



BOOK REVIEWS

Hungary and the Hungarians: Western Europe's View in the Middle Ages. By Enikő Csukovits. Viella Historical Research 11. Rome: Viella Libreria Editrice, 2018. 233 pp.

The monograph presented here, published in 2018 by Italian publisher Viella, is the result of many years of research, as the author Enikő Csukovits herself notes. The book, entitled *Magyarországról és a magyarokról: Nyugat-Európa magyar-képe a középkorban*, took its original form in 2013, and it was submitted by Csukovits for her title as Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Two years later, the monograph was published with the support of the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Research Centre for the Humanities as part of the series entitled *Monuments of Hungarian History. Dissertations*. The committee which read Csukovits's work (referred to as a "large doctoral thesis") in 2013 recommended it for publication in Hungarian and in translation. One of the reasons for this recommendation was to make the monograph, which fills a significant gap in scholarship concerning perceptions of cultural others, available to an international readership. Another was to make it possible to identify and indicate the sources of stereotypes concerning Hungarians which are still alive today. The publication of the work in English translation is thus a welcome contribution to the secondary literature.

Since the 2015 edition was reviewed in 2016 in the third volume of *The Hungarian Historical Review* by Judit Csákó, who summarized its contents, I feel exempt from this obligation. However, it should be noted for the sake of accuracy that I use the term "version" because Csukovits made certain changes to the publication printed in English in comparison to the Hungarian edition. The omission of chapter one, which was dedicated to the ways in which geographical knowledge developed in Medieval Europe, was the most significant of these changes (pp.14–16), though a small fragment of this chapter was integrated into the text of a later part of the English-language edition. Changes related to this were also made in the introduction. In the introduction, Csukovits explains her understanding of the concept of "Western Europe" as a geographical term, not a political term. As Gábor Klaniczay correctly pointed out in the review of the Hungarian-language edition, which was published in the journal *Buksz* in 2016, we do know why Csukovits made no use of source materials of English and

“Spanish” provenance which have been both touched on and made available in the secondary literature in Hungarian. Perhaps it would have been better to replace this concept of Western Europe with reference to the area affected by the Latin-language cultural circle. This would have broadened the scope of inquiry and would have required more time, because, for example, literary output originating in Scandinavia, the Czech lands, and Poland would also have to have been taken into consideration.

When Csukovits was carrying out the proposed dissertation research with the assistance of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the reviewers Edit Madas, Klaniczay, and László Veszprémy suggested sources and publications that she had not yet taken into consideration. They emphasized, however, that she would have to make selections from among the sources and would have to choose the most important sources, which best illustrated the emerging view of Hungary and Hungarian people. On the basis of the overview of the sources offered by Csukovits, one can agree that from time to time an important event made the wider public opinion in Europe pay attention to Hungary. Throughout the Middle Ages, such events included incursions made by pagan Hungarians, the conversion of the Hungarians to Christianity, the Mongol invasion of 1241–1242, and the threat posed to Europe by Ottoman Turks. The source material used by Csukovits was adapted to several common themes, and this certainly influenced its selection. She used the sources which she herself considered most important.

In my view, a certain disparity within the range of source materials can be felt, and the sources from the Árpád Era are treated too selectively and laconically. Despite the situation indicated by Csukovits concerning the recognition, availability, and the status of study of sources, the center of gravity in her discussion visibly moved to the material originating from the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, and not only on account of the quantity of sources or their accessibility, but also because of the research undertaken by Csukovits earlier. Csukovits used the listing of source texts published by Albin Ferenc Gombos more than eighty years ago (*Catalogus fontium historiae Hungaricae aevi ducum et regum ex stirpe Arpad descendantium ab anno Christi DCCC usque ad annum MCCC*) as a kind of guide to sources about Hungary in the period up to the early fourteenth century and thus corresponding to the Árpád Era. No such list is available for the source material concerning late medieval Hungary. *Catalogus* is a kind of an overview of source texts, and as has been shown by historians in recent decades, it is far from complete. László Veszprémy and Tamás Körömdi, for instance, have pointed out its deficiencies.

