

# *The Identification of K.r.h in the Passage of Ibn Rusta*

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There are a number of sources about the relations between Eurasian nomads and sedentary societies. The Crimean Peninsula was a typical meeting place of cultures and civilizations in Eastern Europe. On the southern part of the peninsula rich natural resources can be found. On the seacoast, Greek colonies came into being as early as the Classical Age; the inhabitants engaged in fishing and trade. They established commercial relations with the "barbarians" living north of them. As a consequence of political changes on the East European steppe some nomadic peoples disappeared and others emerged, but contacts between nomads and these trading cities were not interrupted. In the ninth century the Hungarians were the nomads who traded with the Greek cities of the Crimean Peninsula. This study adds some notes to the study of the commercial ties between Hungarians and Byzantium mentioned in the "Hungarian Chapter" of the book by a Muslim author, Ibn Rusta.

Ibn Rusta was a geographer born in Isphahan in the second half of the ninth century; he described the peoples of Eastern Europe in his work titled *The Book of Precious Pearls*. This book was written between 903 and 930.<sup>1</sup> The source of the "Hungarian chapter" of the book was the work of al-Ġayhānī, the Samanide wazir (from 913) entitled *The Book of Routes and Kingdoms*. Ġayhānī's book has not survived; its contents are known from the copies made by his disciples and followers. One of them was Ibn Rusta, who wrote about the Hungarians (*maġġariyya*):

They attack the Ṣaqlāb and they bring them as captives on the seacoast until they come to the ascent of the country of the Greeks called Karkh, and it is said, that al-Khazar in former days was surrounded by a ditch as a defence against the Magyars and other nations adjacent to their country. When the Magyars go with the captives to Karkh, the Greeks come out to them and they trade there and de-

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<sup>1</sup> I. Ju. Kračkovskij, *Arabskaja geografičeskaja literatura. Sočinenija*. [Arabic geographical literature. Collected works] T. 4. Moskva-Leningrad 1957, 159-160.

liver over them the slaves and take Greek brocades and carpets and other Greek goods.<sup>2</sup>

The other authors who used the work of al-Ġayhānī did not mention the name *K.rh̄*.<sup>3</sup> Ibn Rusta's work has been preserved in only one manuscript, copied in the thirteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

A number of solutions have already emerged to identify the city mentioned as *K.rh̄*: 1) *Karkina* on the coast of the present-day Karkinit bight,<sup>5</sup> 2) *Kertch* in the eastern part of the Crimean Peninsula,<sup>6</sup> 3) the city *S.m.k.r̄š/S.mqūš* or SMKRC (*Tamatarcha*, *Tmutorokan'*) lying on the Taman Peninsula,<sup>7</sup> 4) *Cherson* on the western coast of the Crimean peninsula,<sup>8</sup> 5) *Careon*, mentioned by Iordanes.<sup>9</sup> The city

<sup>2</sup> T. Lewicki, *Źródła arabskie do dziejów słowiańszczyzny*. [Arabic sources on the history of the Slavs] T. 2/2. Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1977, 34, 8–12; Cf. C. A. Macartney, *The Magyars in the Ninth Century*. Cambridge 1930, 208–209; H. Göckenjan–I. Zimonyi, *Orientalische Berichte über die Völker Osteuropas und Zentralasiens im Mittelalter*. *Die Ġayhānī-Tradition*. Wiesbaden 2001, 73–74 (German translation).

<sup>3</sup> Gardizī (eleventh century): "The Hungarians are fire-worshipper[s] (ateš-parats) and go [forth] on raids against the Saqlābs and Rūs. They bring back slave[s] (or captive[s], barde) thence, take them to the Byzantine [country] and sell them." A. P. Martinez, "Gardizī's two chapters on the Turks," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* (=AEMA) 2 (1982), 161–162; Marwazī (twelfth century): "They overcome those of of the Slavs and Rūs who are their neighbours, carrying off captives whom they sell in Rūm." V. Minorsky, *Sharaf al-Zamān Tāhir Marwazi on China, the Turks and India*, Arabic text with English translation and commentary. London 1942, 22 (Ar.), 35 (Eng.); 'Aufī (thirteenth century): "Between them and the Saqlāb goes on a perpetual war about religion and they are constantly victorious over the (Slavs), and taking prisoners from them carry them to Rūm and sell them." V. Minorsky, *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam*. *The Regions of the World. A Persian Geography* 372 A. H. 982 A. D. E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, New Series XI. London 1937, 324.

