

On the historical source value of toponyms¹
Toponyms as a source for the reconstruction of ethnic relations

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1. The earliest toponymic data of any language are exceptionally important sources of the history of the given language providing information primarily on the characteristic features of the sounding, vocabulary and methods of word and name formation of the language represented by them. In the case of the Hungarian language the earliest charters that are abundant in toponyms date back to the 11th century. In addition, the toponymic data of the charters do not only offer us plenty of information on the language itself, but they enrich also our knowledge of the life-style and culture of its users, as the language of any historic period reflects authentically the spiritual and material culture of the community which uses the language (cf. HOFFMANN 2007: 61–62).

As for the two types of proper names to be found in charters, toponyms can be used better as historic sources than personal names. In the case of toponyms, namely, later mentions and occurrences of the settlement may be of assistance in the identification of the linguistic elements appearing in the charter. In this respect the most important consequence is that toponyms should not be surveyed in isolation, but through them we can grasp also their toponymic environment and reconstruct the linguistic-ethnic relations of a particular territory. According to general opinion, in addition to the aforementioned factors, toponyms can be used by researchers as reliable source material also due to the fact that their changes are shaped much more by linguistic factors than those of personal names, in the case of which extra-linguistic (cultural, social) factors need to be taken into consideration with greater weight (cf. BENKŐ 1996: 5s.; HOFFMANN 1996: 114s.).

2. Besides constituting crucial source material for linguistic history and onomastic research, toponyms occurring in historical sources (medieval charters)

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can be exploited also for the (history-related) purposes of other fields of research such as historiography (in particular, settlement and demographic history), historic geography, ethnography, etc. When trying to map the ethnic composition of earlier times, representatives of historical studies like to rely on data extracted on the basis of different layers of the origin of toponyms. However, it needs to be emphasised that such examinations presuppose special circumspection in order to avoid typical stumbling blocks exactly in the field of ethnic reconstruction whose possibilities I want to highlight here. The possibilities of the procedure will be demonstrated with the help of Hungarian examples, yet in my opinion the suggestions that emerge as a result of the questions posed have wider and more general significance.

Thus my paper strives to answer the question whether toponyms occurring in the earliest Hungarian charters can play a role in the identification of ethnic relations, and if they can, in what way can they serve as basis for the reconstruction procedures. In this respect we must first of all examine on the basis of what aspects toponymic data extracted from a given Hungarian charter can be considered to belong to the Hungarian, German, Turkish, or any of the Slavic languages. For this purpose, we may draw on the interconnections of onomastics, on pieces of information on the emergence of the names and on phonetic phenomena.

3. In several of his works, the researcher of medieval studies Gyula Kristó drew conclusions on the ethnic composition of the Árpád age based on results of linguistic studies: the approach is familiar also to the representatives of historical studies who attempted to draw up an ethnic map and the settlement history of the Carpathian Basin on the basis of names. Earlier, the predominant methodological procedure of history included reliance on the etymons of lexemes or words to draw conclusions with respect to the ethnic origin of particular name-giving communities, based on which it defined the ethnic map of 11th-century Hungary. Basically, the starting point was the linguistic origins of the toponyms found in early charters. Below I present this method of ethnic reconstruction through some examples, at the same time pointing out the dangers and stumbling blocks of this type of research.

Surveying early charters, some representatives of historiography came to the observation that at the turn of the 10th to the 11th century the toponyms of the Carpathian Basin were predominantly of Slavic (and Turkish) origin, as “these had been the peoples that gave names to the settled-down, consolidating, non-changing settlements” (KRISTÓ 1993: 204, later 1995: 268, 2000: 26s.).