Csukovits has successfully taken into consideration the source groundwork without limitations from the perspective of genre, and this constitutes one of the indisputable merits of her work. In addition to historiographical sources, she has also used other sources which have been repeatedly omitted or used at best sporadically, for example descriptions of pilgrimages, travels, reports of legations, monuments of cartography, short stories, and chivalric romances. Csukovits emphasizes that knowledge about the Hungarian people and Hungary had been preserved in different texts, though she stresses that since they were handwritten, these texts were not always available to the persons interested. Csukovits points out that many of the resultant records did not survive, and thus it is difficult to say whether it is possible to obtain comprehensive knowledge about notions prevalent in the Middle Ages as the result of the research she has undertaken. One can also agree with the conclusion that there were no collections in Europe that would have contained the sum of knowledge about Hungary and its residents, to say nothing of sources that would have taken into consideration diverse opinions on the matter. Csukovits also points out that the appellation of Hungary appears in the monuments of medieval cartography more often than designations referring to other countries of Central Eastern Europe. Csukovits offers an appropriate set of 26 maps of the world (pp.70–75, 189–91). The above observation could also be applied to historiographical sources, which can be shown by at least looking through indexes to the publisher *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* series *Scriptores*, *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum*.

Csukovits rightly pays attention to the meaning of ethnonyms and terms used in relation to Hungarians, especially in the period before their conversion to Christianity. However, it is possible here to have reservations about the exhaustiveness of her discussion of the exoethnonyms which were used to describe Hungarians in the past. She limits herself to a relatively small group of them: Saracens, Huns, and Avars (pp.18–19), leaving the others unmentioned. Meanwhile, on the basis of the list compiled by Gombos, it is possible to indicate ethnonyms used to describe Hungarians which often are found in sources related to one another by filiation, such as Hagarites, which gains in importance in the context of the opinion of Ekkehart IV of Sankt Gallen, contained in *Events of Sankt Gallen*, who expressed a negative opinion in the matter of identifying Magyars with Hagarites. Among other ethnonyms which were used to describe Hungarians in other sources, and which bore specific associations or contents, the following should be mentioned: Jews, Turks, Massagets, Parthians, Scythians, Slavs, Sarmatians.

In the context of primarily Hun-Hungarian identification, which existence was only signalled by Csukovits (pp.18–19), in our opinion, it is also worth paying attention to accounts included in the explicitly connected texts *Deeds of the bishops of Tongeren, Maastricht and Liège* by Heriger of Lobbes and, based on them *Deeds of the bishops of Liège* by Egidio of Orval which show the overlap of motifs with the account included in the list of monk of St. Germain to Dado, bishop of Verdun from the beginnings of the tenth century regarding famine and the abandonment of dwellings by Huns or Hungarians, while in the background one also overhears the echo of the Latin word “hungry” and the Old High German “hungar.”

Csukovits also indicates the meaning of terms used to denote Hungarians before the Hungarians adopted Christianity and later used by participants in the crusades when they met Hungarians, such as pagans, barbarians, uncouth, and cruel (pp.19 and 23). In the context of abovementioned terms, attention should also be paid to the role of term *gens*, which is used in some sources as an exoethnonym of Hungarians, primarily in accounts about the abandonment by the Hungarians of Scythia and incursions at the end of the ninth century and throughout much of the tenth. Attention should also be paid to the role of more complex terms used alongside the ethnonym (*H*)*Ungari*, such as: crueler than all monsters, fiercest, most abominable, dirtiest, most burdensome, strongest, proficient in the use of arms, deceitful, worst, bestial, strong, and hostile to God.