<sup>4</sup> Göckenjan–Zimonyi, *Orientalische Berichte*, 34–35.

<sup>5</sup> D. Hvolson, *Izvestija o hozarah, burtasah, bolgarah, madjarah, slavjanah i rusah Abu-Ali Ahmeda ben Omar ibn Dasta*. [Reports on Khazars, Burtas, Bulghars, Magyars, Slavs and the Rus by Abu-Ali Ahmeda ben Omar ibn Dasta] Sankt Peterburg 1869, 121.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. K. Czeglédy, "A magyarság Dél-Oroszországban." [Magyars in South Russia] in *A magyarság őstörténete* ed. L. Ligeti, Budapest 1943, 114; T. Lewicki, "Świat słowiański w pisarzy arabskich oczach." [The Slavic world in the eyes of Arabic authors] *Slavia Antiqua* 2 (1949–1950), 348; J. Ferluga, "Der byzantinische Handel nach dem Norden im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert." in *Untersuchungen zu Handel und Verkehr der vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Zeit in Mittel- und Nordeuropa*. Teil 4. *Der Handel der Karolinger- und Wikingerzeit*. Hrsg. K. Düwel, H. Jankuhn et al., Göttingen 1987, 633; Gy. Kristó, *Hungarian History in the Ninth Century*. Szeged 1996, 169; C. Zuckerman, "Les Hongrois au pays de Lebedia: Une nouvelle puissance aux confins de Byzance et de la Khazarie ca. 836–889." in *Byzantium at War (9-12th century)*. The National Hellenic Research Foundation, Institute for Byzantine Research, International Symposium 4. Athens 1997, 68, 69.

<sup>7</sup> J. Marquart, *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge*. Leipzig 1903, 162–163.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. I. Zichy, *A magyarság őstörténete és műveltsége a honfoglalásig*. [Prehistory and culture of the Magyars prior to the Conquest] *A Magyar Nyelvtudomány Kézikönyve* I/5. Budapest 1923, 82; Gy. Moravcsik, *Byzantium and the Magyars*, Budapest 1970, 47; I.

*Gerrhos* in the vicinity of the river Dnieper<sup>10</sup> and also *Hârşova* on the lower Danube have also been taken into consideration.<sup>11</sup>

The identification of *K.rĥ* is based on linguistic and philological arguments. As for the linguistic aspect, none of the above-mentioned cities can be identified without difficulties with the name reconstructed from the written form *K.r.ĥ*. The name *K.rĥ* can be emended with the transformation of a single character as *K.rġ* in Arabic writing, which corresponds to the phonetic form *Kerč*. The form *Karġ* (*Kerġ*) is found in sources about medieval Kertch.<sup>12</sup>

According to Loránd Benkő the name *Karkina*, mentioned by Classical authors,<sup>13</sup> had the form *\*Kark*, "which contained the root of the name if we omit the suffix." A settlement called *Karga* still exists on the Karkinit bight; the name might be in connected with that of the former city of Karkina. The name *Karga* can be identified with the Turkic word *karya* meaning 'crow, falcon, raven', formed through the mediation of the Turkish-speaking population.<sup>14</sup>

There is a solution in which no emendation is required. Gyula Németh referred to the possibility that the name *K.rĥ* is not necessarily the name of the city. *Karĥ* place-names existed in Islamic countries; among others, one of the commercial quarters of Baghdad was called *Karĥ*, and it may have influenced Ibn Rusta (or the copier of his text) when he set down the name of the Black Sea port.<sup>15</sup> The word *karĥ* meaning 'fortified city, city' in Arabic is an loan word of Aramean origin. It was attached to the names of different cities in the Islamic world. The most famous ones were *Karĥ Bagdad* and *Karĥ Samarrā*.<sup>16</sup> The word *karĥ* also exists in modern Persian meaning 'mansion, habitation, turreted building'.<sup>17</sup> In this case

Bóna, *A magyarok és Európa a 9–10. században*. [The Hungarians and Europe in the ninth–tenth centuries] Budapest 2000, 12–13.

