

Linguistic Layers of Old Hungarian Hydronyms¹

Abstract: When analysing the etymological layers of Hungarian river names, it becomes soon clear that loan names make up a much larger group than in the group of settlement names, for instance. This fact can be due to the phenomenon that in the case of hydronyms, name-giving and name-usage is driven mainly by communicative needs, while other (e. g. socio-cultural or political) factors only rarely influence name-giving. In my paper, it was my aim to provide an etymological typology of Hungarian hydronyms from the Árpád-era (896–1350). It seems to be justified to choose the Hungarian hydronyms of the Árpád-era as the corpus of my investigation, for the country was strongly multilingual and multiethnic in this period of time (Hungarian, Slavic, German, Turkish), which also has an effect on the system of water names. The survey of the linguistic layers of river names shows that largely the same semantic content appears in river names originating from different languages. The semantic types appearing in river names belong to the so-called panchronistic feature of the hydronym system, in other words, they show signs of universal human thinking.

1

From ancient times the Carpathian basin was Europe's most densely inhabited area. Archaeological finds (skull bones, children's milk-teeth, bone tools, etc.) found in Vértesszőlős (Hungary) imply the presence of early primitive man and lead to a conclusion that this area was already populated 350 to 400 thousand years ago. Continuous human presence in the region is suggested by numerous other archaeological finds as well. As a consequence of a Neolithic demographic boom in Southwest Asia, a huge mass of people migrated to the Balkans across Asia Minor and from there along the river Danube. The Carpathian basin ensured relative security, and besides, plains and wide rivers and brooks, all suitable for agriculture and animal keeping, had all promoted the inhabitation of the basin. In later periods, numerous other peoples inhabited the Carpathian basin (even if only temporarily): Thracians, Illyrians, Scythians, Celts, Dacians, etc. Ethnically variegated changes started in the period of ethnic migra-

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tions. In this period Alanians, Huns, Goths, Gepids, Avars, Slavic people and others lived in this area.

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

2

Mapping the ethnic relations of this period is a difficult task since historians lack reliable sources regarding the *Árpád age*. Besides, the researcher has to face the problem of applying the term *ethnic group* to a situation which existed centuries ago. In the excellent study by Hungarian historian Gyula KRISTÓ of ethnic relations during the reign of Stephen I (reigned from 1000 to 1038), we read: “ethnic group affiliation was a matter of an affiliation to a state framework. We can easily see, therefore, that this does not reflect actual ethnic, but rather political frames” (2000). I myself use the term *Hungarian* in the same way: not in the sense of ethnic group, but in the sense of “on the territory of Hungary”.

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

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

3

In what follows, I will present the different linguistic (and indirectly: chronological) layers of Hungarian river names. These names naturally refer to people once or still living in the Carpathian basin. As an aside to research on river names I have chosen the name-giving motivation: in other words, I will take into account those model types which could have served as a basis for name giving.

I have used two sources to compile a name corpus with more than 1,200 names which served as a basis of this study: the 2nd, 3rd and 4th volumes of GYÖRGY GYÖRFFY's *Az Árpád-kori Magyarország történeti földrajza* (The historical geography of Árpád age Hungary. Budapest 1966–1988) and *Korai magyar helynévszótár* (The early Hungarian dictionary of toponyms. Ed. by István HOFFMANN. Debrecen 2005).

3.1

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

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

3.2

Among the river names from Árpád age Hungary, quite a few are of **Slavic** origin. While we cannot really say the name giving motivation of the

Old European layer varied, the names mentioned in this group show a more colourful picture.

The most common motivation for the names borrowed from Slavic is the *flora* surrounding the river. The majority of names were formed after trees found along the river bank: *Orbó*, *Varbó*, *Varbóc*, *Varbók*, *Verbelice*, *Verbice* are names which can by all means be traced back to Slavic **vrbā* 'willow tree' plant name. Rivers *Lipcse*, *Lippa*, *Lipó*, *Lipok*, *Liponok*, *Lipóc*, *Lipva* received their name after the linden trees framing the water (< Proto-Slavonic **lipa* 'lime, linden'), while the word **jelchba* 'alder' can be discovered in *Ilosva*, *Illok*, *Jósua*, *Oleska*, *Ósva* names. The names *Berzence*, *Breznica*, *Brižona* probably denoted water streams framed by birch trees (< *berza* 'birch tree'), oak trees stood on the banks of *Dobó*, *Dubnica* and *Dubróka* (< **dobv* 'oak'), beech trees bordered *Bukova* and *Bukóca* (< *buk* 'beech tree'), while hornbeam bordered *Gerbece*, *Harabó* and *Hrabic(s)* brooks (< *grab(r)v* 'hornbeam'). Besides trees, other plant names could have served as a basis for name giving: *žito* 'rye, wheat' lexemes could have been the terminal source of names *Zsikva*, *Zsitva*, while the reed along the river banks appears in names *Rohozsnica* (< Proto-Slavonic *rogozv* 'reed') and *Szikince*, *Szitnyice* (< Proto-Slavonic **sita* ~ **sitv* 'rush; a type of reed').

