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## THE AVARS AND OTHER PEOPLES IN THE CARPATHIAN BASIN IN THE 9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

### Abstract

According to the prevailing historiographical view, after the fall of their empire, the Avars became users of the Slavic language and integrated with the Slavic population of the Carpathian Basin by the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The present research aims to prove that the Turkish-speaking Avars did not, in fact, become Slavic-speaking after the fall of their empire (ca. 803), but, rather, survived until the Hungarians settled in the Carpathian Basin at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and then integrated into this population. Several sources prove that the Avars survived through the 9<sup>th</sup> century, but these sources have so far escaped the attention of researchers. In addition to examining these sources, the following method also contributed to the results of the research. The essence of this method: the localization of the peoples' territories settled in the Carpathian Basin. This method makes it possible to see which territories the Avars lost and which they retained after the fall of their empire. Accordingly, it can be concluded that in the central part of the Carpathian Basin, in the eastern half of Pannonia and the Great Plain, the Avar population survived until the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. This is confirmed by recent archaeological and linguistic research; in these areas, the Avars did not become a Slavic-speaking people, but were integrated into the society of Hungarians settling in the Carpathian Basin at the time.

**Keywords:** Avar Empire, Carpathian Basin, 9<sup>th</sup> century, population, languages, Hungarians, Slavs.

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## 9. YÜZYILDA AVAR HALKI İLE KARPAT HAVZASI'NIN NÜFUSU

### Özet

Tarihsel belgelerde yaygın görüşe göre Avarlar, imparatorluklarının çöküşünden sonra Slav dilini kullanmaya başlamış ve 9. yüzyılın sonuna kadar Karpat Havzası'nın Slav nüfusuna karışmıştır. İşbu araştırmanın hedefi, Avar halkının imparatorluğun çöküşünden sonra (aşağı yukarı 803 tarihinden sonra) hemen Slav dilini kullanmaya başlamadığını ve 9. yüzyılın sonuna kadar, Macarların Karpat Havzası'na yerleşmesine kadar ortadan kaybolmadığını kanıtlamaktadır. Sorunun önemi şudur: anadili Türkçe olan Avarlar 9. yüzyılın sonunda kadar kalabildi ve yerleşen Macarlara karıştılar. Bazı tarihi kaynakların kanıtladığına göre Avar halkı 9. yüzyıldan sonra da var olmaya devam etti, fakat bu kaynaklar günümüze kadar araştırmacıların dikkatini çekmemiştir. Yeni kaynakların incelenmesi ile beraber araştırmanın başarılı olmasına aşağıdaki metot da katkıda bulundu. Karpat Havzası'nda yaşayan, kaynaklarda söz konusu halkların topraklarını yerleştirmek mümkündür. Böylece Avar halkının, imparatorluğun çöküşünden sonra hangi toprakları kaybettiğini ve hangi toprakları tuttuğunu görmek mümkündür. Sonuçlar temelinde tespit edildiğine göre Avar halkı, Karpat Havzası'nın ortadaki topraklarında, Pannonia'nın doğu yarısında ve Büyük Ova'da 9. yüzyılın sonuna kadar yaşadı. İşbu topraklarda Avarlar Slav dilli bir halk haline gelmeyerek, 9. yüzyıl sonunda Karpat Havzası'na yerleşen Macar toplumuna karıştı. Yeni arkeolojik ve dilsel bulgular da, Avarların 9. yüzyıl boyunca kaldıklarını kanıtlayarak bu görüşü arttırmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Avar İmparatorluğu, Karpat Havzası, 9. Yüzyıl, Nüfus, Diller, Macarlar, Slavlar

### 1. Introduction

The ethnic composition of the Carpathian Basin's 9<sup>th</sup>-century population is a controversial issue in historical research. Following the Frank-Avar wars (791–803), the Avar Khaganate lost its political independence. Pannonia, the western part of the Avar Empire, came under the rule of the Frankish Empire. In the southeastern part of the Avar Empire, the Danubian Bulgar Khanate acquired lands. Slavic nations appeared and settled on the old Avar borders. According to the predominant historiographical view, the Avar population was Slavicized by the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and then disappeared, or certain groups of them might have become Slavic-Avar bilinguals. When the Hungarians occupied the Carpathian Basin after 895/96, there was already a predominantly Slavic-speaking population in the area. In the western part of the Carpathian Basin, Transdanubia, Bavarians as well as Slavs lived under the rule of the Eastern Frankish Kingdom. Sources among the peoples of the Carpathian Basin also mentioned the Wangars and the Gepids, who survived the fall of the Avar Empire in smaller numbers. According to current mainstream historiography, sources appearing after 822 did not mention the Avars, and several sources from the 9<sup>th</sup> century described the settlement of Slavic peoples in the Carpathian Basin. These accounts have given rise to the modern historiographical opinion that the Avars were assimilated into the Slavic population in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and that, consequently their language disappeared. A group of Hungarian archaeologists and linguists dispute this position, arguing on the basis of archaeological and linguistic research that a significant proportion of the Avars were not assimilated into the Slavic nations but, rather, continued to live in the Carpathian Basin alongside Hungarian settlement at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.