<sup>9</sup> E. Č. Skržinskaja, *Jordan o proishoždenii i dejanijah getov. Getica*. [Jordanes on the origin of the Goths: Getica] (Vstup., text, perevod, komment). Moskva 1960, 135; Ju. A. Kulakovskij, "K voprosu ob imeni goroda Kerči." [To the question on the name of the town of Kerch] in *Sbornik statej v čest' F. E. Korša*, Moskva 1896, 194–199, cf. Skržinskaja, *Getica*, 203, note 94.

<sup>10</sup> Gy. Németh, *A honfoglaló magyarság kialakulása*. [Ethnogenesis of the Magyar people prior to the Conquest] Budapest 1930, 157.

<sup>11</sup> J. Bromberg, "Toponymical and historical Miscellanies on medieval Dobrudja, Bessarabia and Moldo-Wallachia." *Byzantion* 13 (1938), 48.

<sup>12</sup> V. V. Bartol'd, "Statji iz Enciklopedii Islama (Kerč)." [Entries from the Encyclopedia of Islam] in *Sočinenija* T. 3. Otv. red. A. M. Belenickij, Moskva 1965, 458–459.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Ptolemaios: C. Müller (rec.), *Claudii Ptolemaei Geographia*. Vol. 1, Parisiis 1883, 432, line 6.

<sup>14</sup> L. Benkő, "Zur Geschichte des Ungartums von der Landnahme im Zusammenhang mit *Leved* und *Etelköz*." *Acta Linguistica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 34/3–4 (1984), 188–190.

<sup>15</sup> Németh, *A honfoglaló magyarság*, 157. Németh did not repeat this idea in the second edition of his book in 1991.

<sup>16</sup> *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. red. B. Lewis–Ch. Pellat–E. Vandonzel, Vol. 4, Leiden 1978, 652–653.

<sup>17</sup> F. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian–English Dictionary*. London 1892, Vol. 2, 1021.

the *karḥ* of Ibn Rusta fully corresponds to the Arabic and Persian word *karḥ*. The Hungarians went to the 'city,' to the *karḥ*. It is hard to explain, however, why the Muslim author used a word characteristic of the Islamic world to describe a non-Islamic territory. It may be concluded that the name of the city might have sounded similarly to the Arabic *karḥ*, and this may have influenced the author. It is also possible that the name had originally been copied erroneously. Ibn Rusta acquired his information about the Hungarians of the ninth century from the work of al-Ġayhānī, whose book was founded upon earlier works, e.g. Ibn Hurdābih's *The Book of Routes and Kingdoms*.<sup>18</sup> After all, new geographical data were transmitted to Muslim scholars by travelers and tradesmen, and Arabic is not always capable of reproducing correctly the phonetic form of a foreign word. Moreover, it is also possible that in this case a foreign word was translated into Arabic.

The other side of the identification is provided by the consideration of historical and geographical aspects. In order to be able to locate and identify the city several criteria have to be met simultaneously: 1) The city had to have existed during the course of the ninth century. 2) The city had to be on Byzantine territory, or under Byzantine influence and there had to be a port in its vicinity. 3) The city had to be close to the habitat of the Hungarians.

As for the first criterion, there is no information about *Karkina*, *Careon*, *Gerrhos* or *Hârşova* in the ninth century. The name *Kertch* does not appear in the ninth century (with the exception of the questionable information provided by Ibn Rusta).<sup>19</sup> The future *Kertch* is still mentioned at that time by its classical name (*Bosporos*) in the sources. However, there are reliable pieces of information about *Cherson* and *Samqūš* (*Samkarš*)<sup>20</sup> from that period.