Among the names of Slavic origin which were incorporated in the Hungarian hydronymic system, the semantic content 'the relation of water to another place' often appears. The closeness of the water to a forest, a plain, a meadow provided the motivation for the following names: *Dervence* (< Proto-Slavonic **dervo* ~ *drvo* 'tree; wood; forest'), *Gáj* (< **gajb* 'grove, grounds, forest' or *gola* 'grassy mountain without trees, mountain pasture'), *Gozd* (< *gvozdv* 'forest, mountain forest'), *Ladica* and *Lászó* (< **lazv* 'clearing, pasture'), *Proszek* (< *pro-* 'upper, over' and *-sěka, sěkv* 'deforestation'), *Tereblye* and *Terpez* (< **trebiti* 'to deforest'). The *Debrece* and *Dobraca* hydronyms can be retraced to Proto-Slavonic word **dǫbrv* 'valley' and we can identify a similar motivation in the name *Dolina* (< Slavic *dolina* 'völgy'). They named waters after the island in the water: cf. for example, names *Kompa* (< Slavic *kapa* 'stream island covered in bushes') and *Osztro* (< Slovak *ostrov* 'island', in the sense of 'water dam'). To the local position of the denotatum refer the names *Lomnica* (< **lomv* 'break, quarry, mine'), and *Szeleden* (< Proto-Slavonic *slědv* 'push, blow, parcel').

The third most common motivation type is of hydronyms referring to the *animal world*. Several names are of animal origin: the Slavic **bebrv* 'beaver' lexeme can be traced in the names *Beberc*, *Bebre*, *Bohróc*, the Sla-

vonic **rakъ* 'crab' in *Rakaca*, *Rakovic*, *Rákóc*, **szьrna* 'deer' in *Szernye*, *Szirna* and the Proto-Slavonic **turъ* 'ox, cattle' in *Túr*, *Tura*, *Túróc*. The name *Szince* (< Proto-Slavonic **svinja* 'pig') received its name after the pig(s) living around the water but it is also possible that the original lexeme is Slavonic **sinъ* ~ *sinъ* 'blue, grey'. Rarely, other animal names appear, too: *Hucina* originates back from the Slavonic *gosъ* 'goose', *Kerepec* might be connected to the Ukrainian *кóпон* 'carp' lexeme, while *Kobolya* is etymologically connected to the Slavic predecessor of Hungarian *kalala* 'mare', the river *Kurca* could have been named after some kind of poultry (cf. Slavonic *kúrica* 'pullet'; Ukrainian *кúпуця* 'hen').

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

Among the rarer semantic categories, we can mention the name group referring to *the state of the water*: *Szuha* (< **suchъ* 'dry'), *Ilóc* and *Jalóc* (< Proto-Slavonic **jalovъ* 'infertile, sterile'), *Mertvice* (< *mьrtvъ* 'dead'), *Panyóca* (< **ponaviti* 'languish, die'), may be names for water which occasionally dried up, but the latter one also may signify water which streams very slowly. Rivers *Gölnic* (< *Gnilъcbъ* 'with stale water') and *Beredinca* (< **brud-* ~ **brod-* ~ **brid-* ~ **bred-* 'dark, blurry, muddy') got their names after their stale and muddy, murky water.

Among names of the Hungarian hydronym system borrowed from Slavic, we may also find a smaller number of those which denote *a characteristic of the water or of the water's environment*. Names *Helednek*, *Hlinik* (< *glina* 'clay'), *Kálló* (< Proto-Slavonic **kalъno* 'muddy, slobby') refer to a clay bed of the water, while names *Kamunuska* and *Kemence* (< **kamy* 'rock'), *Iskolt* (< **skala* 'rock') to a rocky bed. The bed of brooks *Revisnye*, *Revistye* must have looked as if torn (< Proto-Slavonic **rvovati* 'tear, rip') and the brook *Gorbó* got its name after its meandering feature (< Proto-Slavonic **gъrbъ* 'lump'). Even the temperature of the water appears in the semantic content expressed in hydronyms: names *Tapolca*, *Tepla*, *Teplice*, *Toplica* signify