Based on an analysis of the sources written in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the present study refutes the disappearance of the Avar population and the Slavization of the Avars. Thus, it supports the research findings of a narrow circle of archaeologists and linguists. One of the methods used in this study was to examine new sources of information on this issue. Another was to localize the territories of the Slavic peoples of the Carpathian Basin. The analysis of the sources was performed in chronological order, as a result of which the growth of the Slavic territories became visible. This method gave a chance to separate the territories of the Slavs and Avars in the 9<sup>th</sup>-century Carpathian Basin. In examining this topic, conflicting opinions and controversial issues were taken into account.

The study area can be identified from a number of sources. Carolingian sources reported on the Frank-Avar wars (791–803), the victory of the Franks, the fall of the Avar Empire, and the subjection of the Avars to Frankish rule. In a biography of Charles the Great, Einhard wrote that the Frankish ruler had defeated the Avars and occupied Pannonia and Dacia (Holder-Egger, 1911: 15–16, 18). In 822, the Royal Frankish Annals mentioned that Avar envoys appeared in the court of Louis, the Frank Emperor (Kurze, 1895: 159, 178). According to the mainstream in historiography, this is the last mention of the existence of the Avars. The Annals of Fulda reported on the expansion of the Slavs in the Carpathian Basin in the 9<sup>th</sup> century (Kurze, 1891: 16, 25, 112). These sources also supported the view that the Avars either disappeared or were assimilated into the Slavic population. In contrast to these sources, three sources prove that the population of the Avar Khaganate survived the fall of the Avar Empire. The first is the continuation of Ado of Vienne's chronicle, which described the division of the Frankish Empire; Charles the Bald, Louis the German, and Lothar divided their inheritance in Verdun in 843. This treaty mentioned the kingdom of the Avars (Pertz, 1987: 324). The second, the Bavarian Geographer, was in fact an unknown writer who described the peoples who lived east of the borders of the Frankish Empire in the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century. This source listed the peoples of the Carpathian Basin east of the Danube. It did not mention the Avars but did mention the Bulgarians, a group who lived under the Avar Empire and surfaced, politically, after the fall of the empire (Bartonková, Havlík, Hrbek, Ludvíkovský, & Večerka, 1969: 289). The third source that the research did not exploit was the Life of St. Constantine, who also mentioned the Avars (Grivec & Tomšič, 1969: 134, 205).

The discussion of this topic can be divided into the following sections: first, a description of the sources mentioning the nations on the Avar Empire's territory from the end of the Frankish-Avar wars (ca. 803) to 829; second, a description of the nations of the Carpathian Basin in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century; and, third, a description of the Avars living at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and of the neighboring nations. The study concludes with the summary.

## **2. The peoples of the territory of the Avar Empire from 803 to 829**

In 803, Zodan the prince of the Avars of Pannonia, surrendered to Charles the Great, thus ending the Frankish–Avar wars. Along with Zodan, many Slavs and Huns (Avar) also came under the rule of the Frankish emperor (Simson, 1905: 90). Thus, according to the aforesaid source, there were both Avars and Slavs in Pannonia. The Royal Frankish Annals recorded that, in 805, Theodorus Kapkhan (*capcanus*), another prince of the Avars, requested territory for his people from Emperor Charles the Great (768–814). The Avars could not keep their original residence due to the attacks of the Slavs. The emperor donated the area between Sabaria (Szombathely) and Carnuntum (Petronell) to the kapkhan and his people (Kurze, 1895: 119-120). The Avars' original place of residence is disputed. It is most likely that the kapkhan moved from north of the Danube (the southwestern part of present-day Slovakia) to south of the Danube. After 805, the valley of the Morava River was occupied after by the Slavs, who were named Moravians after the river following the occupation. The Royal Frankish Annals first mentioned the Moravians in 822, when the latter's ambassadors appeared before the Frankish ruler



(Kurze, 1895: 159). Subsequently, the Moravian Slavs, who founded Moravia on the northern side of the Danube and in the valley of the Morava River in the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, appeared more and more frequently in the Royal Frankish Annals.

