen I was based on Anonymus' dubious account. The account involved the Kievan march and the foundation of 'Oroszvár' ('Russian castle') on the north-western borders (present day Rusovce in Slovakia), which Anonymus claimed was achieved by the Rus' entering the Carpathian Basin with prince Álmos: '*et in eisdem partibus dedit castrum construere Ruthenis, qui cum Almo duce avo suo in Pannoniam venerant*' (and in the same place he gave to the Rus', who had come to Pannonia with his grandfather, Prince Álmos, a castle to build) (Bak and Rady 2010, 124-25). The anachronistic nature of Anonymus' work has already been mentioned, as he sought to

[8] For a good summary on the depiction of these events in the different sources see footnote 93 in the quoted edition of the Russian Primary Chronicle. (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953, 245-247).

glorify Hungarian achievements in history by explaining place names in his own time with stories from the distant past (Bak and Rady 2010, xxvii).

As proof of the Rus' presence in medieval Hungary during the reign of Saint Stephen, Györffy adduced a more trustworthy, contemporary source. This was the report about the death of Stephen's son Emeric in the *Annales Hildesheimenses* in the year 1031: '*Et Heinricus, Stephani regis filius, dux Ruizorum, in venatione ab apro discissus, periit flebiliter mortuus*' (Waitz 1878, 36) (And Emeric, Stephen's son, prince of the Rus', was mortally wounded by a boar in a hunt, and perished miserably').[9] Györffy suggested that the title *dux Ruizorum* indicates that the Hungarian prince was leading the bodyguard of the king, and that it consisted of foreign Rus' warriors (1958, 574; [1977] 2013, 313-14). Going still further, he supported this theory with another hypothesis, proposed by Gyula Moravcsik, that the assigned wife of prince Emeric was probably a Byzantine princess (Moravcsik 1938). Györffy supposed that it could have been this unnamed princess who, upon coming to Hungary, was accompanied by Varangian-Rus' bodyguards, who later left the country, shortly after Emeric's death (1958, 580; 1959, 92).

Although nothing links *dux Ruizorum* with the bodyguard in the text, and no other source, including Emeric's own legend (Bartoniek 1938, 507-27), gives him this title, the assumption has been widely integrated into Hungarian research.[10] Emeric's allegedly Byzantine wife is also hypothetical and is never explicitly mentioned in the sources. Furthermore, Moravcsik himself admitted that other accounts either speak only of a noble virgin or specifically identify the princess as being of Croatian or Polish origin (1938, 412-14).

The title *dux Ruizorum* was taken on by later Hungarian kings as well, including Stephen's successor Peter Orseolo, whose bodyguard, as discussed above, consisted of soldiers of Italian and German descent, not Rus'. Thus it is plausible that, like most royal titles in the Middle Ages, it was designed simply to enhance the prestige of the ruler and did not actually imply rule over a certain territory or people.

Apart from the rarity and obscurity of these statements in the sources, a larger controversy is at stake here. If Györffy is right and Emeric did indeed receive the title *dux Ruizorum* because of his engagement with the Byzantine princess (tentatively dated to 1015, when Emeric was fifteen years old) and the Varangian contingent left the country after his death, it would mean that they had stayed in Hungary for about twenty years. This seemingly contradicts the much longer-lasting phenomenon that Györffy describes when citing the widespread occurrence of place names that include the stem 'orosz' and 'varang'. Of 47 medieval place names with 'orosz' (Kristó-Makk-Szegfű 1973; Kristó 1983, 196), Györffy identified six that dated to the tenth or early eleventh century and derived from the fact that royal bodyguards were settled there (Györffy 1966, 126; 464-65; 1987, 365-66; 1998, 169-71; 282; 687-88). All of these places lie on an east-west line, just a few hundred kilometres from the borders of the kingdom (Fig. 2). In addition, Györffy discovered two place names, Várong and Varang, in the counties of Tolna and Somogy—closer to the middle of the country—which he believed contained the stem 'varang' (*væring*) and also referred to the presence of royal bodyguards (Györffy 1959, 89; [1977] 2013, 118-19). Although Györffy does not discuss this, the distinction between the place names 'orosz' and 'varang' is apparent. There seems to be a differentiation in language between Rus' and Varangians in medieval Hungary for unknown reasons, unless we assume that place names were decided *ad hoc* and the terms 'orosz' and 'varang' were used interchangeably and completely inconsistently. This implies that Györffy's theory identifies two different groups as bodyguards: one building on the Byzantine tradition (imported Varangian bodyguards from Constantinople by Emeric's

[9] Translation mine.

[10] See the list of works above in footnote 5.

allegedly Byzantine fiancée) and the other on the Kievan tradition (a mixed Slavic-Scandinavian Rus' population similar to the *druzhina*).