Among the cities which must have existed in the ninth century, *Samqūš*/*Samkarš* was not in the Crimea, but in the western part of the Taman Peninsula; this territory was under Khazar rule at the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the tenth century. The Khazars occupied this territory at the end of the seventh century; it is also possible that one of the residences of the Khazar khagan was

<sup>18</sup> Göckenjan-Zimonyi, *Orientalische Berichte*, 28-34.

<sup>19</sup> *Kerč* is mentioned in the *Armenian Synaxarion*, during the reign of Constantine V (741-775), but this work was compiled in the thirteenth century, and the name *Kertč* is probably an interpolation. G. Bayan (publ. et trad.), "Le Synaxaire Arménien de Ter-Israël." in *Patrologia Orientalis*, Tom. 21, eds. R. Griffin-F. Nau, Paris 1930, 872; N. Adonz, "Note sur les Synaxaires Arméniens." *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*, ser 3. T. 4 (1924), 211-218; D. Ludwig, *Struktur und Gesellschaft des Chazaren-Reiches im Licht der schriftlichen Quellen*. Münster 1982, I, 252, II, 52-53, note 264.

<sup>20</sup> *Samkarš*/*Samkūš*: Ibn al-Faqih al-Hamadānī (end of the ninth century), T. Lewicki, *Źródła arabskie do dziejów słowiańszczyzny*. [Arabic sources to the history of the Slavs] T. 2/1. Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1969, 28; the city was mentioned in the tenth century: the *Joseph-letter*: SMKRC, P. K. Kokovcov, *Evrejsko-hazarskaja peregiska v 10 veke*. [Jewish-Khazar correspondence in the tenth century] Leningrad 1932, 31, 102; the *Schechter-text*: SMKRY/SMBRYW: N. Golb-O. Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*. Ithaca and London 1982, 114-115, 128, 137.

situated here.<sup>21</sup> *Bosporos* (Kertch) is situated opposite the Taman Peninsula, in the eastern part of the Crimea; it is difficult to decide whether it belonged to the Byzantine Empire or whether Byzantine influence could have been exerted there. Constantine Zuckerman supposed that the Kertch peninsula was Byzantine territory in the 870s. This is proved by one epistle of Patriarch Photios.<sup>22</sup> According to Thomas S. Noonan the Kertch peninsula was already under Khazar rule by that time. From the *Joseph Letter* and archaeological sources it can be concluded that most of the Crimea was under Khazar control in the second half of the ninth century and the first half of the tenth century.<sup>23</sup> It is not certain that the city of Bosporos itself was a part of the khaganate at that time, but Greek people, subjects of the Byzantine Empire, must have lived there as a Christian church existed in the settlement.<sup>24</sup> Cities of the *Climata*, the southern coast of the Crimea, had a mixed population. A great number of people came from the steppe settled there. Wealth exerted a great attraction for the nomads and a special culture evolved there.

As for Cherson, it was a part of the Byzantine Empire at that time; from the 840s onwards it served as the centre for the *strategos* of the *Cherson Thema*.<sup>25</sup> The most important centre of the Crimea at that time was Cherson, with a busy port. *Kommerkiaroi* functioned in the city, supervising trade.<sup>26</sup> Cherson may have been a state-controlled free-trade area (a so-called *mitaton*), which must have been an attractive destination not only for the nomads but for the Russians living north of the steppe, who also traded with the inhabitants of Cherson.

Where were the borders of Hungarian territory in that period? According to information provided by the Ġayhanī tradition in the second half of the ninth century, the land of the Hungarians was between the (lower) Danube and the Etil

<sup>21</sup> Ludwig, *Struktur und Gesellschaft*, 252.

<sup>22</sup> Zuckerman, *Les Hongrois au pays de Lebedia*, 68–69; in Russian: “Vengry v strane Lebedii: novaja deržava na granicah Vizantii i Hazarii ok. 836–889 g.” *Materialy po arheologii, istorii i ètnografii Tavrii*, Vol. 6, Simferopol’ 1998, 675–676.