The Avars, who lived in the eastern part of the Avar Empire, east of the Danube, were also defeated by Krum, the khan (803–814) of Bulgaria, around 803/805. The *Suda*, a short Bulgarian and late-Avar history written in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, contains a short story about Krum and the Avars. The lexicon, under the heading Boulgaroi, stated that Krum, the khan of the Bulgarians of the Danube, was at war with the Avars, inflicted a decisive defeat on them, and took Avar prisoners of war. This was the defeat only of the eastern half of the Avar Empire, and the complete defeat of the Avar armed forces (Adler, 1928: 483-484).

In 805, after the death of Theodor *kapkhan*, the Avar khagan was baptized and took the name Abraham. The khagan sent an ambassador to Emperor Charles the Great and asked the emperor to restore his dignity by renewing the power of the old Avar khagans. Charles the Great complied with Abraham's request and ordered that, according to the Avar custom, the khagan should have full power in the land of the Avars (Kurze, 1895: 120).

In Pannonia, a conflict arose between the Slavs and the Avars, so, in 811, Charles the Great sent an army to put an end to the hostilities. At the end of the year, the *tudun*, who was the prince of the Avar of Pannonia, arrived in Aachen. He was accompanied by the canizauci, one of the leaders of the Avars. The Avar chieftains accompanied this embassy from Pannonia, along with the leaders of the Slavs living around the Danube (Kurze, 1895: 135). Charles the Great settled relations between the Slavs and the Avars at the negotiation in Aachen, but the source did not report the details of the conversation.

Byzantine sources (Scriptor Incertus A and B) mentioned that Avars fought against Byzantium in 811 and 813–814 in the army of Krum, the Bulgar khan (Dujčev, 1965: 212-214; Bekker, 1842: 347). These Avar soldiers were inhabitants of the eastern half of the Carpathian Basin, part of which came under the rule of Krum after 803/805.

A new Slavic nation, the Timocians, wanted to move into the Avar Empire's Frankish territory. Timocian ambassadors appeared before Louis, the Frankish Emperor, in 818. The Timocians were Slavs who originally lived along the river Timok. They had withdrawn from the Bulgarian alliance and settled on the borders of the Frankish Empire, in the southeastern part of Pannonia, at the lower branch of the Sava (where it flows into the Danube). The Timocians placed themselves under the rule of the Frankish ruler Louis the Pious (813–840). Liudewit, Prince of Pannonia Inferior, revolted against the Frankish ruler in 819 and incited the neighboring peoples, including the Timocians, to revolt (Kurze, 1895: 149-151). The Timocians appeared only twice in the sources, in 818 and 819, after which they ceased to be mentioned. It can be assumed that this nation was integrated into the local Slavic society occupying the area of Pannonia Inferior, which played an essential role in the formation of the Croatian people (Komatina, 2010: 57-59).

Emperor Louis the Pious convened a general meeting in 822, at which the envoys of the Sorbs, Wiltz, Czechs, Moravians, Abodrites (*Abodriti*), and Avars of Pannonia appeared. According to the Royal Frankish Annals, there was an Avar population in Pannonia, and the Moravians lived in the valley of the Morava River north of the Danube. The Sorbs and Wiltz lived in the north, on the east side of the Frankish frontiers. This record in the Annals did not mention the abode of the Abodrites, but the note of 824 stated that the Abodrites/Abodriti, also commonly known as Praedenecenti, lived in the part of Dacia along the Danube, adjacent to the Bulgarians (Kurze, 1895: 159, 165-166). The exact residence of the Abodriti/Praedenecenti is disputed; according to one account, they lived in the area of Dacia by



the Danube, in Banat, in the northern part of present-day Serbia (Georgiev, 2014: 107-113). By contrast, according to Predrag Komatina, the Abodriti/Praedenecenti were located on the southern bank of the Danube in Dacia Ripensis, in the northwestern part of present-day Bulgaria (Komatina, 2010: 70-73). Based on archeological finds, Gyula Kristó located the abode of Abodriti/Praedenecenti in the southern part of Transylvania, in present-day Romania. A characteristic feature of the pagan Slavic culture of the period is the cremation of the dead. The ashes were placed in an urn, which was buried. This burial custom was unique to the Slavs in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, thus allowing archaeologists to identify the cemeteries of the pagan Slavs in the Carpathian Basin (Kristó, 2003: 34-35). In a note from 827, the Royal Frankish Annals mentioned the Slavs living in Pannonia, who were attacked by the Danubian Bulgar Khanate (Kurze, 1895: 173). This record undoubtedly indicates that the Slavs settled in large areas of Pannonia. The Bulgarian campaign took place in the Drava Valley, and the attack affected the Slavs living by the river.