[PLACEHOLDER FOR FIG. 2: Rus and Varangian related place names in Early Medieval Hungary, based on György Györffy's monograph series 'Az Árpád-kori Magyarország történeti földrajza I-IV.' (The Historical Geography of Hungary in the Age of the Árpáds) (Special thanks to Zsolt Szilágyi for editing the map. Source of the basic map: https://foldepites.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/5-karpat-medence-kesz-wo9.jpg)]

Györffy did not see the contradiction between the theory of Varangians leaving Hungary after only twenty years and the idea of them providing names for two places in the country. It is doubtful that they would have left any trace in the landscape after such a short stay. So what is the situation here? Were there other settlements from Constantinople that we do not know about? And what about the Kievan bodyguards? If they were settled in different parts of the country, did they perform different duties from those settled in Várong and Varang? And if this was a moveable retinue which was migrating from one court to the other for military pay, why would they have settled down at all? How could a bodyguard defend his lord if he was living in a distant part of the country?

In reality, the terms Rus' and Varangian likely had slightly different meanings in the period. While Rus' seems to have included men, women, and children—referring to an ethnic group of predominantly Scandinavian origin (possibly mixed with local population)—the term Varangian most likely denoted professional warrior groups of Scandinavian pedigree, operating in European Russia (Andorshchuk 2004; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2009). How is this compatible with Emeric's title? Why was he prince of the Rus' and not of the Varangians? If he was the leader of the bodyguard that had arrived directly from Byzantium, why did he bear a title with the name of a different group? Did *Ruizorum* in the title refer to an ethnicity at all? And if it did, what territorial unit was it relevant for: all the Rus' or just the Rus' in Hungary? The Varangian Guard was an ethnically miscellaneous group that got its name from an ethnic group. Could this have also been the case with the Rus'? The lack of sources makes many of these questions difficult to answer, but none of these inconsistencies in Györffy's theory were ever even discussed and it is clear that he simply compiled anything that could be loosely connected to a 'Scandinavian' retinue without ever critiquing the evidence.

Critiques of his work have been made by previous scholars. Gyula Kristó, another renowned medievalist and a contemporary of Györffy, argued convincingly that the name of a settlement is not necessarily derived from the inhabitants. In fact, there could be many reasons why a place might have a particular name, including one that is especially widespread: that it was named after a person (Kristó 1983, 193-95; Tóth and Hoffmann 2015; 2016). Kristó also refuted Györffy's argument that the relationship between the bodyguard and these settlements is demonstrated by the secondary meaning of 'orosz' as janitor or doorkeeper, pointing out that this meaning was not in use before the thirteenth century, when our written accounts also clearly mention Russians imported and installed by the Hungarian kings (Kristó 1983, 199-201). The evidence that Györffy used to project the phenomenon back in time to the early Árpád Age was a thirteenth-century diploma concerning the obligation of two small villages in north Hungary. According to these thirteenth-century regulations, the villages of Kis- and Nagyoroszi (earlier having been a single settlement) were obliged to provide two doorkeepers to King Coloman the Book-Lover. This, Györffy surmised, proved the earlier presence of bodyguards in Hungarian villages and the long tradition of foreign Russian involvement in the retinue (Györffy 1959, 86; Erdős 1998, 13). He supposed that originally Rus' bodyguards had lived in Nagyoroszi, and for this reason King Coloman stationed Russians there in the

thirteenth-century, believing the new Russian bodyguards should live with the old Rus'-descended bodyguards.

In my opinion, this is a simplistic view that disregards many factors. Besides the fact that the source mentioning this originates from the thirteenth century and, as illustrated by Kristó, the use of the word 'orosz' for doorkeeper derives from later periods and not the early Árpád Age, the development of the settlement is also unclear. This is reflected by variations in its name, attested as Oroszd (1346) and Oroszfalva (1401) (Rácz 2011, 136). Oroszd is unique among early Hungarian place names with the stem 'orosz' (Rácz 2011, 135-136) and probably denotes a personal name (cf. Györffy 1988, 282). Concerning the Oroszfalva variant, linguistic evidence suggests that settlements received the suffix 'falva' (village) only if they were established later than the eleventh century (Kristó 1983, 196). Moreover, if the function of the Rus' bodyguard had ceased after Saint Stephen I and the Rus' had effectively lost their jobs, it is unlikely that so many of them would have settled in Nagyoroszi that the village would still give the impression of a Russian settlement centuries later, especially when considering the fast-changing circumstances and high rate of assimilation at this period. If settlements had already been providing doorkeepers to the king during the reign of Saint Stephen or Grand Prince Géza, as they did later in the thirteenth century, then this institution was very far from being a traditional Varangian-Rus' retinue or *druzhina* that lived with their lords and derived their livelihood from gifts and plunder (Landolt 1998; Richard 2008). The obligation of Nagyoroszi was evidently a feudal type of tax, firmly established in high medieval Hungary, and had nothing in common with an unsettled and voluntary mercenary force that is claimed to have existed there. If we extend this explanation to the settlements Várong and Varang, it is doubtful that, from a place where a warrior-merchant group like the Varangians had settled, the king would have only required a few men to serve in his guard. These bodyguards, required by law to serve King Coloman, bear little resemblance to the Varangian bodyguards of Byzantium described in Icelandic sagas, who returned home after a few years of adventurous, voluntary service.