Studying the oldest authentic Hungarian charter that had been preserved in its original form, i. e. the Founding Charter of the Abbey of Tihany from 1055, Gyula Kristó identified 11 fragments based on the linguistic origin of the toponyms referring to some population of Slavic origin (eg. *tichon*, *brokina*, *knez* etc.), in addition to one German (*ecli*) and four Turkish (*turku*, *ursa*, *gisnav*, *culun*) toponyms (KRISTÓ 2000: 23s.). In his opinion these toponyms prove that “larger settlements marking main directions are names of Slavic (and to a lesser extent Turkish) origin, whereas the majority of names with a micro-toponym function denoting different parts of the fields are Hungarian. This sole fact indicates that the names of most important objects (settlements, lakes) had been taken over by the Hungarians from the Slavs, yet certain parts of the fields within settlement names were named by them” (KRISTÓ 2000: 23). He applied a similar method when analysing the name of Székesfehérvár (KRISTÓ 1996): in his view the Hungarian name of the royal seat emerged as a metaphor from the Slavic language. Based on data written in the Slavic language (*Belegrava*, *Bellegrava*, *Bellagrava*, *Bellegrave*, etc.), frequently appearing in the documents of historians and travellers visiting Hungary, he believes that the castle built by King Stephen had been named *Fehérvár* by the relatively large number of Slavic population, and the name was taken over from them by the Hungarians. The mentioned Slavic ethnicity must have been present in the area well into the late 12th century, as these Slavic names are mentioned in 12th-century sources (KRISTÓ 1996: 176–177).

4. However, more recent language historical-philological research disapproves of the above described method applied by the representatives of historical studies for several reasons.

4.1. First of all, regarding the conditions of the emergence of toponyms, it is important to distinguish between name-givers and name-users, as the name-giver individual or community is not necessarily identical with the name-using community. Even a longer period of time may have elapsed between the emergence and the registry of a particular name, thus the first occurrence of a given name in a charter is independent of the age of the name-giving. The name data of the charters provide information on the linguistic origin of the name users valid primarily for the period of time of the emergence of the certificates, yet “the potentially much earlier date and state of the name-giving cannot possibly provide information on the age of documents” (HOFFMANN 2005: 119). We can identify only two names of foreign origins also from the

Founding Charter of the Abbey of Tihany from the year 1055, besides, the names appear already in linguistic forms referring to usage by Hungarian name-users (cf. HOFFMANN 2010: 47, 131). The name of the Lake Balaton and of the settlement Kesztlöc are of Slavic origin, and they were taken over into the Hungarian language. Nevertheless, the toponym *Balaton* (*balatin* ~ *bolatin*) counts already as a Hungarian linguistic element, since in the language of Slavic peoples it would have been pronounced *Blatin*. In the name of the lake, the consonant cluster *bl-* appearing at the beginning of the original Slavic form is dissolved by a vowel that harmonised with the vowel of the following syllable, because according to the widely held opinion, the Hungarian language did not tolerate, therefore it tried to eliminate word-starter consonant clusters (cf. NYIRKOS 1993: 29; ABAFFY 2003: 309). Thus in this case the phonetic state of the name was of help. Also the writing mode of the toponym *Kesztlöc* (*ca(s) telic* ~ *kaztelic*) with a vowel *a* in the first syllable indicates Hungarian name users, since on the basis of the Slavic etymon (**kostelъ*) we would expect to find a vowel *o* in the given position. It is difficult to draw conclusions not only with respect to the date Slavic names were taken over, but also the date of Slavic name-givings, because in this aspect we cannot rely on the linguistic character of the data, thus on this basis no conclusions whatsoever can be drawn regarding ethnic relations. In addition, due to the large extent of the Balaton, the name of the lake plays a less prominent role in ethnic identification, while that of Kesztlöc may refer to the settlement itself or its narrower surroundings (HOFFMANN 2010: 231).

4.2. Research has proved that the origin of lexemes should not under any conditions prompt conclusions on the origin of toponyms. Kristó fell victim to this mistake when talking about bilingualism in relation to the possessive attributive structure *Ölyves megyéje* (*uluues megaia*) ‘border of the village of Ölyves (place abundant in buzzards)’, and saying that “the first part of the toponym is Turkish, the second Slavic, yet the structure expressing the possessive relationship between the two is Hungarian” (KRISTÓ 2000: 23). In this relation, with respect to the ethnic composition of the area he emphasises that in the particular territory Hungarians outnumbered the Slavs (cf. 2000: 23). Kristó is likely to have come to his conclusion because the word *ölyv* (‘buzzard’) is an Old Turkish, while the word *megye* a Slavic, loanword. This however does not at all reveal the numerical proportions of the Hungarian and Slavic population. The linguistic origin of the lexemes is namely “entirely independent of their appearance in the name (or in the descriptive structure), as

beyond doubt local name givers used these in the moment of the name-giving as elements of the Hungarian language” (HOFFMANN 2010: 105). We should not forget either about the fact that the structure displays the logic of the Hungarian grammatical construction principle (*-je* possessive personal suffix) producing a possessive attributive structure whose first element contains the Hungarian affix *-s* (cf. HOFFMANN 2010: 105). Thus the Hungarian-style morphologic structure is a clear indication of Hungarian name-giving.