According to Walter Pohl, following the embassy of Pannonian Avars (822), Avar political organization ceased to exist, the Avar leader, the khagan, lost his power, and the Avar political formation disappeared (Pohl, 2018: 391-393). In historiography, the opinion was formed that the number of Avars decreased and the remaining Avar population merged with the Slavic population of the Carpathian Basin in the 9<sup>th</sup> century (Róna-Tas, 1996: 254-256; Kristó, 1996: 97).

### 3. The peoples of the Carpathian Basin in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century

Nowadays, several researchers refute the disappearance and Slavization of the Avar population. According to Béla Miklós Szóke, the Avars survived the fall of the Avar Empire in the Great Plain east of the Danube, and their descendants lived at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, even during the Hungarian settlement (Szóke, 1999: 94-95). In his thesis, Szóke referred to the continuation of the chronicle of Ado of Vienne, which, in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, mentioned an Avar Kingdom (Szóke, 2011: 130, note 791). Ado was the archbishop of Vienne, a city that was in Burgundy in the Middle Ages and is now located in the southeast of France, for fifteen years (until 874). A short sequel to Ado's chronicle (*Ex Adonis archiepiscopi Viennensis chronico continuatio I*) was written in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century by an unknown writer. The continuation of Ado's chronicle and the history of the Frank kings (*Francorum regum historia*) reported on the partition of the Frankish Empire in 843: "In addition to Noricum, which had previously been in his possession, Louis possessed the kingdoms given to him by his father: Alemannia, Thuringia, Austrasia, Saxonia, and the Kingdom of the Avars, that is, the Kingdom of the Huns (Pertz, 1987: 324-325)."<sup>1</sup> The cited passage has also appeared in the work of William of Malmesbury, Folcwin's gesta, and book of St. Wandrille Abbey (Mynors, Thomson, & Winterbottom, 1998: 158-159; Holder-Egger, 1963: 616; Bouquet, 1870: 44). These sources gave an accurate and credible account of the division of the Frankish Empire in 843. Contemporaries in the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and in the 10<sup>th</sup> century still remembered the division of the Frankish Empire and the political situation after the division. These sources prove that in 843, the Kingdom of the Avars (regnum Avarorum) still existed under Frankish rule. When the Frankish Empire was divided in 843, Saxony, Alemania, Australia, and Thuringia were given to Louis the German. These were the largest eastern Frankish provinces; the size of the Avar Kingdom was similar to them. This kingdom could not have been a small Avar area in Pannonia. It is noteworthy that the texts did not mention the Pannonian Avars, but the Kingdom of the Avars. Based on this, it can be concluded that the Avar Kingdom existed under Frankish supremacy, east of the Frankish frontiers.

<sup>1</sup> "Ludovicus vero praeter Noricam quam habebat, tenuit regna quae pater suus illi dederat, id est Alamanniam, Thoringiam, Austrasiam, Saxoniam, et Avarorum, id est Hunorum, regnum." (Pertz, 1987: 324-325).



At this point, it is worth recalling that the Avar khagan was baptized in 805 and was called Abraham after that. Charles the Great restored the old power of the Avar khagans and gave it to Abraham Khagan. This political formation may have survived until 843 as the Kingdom of the Avars, but later the chroniclers did not describe its name.

The Avar Kingdom disintegrated in the second half of the 840s, but there is no data on the exact date and details of events. The *Annals of Hildesheim* and the *Annales Altahenses* briefly outlined that Louis the German (843–876) subjugated Pannonia, and returning home from his campaign, he devastated the Czechs (Waitz, 1878: 17; Oefele, 1891: 5; Holder-Egger, 1894: 26; Giese, 2004: 446). According to the Annals, Louis the German, King of the Eastern Franks, subjugated Pannonia, whose Avar prince (tudun) had been a vassal of Frankish rulers since 803. After Louis's campaign, Pannonia came under direct Frankish control and the Avar Kingdom east of the Danube disintegrated. A new geopolitical situation developed east of the borders of the East Frankish Empire, and a description of this new situation is contained in the *Description of Cities and Lands North of the Danube (Descriptio)*. This work was written by an unknown writer known to historians as the Bavarian Geographer (Bartonková et al., 1969: 285-291). Though unknown, the author was a well-informed cleric. The source's exact date of origin is disputed; Wolfgang Fritze dates it between 844 and 862. The source listed the regions (*regio*) of the peoples living east of the borders of the Frankish Empire and north of the Danube, mentioning the number of the cities (*civitas*) in the regions of several nations (Fritze, 1952: 341). The exact meaning of *civitas* in the *Descriptio* is unknown; the word may refer to a castle, a more populated settlement, or an ethnic or tribal center. Probably, the three types of settlement were not far apart; the clan centers were the most populous and fortified settlements. In any case, *Civitas* definitely meant something different to the Slavic peoples from what it meant to the Steppe nomads. For the former, the term would have applied to a more populous settlement with a fortress, whereas to the latter, it would have meant winter homes or the clans themselves.