To summarize, it is evident that the supposedly friendly past relationship between the Hungarians and the Rus' has led to false assumptions. It is unlikely that the Rus' forces that joined the Hungarians after the Kievan march were bodyguards—at most they could have been frontier-guards (Kristó 1983, 203-04). In fact even that is questionable, as many of the settlements with the 'orosz' stem are too far from the borders to be regarded as defensive frontier installations.

Comparing the Hungarian retinue to the Kievan *druzhina* and the Varangian Guard has also caused contradictions, as the structure and operation of these institutions are distinct. Most of the evidence suggests that the employment of Rus' in the king's guard is a later development, likely from the twelfth or thirteenth century. Our evidence, in the shape of place names and the secondary meaning of 'orosz', all derives from that period. The existence of the stem 'orosz' in the names of various settlements is probably just a remnant left by simple Russian migrants or frontier-guard forces, with no connection to royal bodyguards. The evidence suggesting that places such as Oroszvár were founded at the time of the Conquest is minimal and the extent to which this Rus' population had a Scandinavian identity is questionable—especially since Kiev did not develop into a Scandinavian-influenced Rus' centre until the tenth century (Duczko 2004, 220, 257; Androshchuk 2013, 31-32, 216-17; see also: Franklin and Shephard 1996, 98-109).

The settlements Várong and Varang still remain a mystery since linguistic investigations would indicate the forms *Várongi and *Varangi (with an 'i' suffix) if the settlements had been established in the twelfth century (Györffy 1958, 578). However, the possibility that they were named after an individual cannot be ruled out since Varang as a personal name appears in the twelfth century (Györffy 1966, 894). Even if the settlements do originate from

the tenth or early eleventh centuries, it is quite uncertain whether they refer to Scandinavian inhabitants or something else. According to Rahbek Schmidt, toponym parallels in Russia with the stem *væring* probably originated in the 1020s, when the original ethnic meaning of the word had already vanished (Schmidt 1970). It is certain, however, that the first mention of Várong and Varang is found in Hungarian diplomas from 1138 and 1193 (Kristó-Makk-Szegfű 1973, 14).[11]

Although the shared dwelling place(s) and sustained commercial exchange between the Ancient Hungarians and the Rus' before the Hungarian Settlement might suggest that Rus' were already living in Hungary shortly after the Conquest (according to people who favour the theory), even Györffy and his followers thought the infiltration to be at its peak during the reign of Saint Stephen I. The *Russian Primary Chronicle* notes that the relationship between Vladimir I and Saint Stephen was peaceful (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953, 122) and accordingly this could have been the time when the highest number of Rus' mercenaries arrived to serve the Hungarian king (Font 2015). The identification of a certain ethnic group is highly problematic, but the existence of Scandinavians in Hungary is most likely traceable to this period: we know that Vladimir himself was in exile in Scandinavia for some years and Thietmar's chronicle reports that his court was full of Danes (Shephard 2008). This is also attested to in the archaeological evidence in and around Kiev, where *druzhina* graves from the period were unearthed and found to contain a large number of Scandinavian artefact types (Kirpichnikov 1970; Duczko 2004, 202-46; Movchan 2007; Androshchuk 2013, 25-32; cf. Franklin and Shephard 1996, 123).

If the theory is true that there was an exchange of bodyguards between the two courts and Hungarians served in the Kievan *druzhina* while Scandinavians did the same in the Hungarian bodyguard, then the traces of this would have to be apparent in the Hungarian archaeological record, to which we now turn.

Archaeological traits

Since the early twentieth century, Hungarian scholars have been interested in the connection between Scandinavians and Hungarians, using archaeological evidence to demonstrate the dynamic relationship between the two ethnic groups during the early Middle Ages (e.g. Flamm 1986; Kovárczy 1991). This included the coins of Saint Stephen found in Scandinavia (Huszár 1967; Gedai 1980), Scandinavian and Baltic parallels of Hungarian sabretaches (Fodor 1986, 219-220; Erdélyi 2008, 79) and multiple artefacts discovered on Hungarian territory, including different types of jewelry (bracelets and rings) with counterparts from Gotland and the Kievan Rus' territories (Márkiné Poll 1934; Mesterházy 1993); a type of stirrup thought to be a 'Carolingian-Northmen' blend (Mesterházy 1981; Kovács 1986a; 1986b); a hat from Beregszász (Kovács 2003); and weapons, such as straight double-edged