Charters can often contain toponyms that were formed from personal names of foreign origin. The personal names serving as basis for the forming of the toponyms may be Slavic (*tichon*, *knez*), Turkish (*culun*), or German (*ecli*). Nevertheless, these toponyms cannot be linked to Slavic, Turkish, or German name-givers (cf. HOFFMANN 2010: 105). These personal names (and the toponyms preserving them) help us to gain insight into the cultural impacts exerting an influence on the Hungarian people, and to observe the development of potential trends related to particular personal names (cf. TÓTH 2001: 33). It is important to point out that personal names of foreign origin do not refer to the ethnic origin of the denoted person, nor to his or her linguistic relations, but can be explained exclusively with the personal name trends characterising the actual period (BENKŐ 1997: 169; later TÓTH 2001: 33, RÁCZ 2005: 98, HOFFMANN 2010: 228). Therefore it may be misleading to follow such assumptions (e. g. Gyula Kristó’s conclusions).

As is obvious from the above, incorrect conclusions are made too often in connection with the ethnic identifying role of toponyms found in early Hungarian linguistic monuments; such conclusions, which often lack underpinning arguments, are mostly faulty and burdened with internal contradictions, potentially misguiding researchers. Therefore we need to be extremely cautious and circumspect with these types of surveys.

5. Below I would like to provide an overview of certain aspects on the basis of which a particular toponym occurring in a charter can be linked to Hungarian, German, or Slavic name-users, with focus directed on the connection with Hungarian name-users. Accomplishing this task can namely constitute the first step in the reconstruction of ethnic relations. When linking toponymic data to particular languages, the following factors may provide some standing-ground: onomastystematical characteristics, phonetic-morphologic phenomena and the Latin text of the charter (cf. KENYHERCZ 2013: 32–45). All of these factors below are illustrated with examples.

5.1. Onomastosystematical factors. It is a widely held opinion in the Hungarian onomastic literature that in comparison to Europe the toponym formation from a personal name without a formant (i. e. without an affix and a compound) is a typically Hungarian feature² (cf. KNIEZSA 1943–1944/2001: 18; KRISTÓ 1976: 15–38). Of course, this means that in the Carpathian Basin the Hungarian people is the only community using names formed in this way: this mode of name-giving can be found neither among Slavic peoples, nor among Germans or Romanians (cf. KISS 1996: 444–445).

Examining ancient Slavic toponym naming, Ján Stanislav established that toponyms of anthroponym origin are also present in Slavic languages. However, István Kniezsa refuted this claim: he examined a large number of Bulgarian, Serbo-Croat, Slovenian, Czech, Polish and Russian toponyms, but could not detect a layer of toponyms derived from bare anthroponyms (KNIEZSA 1943: 119). In Slavic languages toponyms were created from personal names only by attaching a derivative, even in those cases which may seem contradictory. For example, one might come across toponyms originally formed by derivative -jъ, which lost the suffix and therefore became identical to the bare anthroponym formants (cf. Bulgarian personal name *Preslavъ* > toponym *Preslavjъ* > toponym *Preslav*; anthroponym *Pavel* > toponym *Paveljъ* > toponym *Pavel*; KISS 1999: 183). The majority of Romanian toponyms created from anthroponyms have the suffix *-ești*, *-eni*. There are instances of toponyms morphologically identical to singular anthroponyms, but in almost all cases they are adaptations from Hungarian (KISS 1996: 445). In Europe and its neighbouring regions apart from Hungary, this name type, is characteristic only of Turkish name-giving (cf. KISS 1996: 444; JARRING 1997).

For instance, the toponym *Veszprém* emerged from a personal name without the addition of any formant. Although the personal name serving as the basis for the toponym is of Slavic origin (*Bezprěm* meaning ‘stubborn, obstinate’), the name-giving method (toponym formation from a personal name without a formant) itself hints at a Hungarian-speaking community.