The following is a description of the areas of the peoples near the Danube and the Carpathian Basin, based on the *Descriptio*. The Czechs (*Betheimare*) had fifteen cities (*civitas*); the Moravians (*Marharii*) had eleven. Moravians were Slavic people, living in the valley of the Morava River and the Moravian Highlands. The territory of the Moravians extended to the northwestern part of the Carpathians in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and, in the second half of the century, the Moravians occupied areas to the east in the western and central parts of present-day Slovakia. In the *Descriptio*, the Bulgarian region (*Vulgarii regio*), east of the Danube in the central and southeastern part of the Carpathian Basin, followed the Moravians. According to the *Descriptio*, the Bulgarian region had a large population; they had vast territory and five castles (*civitas*), although they did not need castles because of their large population (Bartonková, et al., 1969: 287). In this context, *civitas* was clearly a fortress. This large population could be the surviving population of the Avar Kingdom east of the Danube, in the Great Plain. After the disintegration of the Avar Kingdom, the Bulgarian region came under the rule of the Danubian Bulgar Khanate. This may be the explanation for the name of the Bulgarian region (*Vulgarii regio*). Archaeologists have not found any archeological finds made by Danubian Bulgars from the 9<sup>th</sup> century in the Great Plain (Katona-Kiss, 2009: 39-42; Szalontai, 2018: 213-214; Szőke, 1994: 82-83). The large population of the Great Plain did not come from Danubian Bulgar Empire in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. They were the inhabitants of the Avar Empire, and they lived continuously in the Great Plain after the collapse of the Avar Empire and Kingdom. In the *Descriptio*, the Merehani region followed the territory of the Bulgarians. The Merehani region had thirty cities (*civitas*) (Bartonková et al., 1969: 287). The localization of the area is controversial, with different explanations summarized by Martin Eggers (Eggers, 1999: 166-168). According to the order of the regions listed in the *Descriptio*, the Merehani lived in the southern Morava River region of present-day Serbia. This region also extended



north of Belgrade to the southern part of the Great Plain (Bowlus, 1995: 10-12, 108). By contrast, Senga Toru located the area of the Merehani population in the southern part of the area between the Danube and Tisza rivers. In his view, the people of Merehan consisted of Avars and Slavs (Senga, 1983: 319-321, 323-324). According to Martin Wihoda, the Merehani were the Slavs of Nitra in the western part of present-day Slovakia, and not those living along the southern Moravian River (Wihoda, 2014: 49). In the *Descriptio*, the people of Merehan had 30 fortified settlements. The area between the Danube and Tisza rivers used to be the central region of the Avars. Its fortresses and part of its population survived the disintegration of the Avar Kingdom, and the survivors continued to live under the rule of the Merehani.

The *Descriptio* did not mention the Kingdom of the Avars; in place of this kingdom were the areas of the Bulgarian, and Merehani populations. The author of the *Descriptio* recorded this political arrangement between 844 and the early 860s. The *Descriptio* mentioned that the areas of the Czechs, Moravians, Bulgarians, and Merehani were on the eastern border of the Frankish Empire north of the Danube. This was followed by a list of nations living east of the borders of these peoples. Of these nations, it is worth mentioning the area of the Slavs (*Vuislane*) living near the Vistula, north of the Carpathians, smaller groups of whom may also have settled in the northeastern valleys of the Carpathians. The population of *Ungare* can be located southeast of the Slavs of Vistula (Bartonková et al., 1969: 291). The author of the *Descriptio* mentioned only the name of the *Ungare* population, but he did not record other information about them. Certain groups of the *Ungare* population may have lived in the northeastern part of the Carpathian Basin in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The *Descriptio*'s difficult question is what nation the *Ungare* was. The first explanation may be that the Onogurs, under the name *Ungare*, surfaced after the dissolution of the Avar Kingdom. The second possibility is the Hungarians (Magyars) were under the name *Ungare*. The ethnic definition of the peoples that can be localized east of the Carpathians is uncertain because, in many cases, ethnonyms refer to unknown peoples, and in only a few cases can the language of the people be inferred from the ethnonym.