[11] A possible twelfth-century dating based on dynastic connections of the era cannot be excluded, although this is admittedly also speculation. The deed of gift of Dömös mentions the settlement first in 1138, which would be the *terminus post quem* for its foundation. This was during the reign of Béla II (1131-1141), who had been blinded and was hiding in the Dömös monastery before he started to rule. His father Álmos escaped to Constantinople, where he received the Greek name Constantinos. After they had been pardoned by the later king Stephen II (1116-1131), Béla took a Serbian wife and settled in Tolna county. The family's close connection to the area of Tolna and Somogy and their Byzantine affiliations could well be the cause for imported Varangian groups. It should be stressed, however, that the ethnic composition of the Varangian Guard at this point was highly mixed.

swords (Paulsen 1933; Fettich 1933, 61, 394-97; Marosi 1934; Fodor 1986, 222; cf. Bíró 2012).

Even before the Conquest, contact would be expected through cultural exchange and later on through commerce via the northern trade route from Poland or through the eastern Tokaj-Eger-Vác roads (Mesterházy 1993). Commercial contacts are also attested in the written sources, as a Jewish traveler Ibrahim Ibn Ya'cub recorded in the tenth century that Rus' and Turks (viz. Hungarians) were both present at the local market of Prague at the time (Mishin 1996, 186). It also seems plausible, that besides the artefacts listed above, Hungarian dirhem finds also signal commercial contacts with the Kievan Rus' as most dirhems found in Hungary were recovered in the Upper-Tisza region (Kovács 1994, 191-193).

On the other hand, many objects of supposedly Scandinavian origin were also attributed with little supporting evidence to the Scandinavian-Rus' retinue of Géza and Saint Stephen.

Unlike in Polish or the Kievan Rus' territories, there are no cemeteries or individual graves in Hungary that could be interpreted as of Scandinavian origin, though a few attempts have been made at such an explanation. In the cemetery of Hencida (Bihar county), for instance, physical anthropological research in the 1920s identified four individuals as showing 'predominantly Nordic traits' (Bartucz 1926). Fettich later described them as assimilated Northmen who joined the Ancient Hungarian tribes back in Levedia (1933, 259, 379).

Concerning a boat burial (Grave 362) located in the castle garden at the residence of the county sheriff of Visegrád (established by Saint Stephen in 1009), it was suggested that the person interred might be a member of the Scandinavian retinue. This was based on the royal links of the settlement and the boat, which, although smaller than its Scandinavian counterparts, was very similar to them in shape (for discussion see Kovalovszki 1994). The grave was ultimately found to hold an infant and an adult, without any grave goods, making the Scandinavian descent of the deceased a mere assumption.

Kornél Bakay, who attempted to use the straight double-edged swords as a means of identifying all retinue members (not merely the Scandinavians), claimed that there are three main reasons why we should not look for the burials of foreign retinue members in the Hungarian material: 1) high status retinue members would not have been buried with middle class people; 2) these warriors were Christians who would not have been buried in heathen fashion; 3) the Hungarian state was formed later than the Polish state (Bakay 1965, 24).[12] Despite his injunctions against the direct identification of foreign retinue graves, in two instances he allowed a grave to be identified as belonging to a Rus' retainer, these being the lone burial at Benepuszta and the 'A' grave in the cemetery of Székesfehérvár Rádiótelep (Bakay 1965, 25). The Benepuszta burial has since fallen out of consideration, as it has been demonstrated that the alleged Scandinavian strap-tag of the grave was of undoubted Carolingian origin (Wamers 2005; Bollók 2014), while the missing straight double-edged sword in fact turned out to be a sabre (Kovács 1980). These facts, together with the obvious steppe origin of the rest of the grave goods and the nomadic manner of the burial (Fettich 1933, 380), rule out a Scandinavian identification of the corpse.

By contrast, the other grave in Székesfehérvár Rádiótelep is more problematic to explain, as it was even more recently identified by László Kovács as the resting place of a 'high status Rus' warrior' who was probably a member of the royal bodyguard (Kovács 1995).[13] The grave itself was disturbed by the workers who discovered it and probably for this reason the body was never found (Marosi 1923-26). According to Kovács, the grave goods exhibit a mixture of Scandinavian and nomadic, suggesting that an assimilated Rus' warrior of high status, whose equipment and burial only partially reflected Hungarian customs (1995, 304-

[12] The second point is shared by Kovács (1994, 194).

[13] Accepted also by historians: Polgár 2002, 95; Kiss 2015, 247.