5.2. Phonetic and morphologic phenomena. Changes in the phonetic form of words may also be helpful in the linking of toponymic data to languages. From all these changes I would like to call attention to the earlier mentioned phenomenon of consonant clusters. According to a widely accepted view of Hungarian research literature, it is a characteristic feature of Hungarian phono-

² Previously I personally studied the questions of toponyms of anthroponym origin in full detail (KOVÁCS 2012).

tactical rules that words cannot normally start with two or more adjoining consonants (except in onomatopoeic words and loan words). Therefore there is a tendency in the Hungarian language to dissolve initial consonant clusters even in toponyms borrowed from other languages (cf. ABÁFFY 2003: 309), like for instance in the case of the toponym *Balaton*: according to the occurrences *bolotin* ~ *bolatin* appearing in the charter of 1055, the form *blatin* of assumably Slavic origin, underpinned by several analogies, was replaced by the form [*balatin*] or rather [*balaton*] already in the language use of the mid-11th century. Despite the Slavic origin of the toponym (i.e. despite the Slavic name-giving method), this fact clearly refers to the 11th-century presence of Hungarian language users in the area.

Recently Róbert Kenyhercz studied the initial consonant clusters in full detail: he examined not only how the Hungarian language had integrated the loan words but he tried to map the process during the foreign phonotactical structure had become part of the Hungarian language. Surveying the initial consonant clusters, Kenyhercz came to the observation that in some cases only the initial consonant clusters refer to the bilingual usage of the names (e.g. Slovak *Brakoň* ~ Hungarian *Barakony*), but in other cases the parallel usage of words with initial consonant clusters and already dissolved consonant clusters does not at all refer to bilingual usage (KENYHERCZ 2013: 28s.). Consonant clusters and their dissolution, namely, could produce phonetic variants in the Hungarian language which coexisted until either of them superseded the other version. We can witness this phenomenon also in the charters. For example, the toponym *Barincska* appears in a 16th-century charter both under the form *Baranchka* and *Branchka*. Kenyhercz believes that both name forms attest to Hungarian language use, as all of the estates mentioned in the surroundings hint at Hungarian name-giving practices and language use (KENYHERCZ 2013: 30).

Taking morphological considerations into account, we can ascertain that the presence of Hungarian toponym-affixes can also serve as reliable proof that particular toponyms belong to the Hungarian toponymic system. In the Hungarian language the highest-frequency toponym-suffixes are *-i*, *-d* and *-s*.

In the ancient Hungarian language the suffix *-i* came to be distinguished from the affix morpheme *-é* expressing possession through simultaneous split of both form and content, taking on an independent function as a toponym-forming suffix. Presumably, the change of functions had started among toponyms derived from personal names, namely, the first groups of the Hungarian toponyms with the suffix *-i* came from those basic words which refer to a person

or people (e.g. *Tamási* ‘personal name *Tamás* + *-i*’, *Kovácsi* ‘occupational name *kovács* ‘smith’ + *-i*’, *Csehi* ‘ethnic group *cseh* + *-i*’, cf. SZEGFŰ 1991: 254; BÉNYEI 2012: 80–82). Although originally the suffix *-d* had been a diminutive, hypocoristic formant, in the role of a toponym-forming suffix it was mostly added to a base denoting some animal or plant to create a settlement name. Indeed, in ancient Hungarian time, the suffix *-d* had also been widely used in the formation of personal names (exactly due to its diminutive function), thus several personal names containing the suffix *-d* could become toponyms through metonymy, which must have contributed to the emergence of the formant’s new, toponym-forming role (cf. SZEGFŰ 1991: 254; BÉNYEI 2012: 60–62). The toponym-forming suffix *-s* – whose secondary role for the expression of abundance in something may have emerged from its function as an ending forming collective nouns – was mostly added to nouns referring to plants or animals (cf. SZEGFŰ 1991: 255; BÉNYEI 2012: 98).

Thus behind the toponyms *Petri* (personal name *Péter* + *-i*), *Peterd* (personal name *Péter* + *-d*) or *Ölyves* (bird name *ölyv* ‘buzzard’ + *-s*) once again we can rightfully suspect Hungarian name-givers and name-users. Of course, on this path we may be faced with some problems, since for example the suffix *-i* formally coincides with the genitive ending *-i* in the Latin language and the plural in the Slavic language, which was also used as a toponym-forming suffix. The Hungarian name behind the structure *villa Petri* may be both the circumlocution with the meaning ‘village which belongs to Péter’ and the Hungarian place name, *Petri*, with the toponym-forming suffix *-i*, and we can also think about the two-componential toponym, *Péterfalva* (BENKŐ 1998: 144s.). In this respect the surveyed name forms require thorough examination.