The identification and localization of peoples living further away from the Frankish frontiers is a controversial part of the *Descriptio*. (Polgár, 2003: 243-255; Witczak, 2013: 36-42; Szántó, 2017: 160-168; Koncha, 2012: 16-20). The people of the eastern Abodriti (*Osterabtrezi*) had more than a hundred fortified settlements. Georgiev identified this nation with the aforementioned Abodriti/Predeneanti, and, in his view, they lived in the Banat (Bartonková et al., 1969: 288; Georgiev, 2014: 109-110). The *Vuillerozi* can be identified with the people of the Danubian Bulgar Khanate, who had 180 cities (*civitas*). According to another definition, the *Vuillerozi* were identical to the Volga Bulgars (Koncha, 2012: 17-18). The Danubian Bulgar Khanate occupied Southern Transylvania in the 9<sup>th</sup> century after the fall of the Avar Empire. This is also confirmed by archeology, as archaeologists have found Bulgarian cemeteries and settlements (Bóna, 2001: 266-270). The area of Eptaradici, located south of the Southern Carpathians, had 263 *civitas*. (Bartonková et al., 1969: 288). This group is identified by some researchers as the seven Slavic clans who were allies of the Danubian Bulgar Khanate (Witczak, 2013: 39-40; Koncha, 2012: 17-18). Certain groups of the seven Slavic clans may also have appeared in Transylvania, where archaeologists have found Slavic artifacts (Bóna, 2001: 255-263). Archaeological research has shown that a smaller Slavic population also lived at the upper branch of the Tisza River (Wolf, 1994: 126-127). Other nations appearing in the *Descriptio* lived farther from the Carpathian Basin.

After the disintegration of the Avar Kingdom, the peoples living under the rule of the Avars came to the surface. These included the Wangars, who lived in western Pannonia and were under Frankish rule. The Slavs who lived in Pannonia and Carinthia called the Onogurs as 'Wangars'; the latter migrated from the steppes of Eastern Europe to the Avar Empire in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the



Onogurs probably spoke a Turkish dialect; the name Ungari/Hungari developed from their name, as attested by medieval Latin sources. The word for 'Hungarian' in the modern Western languages (Hungarian, Hongrois, Ungarn, Ungheresi) also developed from this ethnonym (Olajos, 2013: 521-528, 530).

#### 4. The Avars and neighboring peoples in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century

The territory of the Avars contracted in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and, at the borders, they must have mingled with Slavic and other peoples. However, a significant proportion of the Avars retained their language. This is evidenced by the biography of St. Constantine (*Life of St. Constantine*). The biography was written between 874 and 880 and its data is reliable. Chapter 16 of the biography tells us that Constantine had a dispute with the western Latin bishops in Venice in 867. The bishops believed that it was wrong to translate the holy books into the languages of the barbarian peoples. Therefore, they were opposed to Constantine's efforts at creating an alphabet for the Slavs and translating liturgical books into the Slavic language (Dvornik, 1970: 53, 129-132, 182). Constantine argued that many nations had liturgical books in their own languages: "We know of numerous peoples who possess writing and render glory unto God, each in his own language. Surely these are obvious: Armenians, Persians, Abkhazians, Iberians, Sogdians, Goths, Avars, Turks, Khazars, Arabs, Egyptians, and many others (Kantor, 1983: 71; Grivec & Tomšič, 1969: 134, 205)." He further argued that the Slavs should also have been given the opportunity to have liturgical books written in their own language. He mentioned in the debate that the Avars had liturgical books and prayed in their own language. This statement proves that, in the 860s, the Avars were still using their own language, and thus that they were not assimilated into the Slavic population. This detail has escaped the attention of the majority of researchers, with the exception of István Futaky (Futaky, 2001: 17).