05), was buried there. Among Kovács's evidence we find particular grave goods he believed to be distinctive features of Norse/Rus' burials: a water bucket; an axe, which he interpreted as a sign of retinue membership in Russia after Kirpichnikov (1966, 35-37; Kovács 1986a); and a straight double-edged sword classified as Petersen type T. Nomadic, Magyar type of objects, according to him, were represented by a caftan, the stirrups, and the presence of a horse (Kovács 1995, 304-305). Against this, the site was very poorly documented—the skeleton was missing, the whole area had been disturbed, and no information was provided on the disposition of the grave goods or the deceased. Basically, the burial was interpreted out of context, by picking out a few objects that could have been of foreign origin and using them as evidence for the foreign provenance of the entire grave, without considering alternative explanations as to how these objects may have ended up there. Kovács could have been influenced by an ingrained historical thesis (the Rus' bodyguard) which prompted him to identify any archaeological data that could be connected to it in the slightest way. Interestingly, this is not a uniquely Hungarian phenomenon. Polish scholars faced the same problems when unverified data from other sciences led archaeologists astray concerning the identification of Scandinavians in early medieval Poland (Rohrer 2009; Gardeła 2015). It is also a problem that Hungarian archaeologists were not aware of the high diversity of Norse burial traditions (Price 2010) when they were identifying such traits. For instance, when Kovács assumes the presence of the horse to be a nomadic tradition, he misses the fact that horse burials were extremely common in the Viking world as well (Sikora 2003-04; Rúnar Leifsson 2012).

Kovács's argument concerning this particular site also failed to acknowledge the complexity of burials in general—he seems to consider everything in the grave to be a mirror into the past and not part of a conscious ritual by the burying (probably Hungarian) community. The place of fabrication of the objects is not the only relevant issue in trying to understand the identity of the dead. Judging by certain objects that might have had a Scandinavian origin—such as the sword, which has direct parallels in Norway (Peirce 2002, 108)—he identified the whole grave as such. If this would be true it is puzzling why do we not find more of these retainer graves in Hungary? The only exception when a burial was partially associated with the 'A' grave of Székesfehérvár-Rádiótelep comes from Nyíregyháza-Felsősima, however, no sword has been found there and only the flat single-edged axe, the horse bones and the trapeze shaped stirrup showed similarities with the Székesfehérvár grave. In addition, the axe was paired with arrowheads and the nearby cemetery was definitely dated after the middle of eleventh century (Jabak 2009, 114-115). The 'A' grave of Székesfehérvár-Rádiótelep therefore is unique in the Hungarian record and probably needs a more complex interpretation. We would expect more of these graves (in a much clear context) to turn up to validate such a big theory as the Varangian-Rus bodyguard.

Not only poorly documented and fragmentary burials were regarded as Rus'[14] but in many cases even stray finds were explained as the remnants of a permanent Rus'-Scandinavian presence in medieval Hungary. Straight double-edged swords from the early Middle Ages were found in great numbers in the Carpathian Basin, mostly near busy trade routes and princely headquarters (Bakay 1965, 27; Fig. 3). These weapons were associated with the retinue and bodyguard of Géza and Saint Stephen. The correlation was based on the historical

[14] E.g. the find at Ártánd-Zomlinpuszta was considered to be a 'Varangian-Russian' grave by Pálóczi (1994, 127-28), based on the chainmail fragments and the arrowhead types found in the grave, both having parallels in the Kievan Rus' territories. A warrior from the grave of Erdőtelek was also identified as 'Varangian-Russian' but the nomadic lineage of the deceased was nevertheless emphasized, implying that he was a Pecheneg warrior from the Kievan *druzhina* who migrated to Hungary (Nagy 1969).

assumption that the Magyar style steppe nomadic warfare was inferior to Western innovations of the period and Géza had realized the need for a new modern army equipped with Western double-edged swords. This is the theory of the so-called 'Waffenwechsel' ('weapon-change'), which—like the theory of the Varangian-Rus' bodyguard—was rarely questioned, despite its serious methodological problems, such as the complete absence of defensive weaponry in the archaeological findings (Bíró 2012). It is therefore implausible that all graves containing double-edged swords would denote retinue members. Regardless, all burials with double-edged swords were associated with this new army and although most of the swords were thought to be of Western origin it was acknowledged that some of them might have come from Scandinavia (Paulsen 1933; Bakay 1965, 31-35; László 1944, 20-44; Mesterházy 1995; Horváth 2008). Examples are Vác-csörög (Paulsen 1933, 35-42; Bóna 1961-62), Szob-kiserdő (Fodor 1996b, 409-10, in comparison with the Erzsébet bridge sword: 365-66), Székesfehérvár-Sárkeresztúr, and Rádiótelep (Marosi 1934), Budapest Erzsébet bridge (Fodor 1996b, 365-66), and Dombrád where only the sword chapel has been found (Bakay 1965, 32; Fodor 2001, 23).[15]

[PLACEHOLDER FOR FIG. 3: Weapon and stirrup finds in the Carpathian Basin from the 10th and 11th centuries (Bakay 1965, 58)]