Expressions which were used to designate Hungarians in the sources also constitute a form of information about perceptions of them: unknown, non-mentioned tribe, our former enemies, enemies hitherto unknown to those peoples, or new enemies. Csukovits mentions this problem laconically in relation to the record *Annals of Saint Bertin* (p.17). The account preserved in *The Younger Chronicle of Ebersberg* and the letter of Prince of Austria Albert I Habsburg from 1291 to the bishop of Passau, which traces the Hungarians back to a serpent living in marshes, are not among the sources used by Csukovits.

One might have expected Csukovits to pay attention to the range of influence of individual identifications, motifs, descriptions, and their perceived “popularity” in a monograph which summarizes perceptions of Hungarians and Hungary. As I noted above, she is aware that it is impossible to obtain a comprehensive overview of views on this subject due to the status of the sources. Nevertheless, she should have paid more consistent attention to both the quantity of preserved manuscripts and the ways in which the respective texts were used by later authors. Had she done so, it would have been possible to

obtain at least an approximate view of the popularity and thus influence of given perceptions. One notes a certain inconsistency here. In the case of e.g. *Austrian chronicle of 95 monarchs* (p.37) and the chronicles written by Domenico da Gravina and Giovanni Villani and Matteo Villani (pp.30, 128), Csukovits pays attention to the significance of the number of preserved manuscripts of these chronicles and their popularity. She also notes, in relation to the work *World Chronicle* by Hartmann Schedel, not only its publication in Latin or German but also the number of preserved copies (p.66, footnote 260; p.167). She similarly takes into consideration the manuscript tradition of *Description of Eastern Europe* (p.78) and the chronicles written by Jakob Unrest (p.145, footnotes 114–15).

Csukovits devotes no attention to the so-called manuscript tradition in the case of account preserved in the chronicle by Regino of Prüm (p.18), though it would have sufficed to refer to the study written by Wolf-Rüdiger Schleidgen (*Die Überlieferungsgeschichte der Chronik des Regino von Prüm*, Mainz: Gesellschaft für mittelhessische Kirchengeschichte, 1977). She also gives no consideration to its influence, either direct or indirect, on subsequent historiography, for instance on editions of Hungarian gesta or on *Annals of Metz*, *Chronicle* by Annalista Saxo or the written by Ekkehard of Aura, Otto of Freising, Godfrey of Viterbo, and Martin of Opava, which were widely read in the Middle Ages. In the case of *History of the archbishops of Salona and Split* by Thomas of Split, which she does discuss (pp.52–53), the problem of the manuscript tradition of this work and its influence on subsequent historiography was omitted.

Csukovits emphasizes that the conversion to Christianity by Hungarians had a vital significance in shaping views of Hungarians to the west. She also assigns a vital role to the positive attitude of Hungarians towards pilgrims during the times of King Saint Stephen, and she associates the appearance of mentions with a negative tone, like the visions of pagan Hungarians, preserved in descriptions of crusades with the defense by Hungarians of their belongings against newcomers. She also points out that Hungarians themselves and their rulers shaped their image when they made pilgrimages, waged war, or went on missions to the west.

In this context, her failure to devote attention to the influence of monuments of Hungarian historiography on opinions concerning Hungarians and Hungary in the west leaves the reader with a certain sense of dissatisfaction. She would have done well to have included, alongside her discussion of sources mentioned to point out views emphasizing the affluence of Hungary of the time, to note the reference to the image of Hungary known in the eleventh through fourteenth centuries as *pastures of the Romans*, especially since she attempted also to use

records of a chorographic and geographic character. This term appears *inter alia*, as it is believed, in texts related by filiation or resultant, under the influence of Hungarian historiographic records, such as *Hungarian-Polish Chronicle*, *Verse chronicle of Stična*, and the *History of the Archbishops of Salona and Split* by Thomas of Split. It also appears, as noted by Csukovits, in *Louis VII's Journey of Orient* by Odo of Deuil, where the term *granary of Julius Caesar* is used, and in *Description of Eastern Europe*, but in both cases Csukovits does not note that the terms refer to Hungary (pp.24, 75–82). A panorama of sources which were created outside the area of Hungary, and which describe the land as the *pastures of the Romans* is complemented by the source known as *The Description of Lands*, quite laconically in relation to Hungary but baselessly escaping the notice of Hungarian historians (it has been dated to the years between 1255 and 1257/1260).