The language of the Avars is worth a brief mention. There is a widespread opinion among historians and linguists that the Avars took over the Slavic language, had their own language slaviced, or developed Slavic-Avar bilingualism (Róna-Tas, 1996: 254-256; Kristó, 1996: 96-97). This opinion was based on the results of toponymic research. Only a few place names from the 9<sup>th</sup> century have survived; it is impossible to sketch the ethnic situation in the Carpathian Basin on the basis of these. On the territory of Hungary or that of the Carpathian Basin, the vast majority of the place names were developed between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, and they survived in Latin charters. Historians and linguists have singled out Slavic place names from these Latin charters, and some have found that their origins can be traced back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Avar place names have not been found, so it has been concluded that the language of the Avars disappeared and the Avars were assimilated into the Slavic population. The methodological error, here, is that the research reconstructed the spread of languages in the 9<sup>th</sup> century Carpathian Basin on the basis of place names created in the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Recent toponymic research has shown that some Avars preserved their language in the central part of the Carpathian Basin in the Great Plain and the eastern half of Pannonia, but this research has also failed to avoid this methodological problem (Juhász, 2018: 41). The excerpt quoted from Constantine's biography is one important piece of evidence that a significant proportion of the Avars retained their language until the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

The language of the Avars is a controversial issue in history and linguistics. Personal names and titles from the Avar language have survived mostly in Latin and Greek sources, some of which are derived from the Old Turkic language or are of foreign origin but adapted to Old Turkic. Examples of the words for Avar titles based on Latin sources include *khagan* (ruler); *katun* (the wife of the khagan or female member of the khagan's family); *tudun* (viceroy, the 'Lord of Pannonia'); *kaphkan* (the prince of the Avars settled between Carnuntum and Savaria); *iugurrus* (the prince of the Avars); and *tarkhan*



(a nobleman or chieftain in the khagan's retinue). Most of the Old Turkic names for dignitaries also appeared in the languages of the nomadic peoples living on the steppes. Still, there has not survived a contiguous Avar linguistic monument (Ligeti, 1986: 145-149; Stepanov, 2014: 165-167). Linguists have deciphered the short Avar runic inscriptions on archaeological findings based on the Old Turkic language (Róna-Tas, 1985: 240-248; Harmatta, 2004: 181-185; Harmatta, 1983: 78-80). Among historians, György Györffy assumed that the Avars spoke an Old Turkic language (Györffy, 1997: 144). Based on linguistic research, István Futaky concluded that there were also Mongolian and Manchu-Tunguz words in the Avar language. Futaky hypothesized that certain groups of Avars may have been Mongolian and Manchu-Tunguz-speaking. (Futaky, 2001: 19-22, 97). András Róna-Tas classified the Avars among the peoples who used the West Old Turkic language, but mentioned that the Mongolian and Manchu-Tunguz languages may also have influenced the Avar language (Róna-Tas & Berta, 2011: 1163-1164).

Returning to the question of the survival of the Avars, the next source consulted was *The Conversion of the Bavarians and Carantanians*; this source mentioned their survival. The source was written in Salzburg in 870. The author aimed to establish the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Salzburg over Carantania (approximately Carinthia in present-day Austria) and Pannonia (Lošek, 2020: 6). The source contains important data about the nations of Pannonia, explaining that Charles the Great expelled the Huns (Avars) from Pannonia and that Slavs and Bavarians settled in their territory. The Avars, who were baptized and paid taxes to the Frankish ruler, were able to keep their lands, thus they remained in Pannonia. The Avars also appeared in the source as 'Huns' (Lošek, 2020: 110-112, 102). The source listed the names of several settlements in the western part of Pannonia, where Bavarians and Slavs settled under Frankish rule. The writer even mentioned that some of the Gepids still lived in Pannonia (Lošek, 2020: 110, 130-134). The Avar population was able to keep their lands in the eastern half of Pannonia after the Frankish-Avar War.

From the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century onward, the Avars no longer had their own political formations. The Franks subjugated Pannonia and the Danubian Bulgar Empire occupied the southern part of Transylvania and the southeastern part of the Great Plain. At the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the territory of Moravia extended to the southeastern part of the present-day Czech Republic, and to the western and central parts of present-day Slovakia (Ruttikay, 2014: 74; Štefan, 2019: 151). Archaeologists have found several 9<sup>th</sup>-century sites in Moravia, as well as archaeological traces of Slavs in western Slovakia (Nitra, Děvín, Bratislava Castle, and Ducové u Piešť'an) (Betti, 2014: 23). These archaeological sites belong to the Blatnica-Mikulčice horizon and can be linked to the Moravians (Ruttikay, 1994: 113-118; Robak, 2017: 132-146, 150-152). Svatopluk, the prince of the Moravians (871–894), extended his power to the area between the Danube and the Tisza (Štefan, 2019: 156-158). Nevertheless, no archaeological traces of the Moravians have been found in this area so far. This may be explained by the fact that no Moravians settled in the area between the Danube and the Tisza during the reign of Svatopluk. As a result, the Avars may have survived until the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century in this region. Regino, abbot of Prüm, recorded in his chronicle of 889 that the Hungarians had been wandering, hunting, and fishing in the steppe of the Avars (*solitudines Avarum*), and attacking the borders of Moravia, Carantania, and the Bulgarians (Kurze, 1890: 132-133). Smaller groups of Hungarians appeared in the Great Plain, where the Avar population lived, before the Hungarian settlement (895/896). The term *solitudines Avarum* referred not to an uninhabited territory, but a politically disorganized one—specifically, to a wide border area between Moravia, the East Frankish Kingdom, and Danubian Bulgaria (Pohl, 2018: 396; Szabados, 2016: 677). After 895/96, the Hungarians settled in the Carpathian Basin and integrated the Avars into their society. In the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Konstantinos Porphyrogenetos claimed that the descendants of the Avars still lived in Croatia under