the warm temperature of the water, the terminal antecedent of the names may have been the **toplъ* ~ *teplъ* ‘warm’ adjective. The sound of a water running fast may have motivated the names *Gortva* (< **grochoťъ* ‘clatter, rattle’), *Revuca* (cf. Slovak *revúci* ‘roaring, mooring, howling’), *Rima* and *Rimóca* (cf. Russian N. *рымóнить* ‘howl, cry’), *Torockó* (< **trěskati* ‘boom, blare’). The velocity and the manner of water running may have been the motivation in other names, such as: *Beszterce*, *Bisztirc*, *Borza* which were probably fast running waters (< Proto-Slavonic **bystřъ* ‘fast-running, and for this reason usually see-through, transparent’). Names *Klokocsóc* and *Klukucs* came perhaps from Slavonic lexeme *klokotati* ‘bubble, gurgle, fume’. The colour of the water sometimes also appeared as a motivation for hydronym forming: several *Béla* and *Belecs* names refer to the white colour of the water (< Slavonic **bělbъ* ‘white’); **čьrnъ* ‘black’ colour name may have been the basis for *Csarnavoda* and *Csarnolta* names, but maybe even *Zagyva* can be listed here (< Proto-Slavonic **sadja* ‘smut’).

3.3

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

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

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

The third most frequent category consists of hydronyms referring to *a person or a group of people* somehow connected to the water. Besides personal names, this semantic content is expressed by ethnic group names and profession names, too. The most numerous category is the former, though. To determine the semantic function of the river names belonging to this group is also the researcher's task. The names usually denote the person on or near whose property the water denotatum can be found. Besides, the water may get its name after a person with whom something happened in or surrounding the water, for example, if somebody drowned or fished there. The relation to a person served the motivation in the old Hungarian hydronyms such as *Gény*, *Hasznos*, *Kápás*, *Kara*, *Mile*, *Úz* and *Csákány pataka*, *Csikló-patak*, *Détmár pataka*, *Fancsal ere*, *Tiba pataka*.

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

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

Among old Hungarian toponyms we barely find hydronyms of *sheer geographical common name* form. We can mention *Ér* 'brooklet', *Patak* 'stream', *Sár* 'mud'.

Compared to the proportion of this name group among names of Slavic origin, there are fewer names representing the relation between water and *fauna*. Names such as *Hodos* 'beavery', *Ludas* 'goosy', *Rákos* 'crayfishy', *Férges-ér* 'wormy brooklet', *Hattyas pataka* 'swany stream' and *Pisztrángos-patak* 'trouty stream' got their names after the animals in or in the surrounding of the water.

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

3.4

A few hydronyms of **German** origin can be found in the Árpád age corpus, too. The name *Vág* can be connected to the word *wāg* ‘billowy, surging water’, the same second constituent is connected to the Old High German *tot, tod* ~ Old Saxon *dod* ‘dead, deceased’ attributive first component of German origin in the hydronym *Dudvág*. The antecedent of the *Bódva* hydronym could have been **Fuldahwa* (< *Fult* ‘land, country’ + *Ahwa* ‘water’). The name *Tartlau* (< **Tortily* ‘sedimentary’) came to our system via German but is probably of Turkish origin.

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

3.5

There are just a few hydronyms of **Turkish** (Avar, Pecheneg, Bulgarian-Turkish) origin. We may consider the Pecheneg word *budaγ* ~ *budaq* ‘branch’ the terminal source of the name *Budak*, and **qara-šuy* ‘black water’ the terminal source of the *Karasó* and *Krassó* names. The hydronym *Okor* received its Turkish name after after the Old Turkish *aq-* ‘flows, runs’, see also Ottoman *akar* ‘flowing, fluid’, *akarsu* ‘river, stream’. The name *Ojtoz* originates from the name **Altuz* ‘red salt’, while we can find the *silik* ‘clear’ lexeme in the river name *Seleg*.

4

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

The survey of the linguistic layers of river names shows that largely the same semantic content appears in river names originating from different languages – Slavic and Hungarian names show this phenomenon the best, since names from these languages are represented in greater numbers. In both onomasticons the most common semantic motivations for name-giving were the flora in or surrounding the water and the relation of water to another location (e. g. settlement, forrest, region). This is not surprising as the flora, especially the trees are characteristic features of the river banks, on the other hand the locations can serve as solid benchmarks. These semantic types appearing in river names belong to the so-called panchronistic feature of the hydronym system, in other words, they show signs of universal human thinking.

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