<sup>23</sup> E. g. Th. S. Noonan, “The Khazar-Byzantine World of the Crimea in the Middle Ages: the religious dimension, *AEMA* 10 (1998–1999), 208–212; I. A. Baranov, *Tavrika v èpohu rannego srednevekov’ja (saltovo-majackaja kul’tura)*. [Tavrika in the early middle ages] Kiev 1990, 54, passim. According to Anastasios Bibliothecarius, Cherson was in the vicinity of the land of the Khazars, i.e. the western border of the khaganate reached the western part of the Crimean Peninsula. *Anastasii Bibliothecarii epistolae sive praefationes* 15 (after March 1875), rec. E. Perels et G. Laehr, *MGH Epistolae Karolini aevi* T. 5. München 1978, 437.

<sup>24</sup> C. f. A. L. Jakobson, *Srednevekovyj Krym*. [Medieval Crimea] Moskva–Leningrad 1964, 53.

<sup>25</sup> On the organization of the Cherson Thema: C. Zuckerman, “Short Notes. Two Notes on the early History of the Thema of Cherson.” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 21 (1997), 210–222.

<sup>26</sup> A. I. Romančuk, “Torgovlja Hersonesa v 7–12 vv.” [The trade of Kherson in seventh–twelfth centuries] *Byzantino-Bulgarica* 7 (1981), 319–331; A. I. Romančuk, “Cherson im Mittelalter: städtische Funktionen und ihre Widerspiegelung in den Quellen.” *Byzantinoslavica* 53 (1992), 205; Ferluga, *Der byzantinische Handel*, 631, 633.

River. On the basis of the other most reliable source, the *De administrando imperio* (Chapter 38), the Hungarians resided in the territory called Etelköz in the same period. As to the localization of the Hungarian habitat there are several notions; the greatest difficulty is posed by the definition of the eastern borders of the country.<sup>27</sup> Which river can be identified with the Etil mentioned by Muslim sources? The early Muslim literature on geography uses the river name Etil referring to the Volga River.<sup>28</sup> However, it is improbable that the dwellings of Hungarians in the second half of the ninth century could have included the huge territory between the Volga and the Danube. The Volga region belonged to the Khazar Khaganate, and to the north of it a people called *Burtas* lived on the western bank of the river. Hungarian territory cannot have extended as far as the Volga River. According to other opinions the eastern border of the Hungarians was not the Volga, but the Don River at that time.<sup>29</sup> According to the information in *De administrando imperio*, the Hungarians settled between the Dnieper and the Sereth River (and lower Danube) in the second half of the ninth century. In this case, the Etil River mentioned by the Muslim sources could be identified with the Dnieper.<sup>30</sup> In the case of the first, the Crimean region was at the southern border of the Hungarian land. In case of the latter, the Crimea was at the southeastern borders of the Hungarian habitat. The Byzantine city must have been in the western part of the Crimea or between the Crimea and the Dnieper estuary. However, the main factor for Hungarian trade with the Byzantines was not necessarily the physical closeness of the city, but the size of the market, the output and volume of its trade, and the selection of goods available. On the basis of all this one can assume that the most easily accessible places for the Hungarians were the Dnieper estuary, the Karkinit bight and the western part of the Crimea.

Considering what has been said about the information on *K.rĥ* provided by Ibn Rusta and assessing all the other circumstances, it is possible that the name *K.rĥ* refers to Cherson. Two further pieces of evidence support the contention that the Hungarians were familiar with the roads leading to Cherson. Constantine-Cyrril, after having left Cherson for Khazaria, met a troop of Hungarians not far from the city.<sup>31</sup> A passage in the *De administrando imperio* (Chapter 9) also sug-

<sup>27</sup> On the problem of *Etelköz*, see, for instance, Kristó, *Hungarian History*, 154–158; F. Makk, "Etelköz-Mezopotámia." *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis. Acta Historica* 113 (2001), 31–40; Gy. Györffy et al., *Tanulmányok a magyarság honfoglalás előtti történetéből*. [Studies on the History of the pre-conquest Hungarians]. A Magyar Nyelvtudományi Társaság Kiadványai 172. Budapest 1985.