The intention here is not to enter into a debate about the precise provenance of each sword, which in many cases is quite complicated, but to bring attention to the widespread distribution of these weapons throughout Europe (Bíró 2012; Androshchuk 2013, 35-36) and the possibility that the grip and the blade were manufactured in different workshops (Arbman, 1961, 20). There are, however, a few swords where the typology and ornamentation both attest to their alleged Scandinavian origin. The explanation for the existence of these swords has been given as commerce, as the Western booty of Hungarians (Hampel 1907, 29), or as *insignia*, such as the sabre of Charlemagne or the sword of Saint Stephen, which is held in St. Vitus cathedral in Prague (Paulsen 1933, 53-56; Fodor 2000). The prestigious sword with the *Ulfberht* inscription is one of the few weapons which was indeed in the possession of a historical person—it is included in the cathedral's inventory from 1355 as belonging to King Saint Stephen I (Fettich 1938; László 1977; Fodor 2000, 2003-04). This is very rare in archaeology and more recent research suggests that it might indeed indicate contact with the Jelling dynasty (Tesch 2015). In spite of such exceptions, which are backed up with documentation, it is hard to agree with the direct identification of stray finds with the Scandinavian retinue when evidence is not available.

Another example is a richly ornamented tenth- or eleventh-century spear dredged from the bed of the Danube in 1910. A unique find, it was nielloed with gold and embellished with acanthus motives in Ringerike style (Fig. 4). Although it was evidently a Scandinavian product, as a stray find it would be hard to associate directly with an eminent leader of the Varangian-Rus' bodyguard of Saint Stephen, as Kovács did (1970). Kovács excluded the use of the spear as a dynastic object or commercial product and related it to the *druzhina* members who arrived to the court of Saint Stephen (1970, 337-38). The differentiation between the

[15] A typical Magyar burial in the gravel-pit of Kajárpéc-Gyűr contained a single-edged sword, identified as a Baltic or Norwegian product. It had only one parallel from the burial of Felsőszeli and because of their absence from the territories of the Kievan Rus' neither of them were associated with the retinue, although their possible Scandinavian provenance was mentioned (Kovács 1992, Fodor 2001). There were other swords as well where a possible Viking influence has been suggested, but the listed examples above are the ones where the Scandinavian provenance is generally accepted among archaeologists.

Nordic (Scandinavian), the Eastern (Rus'), or the Southern (Varangian from Byzantium) origin of an object does not appear in the scholarly discourse and these differences do not seem to be considered when relating the objects to the bodyguard.[16]

[PLACEHOLDER FOR FIG. 4: Decorated Viking spearhead from the Danube, Budapest (Fodor 1996b, 366)

This became apparent when archaeologists analysed another type of weaponry related to the retinue, namely axes. A flat single-edged unique and a broad-bladed axe type, dated to the tenth century, have been found in Hungary in different locations (Kovács 1989, Petkes 2006): these are Halimba-Cseres, Ógyalla, Székesfehévár Rádiótelep and Szob-Kiserdő, Ibrány-Esbóhalom, Kaposvár-Városi kertészet, Nyíregyháza-Felsősima for the smaller bladed axes; and an unknown habitat, Bodrogvécs (Dragotă 2015), Nagyhalász (Istvánovits 2003, 338-39), Nagytarcsa, Szob-Vendelin, Hajdúszoboszló-Árkoshalom, Nagymácséd Buriánföldek, Sárrétudvari-Hízóföld, and notably Doroszló (Fodor 1996a) for the broad-bladed ones. Some of them were found near border settlements or smaller earth-built strongholds (Fodor 1996a). It was acknowledged that almost all of the graves in which these axes have been found fit to the general Magyar material and thus the ethnicity of the dead should not be sought in foreign places (Kovács 1986, 110). However, their parallels were found in the Kievan Rus' territories (Petkes Forthcoming; Kovács 1986a, 102-110; for the Doroszló axe, the Golden Gate of Kiev, Panovo), and it was surmised that they were normally carried by 'Eastern Russian-Varangian' or 'Russian-Norman' mercenaries and were acquired by the members of the 'new' Hungarian tenth-century princely army from the north-northeast (Fodor, 1996a, 390; Kovács 1989, 171; Petkes Forthcoming). Recently the idea that they were brought back home to Hungary by Hungarian retinue members who served in the Kievan *druzhina*, has also been raised (Petkes Forthcoming). Regarding these axes from the tenth century, it is striking that we do not find their parallels from the period in Scandinavia at all, but only in the Kievan Rus', suggesting them to be of Slavic origin rather than Scandinavian.[17]

[PLACEHOLDER FOR FIG. 5: Special, probably Nomadic, axe type from Doroszló (Fodor 1996a, 389)]

There are other types of objects which, in spite of their being stray finds, archaeologists believe testify to the presence of Rus' warriors in Hungarian territory. The most notable of these are ten miniature Perun (or Þórr?) axe pendants, from which for years only four have been known (Szabolcsveresmart, Hajdúhadház-Cégény, Hajdúdorog Kövecses-Halom, Sály-Örsúr). In the last few years, however there numbers have been doubled and six new axe pendants have been published recently (Füredi et al. 2016): Bugac-Alsómonostor, Csanádpalota Juhász T.-tanya, Dabas-Templomdomb, Ipolytölgyes-Mál-alja, Kecskemét-Ballószög, Valkó-Öregszőlők.