Croatian rule (Moravcsik & Jenkins, 1967: 142-143). Sources appearing after the 10<sup>th</sup> century ceased to mention the Avars. The Avars became part of Hungarian society, and many of their words were preserved in the Hungarian language, as evidenced by recent linguistic research (Futaky, 2001: 95-97; Körmenđi, 2006: 28-30, 60-65).

## 5. Conclusion

The ethnic relations of the Carpathian Basin changed after the fall of the Avar Empire (ca. 803). Pannonia then came under the rule of the Frankish Empire. With the permission of Charles the Great, some of the Avars settled between Sabaria and Carnuntum under the leadership of the *kapkhan*, who probably moved from the northern side of the Danube (which ranges from the southeastern part of the present-day Czech Republic and southwestern Slovakia to western Pannonia). The Moravians occupied the territory of these Avars north of the Danube and founded Moravia in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Charles the Great restored the power of the Avar khagans in 805 and bestowed it upon Abraham khagan. The new Avar khagan may have ruled the area east of the Danube and north of the territory of the Bulgarians, which can be identified with the central and eastern parts of the Great Plain. This may have been the Kingdom of the Avars, which existed until the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In Pannonia, at the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the prince of the Avars was the tudun, and he surrendered to the Frankish ruler. Slavs settled in the western part of Pannonia in the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

The Slavic Timocians settled near the Frankish borders in the southeastern part of Pannonia around the Sava and Danube rivers around 818–819. Abodriti/Praedenecenti migrated to what is now the Banat, to the lower section of the Tisza, or maybe to the south of Transylvania, where archaeologists have also found 9<sup>th</sup>-century Slavic archeological artifacts. The southern part of Transylvania came under the rule of the Danubian Bulgar Empire, as evidenced by the archaeological findings of Bulgarians. The Danubian Bulgar Empire occupied the southeastern part of the Great Plain to the Tisza and Mureş rivers, but archaeologists did not find significant Bulgarian and Slavic artifacts in this area, so there was no significant immigration.

After the division of the Frankish Empire (843), a new geopolitical situation emerged in the Carpathian Basin. Louis the German took direct control of Pannonia in 846. To the east of the Danube, the Avar Kingdom disintegrated, and in the central and eastern part of its territory the Bulgarian region was formed, which came under the rule of the Danubian Bulgar Khaganate. The people of Merehani appeared in the southern part of the area between the Danube and the Tisza. A significant Avar population continued to live in these areas, and archaeologists found no trace of immigration in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. It may have been the Slavic people of Merehani, but no archaeological findings remained in the area between the Danube and the Tisza. The Avars survived the collapse of the Avar Empire and later the Avar Kingdom, lost significant areas but retained their language in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. This is evidenced by the legend of Constantine (Life of St. Constantine), according to which the Avars prayed in their own language. In the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Bavarians settled in the western part of Pannonia, and one of the surviving peoples of the Avar Empire, the Wangars, also surfaced in this area.

At the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the geopolitical situation changed in the Carpathian Basin. The Avar population lost significant areas inhabited by other nations, especially Slavs, but sources also mentioned surviving Avars. During the reign of Svatopluk (871–894), Moravia strengthened militarily and politically, extended its power to the northwestern and northern parts of the Carpathian Basin, and its hegemony extended to the area between the Danube and the Tisza. Pannonia remained under the rule of the Eastern Frankish emperor. Danubian Bulgaria has retained the southern part of Transylvania and the southeastern part of the Carpathian Basin up to the rivers Tisza and Mureş. Among the Moravians,



Franks, and Bulgarians, the *solitudines Avarum* was located in the central and eastern part of the Carpathian Basin, which was a politically disorganized area. The Avar population of this area did not become Slavic-speaking. After the settlement of the Hungarians (895/896), the Avars integrated into the Hungarian society, and the Hungarian language took over many words from the Avar language.

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