<sup>28</sup> C. f. A. Z. V. Togan, *Ibn Faḍlān's Reisebericht*. Leipzig 1939, 302–307.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. K. Czeglédy, "A 9. századi magyar történelem főbb kérdései." [The major questions of the Magyar history of the ninth century] *Magyar Nyelv* 41 (1945), 54; S. L. Tóth, *Levediától a Kárpát-medencéig*. [From Levedia to the Carpathian Basin] Szeged 1998, 46–53.

<sup>30</sup> E. g. I. Fodor, *In Search of a New Homeland. The Prehistory of the Hungarian People and the Conquest*. Budapest 1982, 248; A. Róna-Tas, *Hungarians and Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, Budapest 1999, 323 (map), 387; Benkő, "Zur Geschichte der Ungartums," 195.

<sup>31</sup> M. Kantor, ed., *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes*. Ann Arbor 1983, 43, 45.

gests that the Hungarians had visited Cherson in the ninth century. It describes the itinerary of the Russians towards the Dnieper estuary. The sailors had to get over the shallows and cataracts of the river and then came to a ford. "This they pass at the so-called ford of Vrar, where the Chersonites cross over from Russia and the Pechenegs to Cherson."<sup>32</sup> In this case the Pechenegs and the Chersonites must have started from the territory west of the Dnieper River, hence the reference to the crossing; in this case one had to cross the river if heading for the Crimea on dry land. They arrived at the seacoast on the territory east of the Dnieper and from here they had to follow the western coast of the Crimea to get to Cherson. One can enter the Crimean peninsula via the isthmus of Perekop.<sup>33</sup> From the isthmus of Perekop to the peninsula of Kertch the road following the seacoast is much longer than from the same place to Cherson and traffic along the eastern coast is much more difficult because of the many bays and estuaries. That is why it is highly probable, that the road on the seacoast mentioned by Ibn Rusta can be identified with the road to Cherson. The Pechenegs living west of the Dnieper visited Cherson (too), or at least that region. This may also be true for the ninth century Hungarians, that is, the description of the Pechenegs may serve as an analogy for the Hungarians living in Etelköz. The *De administrando imperio* (Chapter 42) also mentions that the Pechenegs traded not only in Cherson, but in Kertch (Bosporos), too.<sup>34</sup> For the Pechenegs living in the northeastern part of the Crimea in the tenth century the eastern part of the peninsula was also close, as they had settled in the peninsula, which we cannot prove in case of the Hungarians. Of course, the Hungarians can have traded with the Byzantines in the Karkinit bight up to the Dnieper estuary. There were Byzantine (Chersonite) settlements and smaller ports, the sea-lane from Cherson to the Danube estuary followed the coastline, and ships used to anchor at these places.<sup>35</sup> The Byzantines often made agreements with the Pechenegs at the estuaries of great rivers (Dnieper, Dniester).<sup>36</sup>

In conclusion, the identification of *K.r.ĥ* with Cherson is the most appropriate solution, since all the above-mentioned criteria are valid: the city existed during the course of the ninth century (under the same name), it was certainly a part of the Byzantine Empire, and it was relatively close to the habitat of the Hungarians. Another source also mentions Hungarians in the vicinity of Cherson.

<sup>32</sup> Gy. Moravcsik, ed. and R. J. H. Jenkins, tr., *Constantine Porphyrogenitus: De administrando imperio*. CFHB 1 Dumbarton Oaks 1967, 60, 63–70.

<sup>33</sup> The isthmus of Perekop is also mentioned in *De administrando imperio* (Chapter 42). According to it, once there was a huge ditch there, but around 950 only its traces could be seen. "In the course of many years this same ditch has silted up and become a great forest, and there are in it but two roads, along with the Pechenegs pass through to Cherson and Bosporus and the Regions." Moravcsik–Jenkins, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, 186, line 83–86.

<sup>34</sup> Moravcsik–Jenkins, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, 186.

<sup>35</sup> M. V. Levčenko, *Očerki po istorii russko-vizantijskih otnošenij*. [Outlines of the history of the Russian–Byzantine relationship] Moskva 1956, 199.

<sup>36</sup> Moravcsik–Jenkins, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, 54, line 5–12.