In the context of shaping the view of Hungarians and Hungary in the west, the chronicle of the world by Alberich of Troisfontaines was omitted. Alberich of Troisfontaines, it is assumed, gathered information from his Hungarian informants, who knew the Hungarian historiographic records. Csukovits would have done well to have taken into consideration the influence of Hungarian chronicles issued in print at the end of Middle Ages, copies of which found their way to the west as early as the end of the fifteenth century, though this would have required painstaking inquiry. In the case of the first of these works, Andreas Hess' chronicle from 1473, only ten of an estimated print run of 240 are known. The fact that the copies have been preserved to this day in library collections in Western Europe indicates the interest with which they met. Similarly, transcripts of the chronicle issued by Johannes Menestarffer (Wien 1481, issued in print in 1473) have also been preserved in the Archdiocesan Library in Pécs, and the text of Hartmann Schedel's collection is available at the Bavarian State Library. The German translation of Jan Thuróczy's chronicle, which was issued in print in 1488 and was created in Bavaria after 1490, is preserved in the Heidelberg University Library. Each of these items would have been worth including among these kinds of testimonials.

The abovementioned handwritten copies and translations of texts of Hungarian chronicles confirm E. Csukovits's conclusions are based only on works of Henry of Mügeln and Jakob Unrest. All of these texts are a sign of an unabated interest in Hungarians and their country in neighboring Austrian lands or more widely Austrian-Bavarian lands (p.39). As was noted by Veszprémy in his review, the omission of the role of familiarity with *The Deeds of the Hungarians* by Simon of Kéza in the Apennine Peninsula does not allow for a full assessment

of the shaping of views of the Hungarians and Hungary from the end of thirteenth century.

Csukovits should have included in her discussion of monuments of Hungarian historiography that shaped views concerning Hungarians and Hungary the transcripts of handwritten Hungarian chronicles which were either transcribed by authors of foreign origin or were created in the West or found their way there in the Middle Ages.

Csukovits rightly includes *Österreichische Chronik* by Jakob Unrest, parish priest of Sankt Martin am Techelsberg in Carinthia, in sources discussing Hungarians and Hungary. She suggests, however, that, although this is not explicitly shown in the source text, the parish priest from Carinthia compared Turkish and Hungarian incursions into Carinthia from the 1480s with a plague of locusts (p.148). In this context, it is possible to point out that metaphors comparing Hungarians to locusts appear primarily, though not exclusively, in descriptions of Hungarians making incursions into Europe in the first half of tenth century, e.g. in *The Chronicle of the Czechs* by Cosmas of Prague, *The Chronicle or history of the two cities* by Otto of Freising, and *The Chronicle about the Princes of Bavaria* by Andreas of Ratisbon.

The suggestions raised by reviewers notwithstanding, which given the breadth of the research topic and the range of potentially relevant sources, should be considered natural. Csukovits's monograph provides an overview of perceptions concerning Hungarians which covers several centuries and is based on an array of sources diverse in genre and provenance. It also familiarizes the English readership with a research topic undertaken primarily by Hungarian scholars interested in perceptions of Hungarians in distant epochs and provides a foundation for further research, for instance of a comparative character. Csukovits's work also fills at least partly the gap in the research on so-called *origines gentium*. This gap has been felt in part due to the publication by Akademie Verlag of Alheydis Plassmann's *Origo gentis: Identitäts- und Legitimitätsstiftung in früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Herkunftserzählungen* (Orbis mediaevalis. Vorstellungswelten des Mittelalters 7, Berlin 2006), in which the question of perceptions concerning Hungarians was not considered at all.

Lesław Sychala
University of Wrocław
leslaw.sychala@uwr.edu.pl