The Russian archaeologist Makarov sorted these artefacts into two groups (1992). Eight of the ten Hungarian finds can be categorized as Makarov type I, from which considerable numbers are known from Sigtuna, and which were linked with Swedish mercenaries returning from Russian service (Edberg 1999). Until recently only one amulet of Makarov type I has

[16] Not just concerning this spear, but with some axes, too (see below). On graves see especially footnote 13.

[17] The closest Norse example for the Doroszló axe is the Petersen type C. However it does not have a hammer edge on the opposite side of the blade and is not curved (see Petersen 1919, 39). One similar piece has been found in Poland (Łubowo) and, without parallels from Scandinavia, it was claimed to be a nomadic type. For discussion see Gardeła 2014, 28-29.

been known from the Hungarian archaeological record, which was associated by István Fodor with a Rus-Varangian mercenary who likely arrived to Hungary during the reign of Saint Stephen (Fodor 2014, 616-618). Two of the ten pendants (the ones from Szabolcsveresmart and Sály-Örsúr) can be categorized as type II, according to the classification system of Makarov, who regarded pendants of this type as signs of *druzhina* membership. However, based on their widespread distribution from Poland to the Baltics, newer research finds *druzhina* membership unlikely and lists possible alternative interpretations, such as a possible link to seafaring or the cult of Saint Óláfr in the Kievan Rus' (Kucypera and Wadyl 2011). In Hungary, Makarov's views prevail and various publications have labelled the Szabolcsveresmart find as the possession of a Rus' *druzhina* warrior (Fodor 1986, 222; 1996b, 172-73; Istvánovits 2003, 184; Révész 1989). Until now, no paper has been published on the Sály-Örsúr artefact, since it was only discovered in 2014, but its online description in the beginnings followed the trends of the Szabolcsveresmart find.[18] Its recent publication together with the new discoveries, however shows a more nuanced interpretation and concludes that they cannot be linked obviously with the presence of a Rus-Varangian military retinue of the tenth-eleventh centuries (Füredi et al. 2016). The pendants, namely date to the eleventh or even the twelfth century (Kucypera and Wadyl 2011, Table 1; Füredi et al. 2016), which makes the traditional Hungarian interpretation a bit unclear since they are chronologically incompatible with a Scandinavian retinue of Géza or Saint Stephen. Associating these pendant evidently with military activity is also a mistake, as from these ten stray-finds only two comes possibly from a stronghold (Füredi et al. 2016).

[PLACEHOLDER FOR FIG. 6a: Axe pendant from Szabolcsveresmart (Istvánovits 2003, 184)]
[PLACEHOLDER FOR FIG. 6b: Axe pendant from Sály-Örsúr (http://homregeszet.tumblr.com/post/105179589900/viharisten-a-hegyen)]

Most evidence therefore suggests that the employment of Rus or even Russian soldiers by the Hungarian state was a later development. This seems to be the case with the few archaeological finds discussed, which, although possibly exhibiting some earlier Scandinavian influence (like many artefacts in the Kievan Rus'), bear just as many Slavic characteristics in their final form. Objects like this have been carelessly interpreted out of context—most of them were stray finds—and illogically matched with a historical thesis.

Classifying certain artefact types as ethnic markers based on typology, ornaments, or both is long outdated in Western archaeological research.[19] The way an object arrived at its resting place is a long story, as every object has its own biography and undergoes changes in shape, value, and meaning over the years (Kopytoff 1986; Hoskins 1998; Gosden and Yvonne 1999). Moreover, in the case of the Rus' we are dealing with a culture that was developing an identity of its own from the ninth century and was neither Slavic nor Scandinavian in itself but a merge of these two cultures, incorporating Byzantine and Turkic influences along the way as well. When archaeologists search for Scandinavians in Hungary, it is quite unclear what they are actually searching for.