5.3. The text of the charter. In many cases, however, there is no need for either etymological or morphological considerations, because the text of the charter is explicit about the toponym’s belonging to a particular name-system (cf. KENYHERCZ 2013: 25). In a 14th-century charter, for example, we can read the following distinction: “in vulgari *Lassyupatak* in teutonico nomine *Stilbach* vocata” (Cs. 1: 262), where the charter articulates the fact that the toponyms in question belong to the Hungarian and German languages, which is at the same time reference to the ethnicities living in the respective area at that time and giving rise to the toponyms mentioned. In a charter from 1408 we can also find the parallel usage of the Hungarian and the Slavic words: “silvam vulgario *Altialbyk* alias sclauonicum *Prechnabukowyna*” (Zs. 2/2: 154).

6. The above described – etymological, morphological and phonetic – aspects facilitate the decision on whether a particular toponym can be traced back to a Hungarian or foreign name. Based on the foregoing, it is obvious that every now and then it may be challenging to decide whether a particular name can be linked to Hungarian or foreign language users, which occasionally calls for assessment on an individual case-by-case basis.

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[**Abstract:** On the historical source value of toponyms. Toponyms as a source for the reconstruction of ethnic relations. – Besides constituting a crucial source material for linguistic history and onomastic research, toponyms occurring in historical sources (medieval charters) can be exploited also for the (history-related) purposes of other fields of research such as historiography (settlement and demographic history in particular), historic geography, ethnography, etc. When trying to map the ethnic composition of earlier times, representatives of historiography like to rely on data extracted on the basis of different layers of the origins of toponyms. However, it needs to be emphasized that such examinations presuppose special circumspection in order to avoid typical stumbling blocks exactly in the field of ethnic reconstruction whose possibilities I want to highlight here.

My paper explores the question if toponyms occurring in early Hungarian linguistic monuments could be used for ethnic identification, and if this is the case, how we can draw conclusions related to questions of ethnicity based on linguistic results. In this respect we also need to examine the criteria based on which toponymic data appearing in charters can be linked to certain (Hungarian, German, Turkish or any of the Slavic) languages. Onomastic correlations, information on the evolution of names as well as

certain phonetic changes may provide us with some clues in the definition of such links.]

[**Abstract:** Vom historischen Quellenwert der Toponyme. Toponyme als Quelle zur Rekonstruktion ethnischer Beziehungen. – Ortsnamen sind nicht nur eine wertvolle Quelle für die Sprachgeschichte und Namenforschung. In historischen Quellen (mittelalterliche Urkunden) überlieferte Ortsnamen können ebenso von anderen, historisch ausgerichteten Forschungsdisziplinen wie der Geschichte (insbesondere Siedlungs- und Bevölkerungsgeschichte), historischen Geographie, Ethnographie usw. ausgewertet werden. Wenn die ethnische Struktur früherer Zeiten kartographisch dargestellt werden soll greifen Historiker gerne auf Daten zurück, die auf der historischen Schichtung der Ortsnamen beruhen. Es muss allerdings nachdrücklich darauf hingewiesen werden, dass derartige Untersuchungen eine besondere Vorsicht voraussetzen, um typische, gerade im Bereich der ethnischen Rekonstruktion begegnende Hürden zu überwinden. Die Möglichkeiten dieser Rekonstruktion möchte ich hier besonders hervorheben.

Mein Beitrag geht der Frage nach, ob die in frühen ungarischen Sprachdenkmälern überlieferten Ortsnamen für eine ethnische Identifizierung herangezogen werden können. Und wenn ja, wie können Fragen der Ethnizität auf der Basis linguistischer Erkenntnisse beantwortet werden. In diesem Zusammenhang sind auch die Kriterien zu untersuchen, auf deren Basis aus toponymischen Angaben der Urkunden auf bestimmte Sprachen (Ungarisch, Deutsch, Türkisch oder eine slavische Sprache) geschlossen werden kann. Onymische Wechselbeziehungen, Informationen zur Namenentwicklung oder bestimmte lautliche Veränderungen bieten uns Anhaltspunkte für die Definition solcher Beziehungen.]