It is important to clarify what, exactly, is regarded as Scandinavian. Was 'Scandinavian' a label given by the Hungarians, or was this a name immigrants used themselves? Who or what do we regard as Scandinavian in the first place? A biological pedigree? A mental consciousness of someone's past origin? A person who spoke Old Norse? Someone who lived

[18] http://homregeszet.tumblr.com/post/105179589900/viharisten-a-hegyen [accessed: 17. 03. 2017]
[19] About ethnic interpretations in Hungarian research see: Bálint 2010.

according to Scandinavian customs and law? Or someone who was dressed or armed with Scandinavian objects? One can hardly answer. None of these are ethnospecific features in themselves. Ethnicity is complex—it is rarely a static condition and is often dependent on the private interests of an individual (Bentley 1987). This is not to suggest that it is useless to study the ethnicities of the Early Middle Ages, or that it is impossible to locate certain ethnic groups in the archaeological record, but conclusions cannot be drawn from typology or ornamentation alone, without any other contextual information.

Contact between Scandinavians and Hungarians certainly existed during the Early Medieval period, and not only on a commercial level but on a military level as well. Fedir Androshchuk observed, for instance, that the joint participation of Rus' and Hungarian mercenaries in various Eastern campaigns of the tenth century probably resulted in the introduction of horses to Viking techniques in warfare (2013, 222-23). Even more notable, in the garrison of the Swedish town Birka numerous objects of Magyar origin were found, suggesting the presence of an orientally-influenced auxiliary force that spent long periods of time in contact with steppe nomadic groups (Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006; 2009; 2012; Lundström-Hedenstierna-Jonson-Holmquist 2010). Similarly, in the Danish fortress of Trelleborg Slavic mercenary groups were found buried in the same cemetery with Scandinavian garrison members (Price et al. 2011). Warrior groups like these were probably heterogeneous, the main goal of their employment by a strong central power being to maintain a professional warrior elite—the ethnicity of which did not matter at all. Exchange of style or warfare techniques among these retainers were more likely a matter of fashion than the remnants of an ethnic identity. On the other hand, the abundance of evidence at Birka or Trelleborg cannot be found regarding Scandinavians in Hungary. Not only are we lacking Scandinavian cemeteries and Nordic-related objects in bigger numbers or in one place but all our isolated examples are either stray finds or come from graves which are furnished with Magyar style objects. These could perhaps suggest certain warrior equipment trends but I myself would hesitate to attribute them expressly to foreign retinue members.

The notion that retinue graves have not been found in bigger numbers in the Hungarian records due to the Christian faith of these retainers is implausible, as numerous retainer graves furnished in heathen fashion have turned up in the Kievan Rus', from where most of these retainers allegedly came. It has also been suggested that the graves of retainers should not be sought in intact military cemeteries but in the countryside, where the families of retinue members settled (Mesterházy 1995, 1039-1040). This could be a solution, since no excavations have thus far been carried out in the area around the supposed settlements (Fig. 2) of the Scandinavian retinue. The only exception is Oroszvár, however, not in the slightest way can any archaeological findings in the Árpád Age cemetery of the settlement be linked with the Kievan Rus' or Scandinavia (Tomka 2000, 18).[20] Even if these settlements would hide the remains of Rus retinue members, it would imply that this settled retinue was probably a later feudal development and not the typical migrating Viking retinue and bodyguard described by Hungarian historians.

Final remarks

As illustrated, the historical evidence for the existence of a Scandinavian retinue and bodyguard in early medieval Hungary is not convincing, as the theory was built upon several dubious hypotheses. These conceptions, borrowed from different disciplines, were used to validate the theory, despite the fact that proper examination would have revealed that they

[20] There is ongoing excavation near Várong, however the cemetery found there is from the Avar Age. Online report: http://wmmm.hu/asatasi-hir/ [accessed: 09.03.2017.]

were often contradictory. The scant literary references to the phenomenon, the chronology, the increasing usage of toponyms, and the archaeological evidence are compatible only on a small scale. Based on this evidence, it seems unlikely that large numbers of Scandinavian soldiers were employed by the Hungarian grand prince and the first king, although Slavicized warriors may have been present at that time as frontier-guards and, from the twelfth century, also as doorkeepers. The earlier retinue and bodyguard of Grand Prince Géza and King Saint Stephen I appears to have been an ordinary feudal type of retinue, organized along Western European patterns and led by German knights. A traditional multinational retinue, that resided with its lord and was maintained through plunder, is not likely to have existed. Although the princely or royal retinue might, to a lesser extent, have consisted of heathen warriors of a different kind the ethnicity of these is impossible to confirm. The high proportion of assumed Scandinavian retainers is completely unattested, especially if we compare the archaeological record with its foreign parallels, as demonstrated by the Polish or Russian examples discussed above. What is certain is that Norse burial traditions, like cremation graves, boat burials, and the huge barrows of the Kievan Rus', are missing, as well as an abundance of Nordic weaponry in the graves. It is notable, for instance, that thus far no shield bosses at all have been discovered in Hungary, and the same is true of the distinctive Nordic feature of runic inscriptions on objects.

While this does not completely exclude the possibility of Scandinavian retainers being hired in early medieval Hungary, the scope of this phenomenon should not only be qualified but seriously rethought.

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