

Joseph Deguinges, Georgius Pray, and the Reshaping of the Hungarian National Identity in the Eighteenth Century

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To Barnabás Csongor (1923-2018), my master and friend

*Georg Pray, a Jesuit professor (1723-1801), studied the early history of the Hungarians on the basis of the work of Joseph Deguignes, identifying differences among the Huns, Avars, and Hungarians. He made use of the famous work *Gesta Hungarorum* of Master P. (P. dictus magister), or the Hungarian Anonymous, in his work and held the view that Hungarian is a Finno-Ugric language.*

Georgius (Georg/György) Pray SJ (1723-1801) was born in Neusiedel (now Nové Zámky/Ľánskývár) into an officer's family. His parents lived in Preßburg (now Bratislava, traditionally Prešporok/Pozsony), which was then the administrative centre of the Kingdom of Hungary (for the time being, this city is the capital of Slovakia). His family had its roots in the Tirol. He joined the Austro-Hungarian Province of the Jesuit Order (then the only common institution of the countries that later formed the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy) in 1740. He was ordained in 1754. During his student years in Graz, he studied together with the famous astronomer János Sajnovics, who first discovered the Finno-Ugric origin of the Hungarian language, and therefore can be held to be the founding father of Finno-Ugric studies. In 1755, he became a professor of the Theresianum College in Vienna. Under the influence of one of his colleagues, Erasmus Fröhlich († 1758), he began to study the earliest periods of Hungarian history. In 1761, he published his epoch-making work 'The ancient Annals of the Huns, Avars and Hungarians'.¹ followed by two other works².

¹ *Annales veteres Hunnorum, Avarum, et Hungarorum ab anno ante natum Christum CCX ad annum Christi MCXCVII deducti ac maximam partem ex orientis, occidentiosque*

Although the Jesuits, who were the most ardent supporters of Habsburg rule in Hungary, had already carried out a lot of work on the beginnings of Hungarian history,³ one can surmise that Pray's works would not fit into this frame. Before analysing this question, we should look at the work that lies in the background of Pray's works.

It is a well-known fact that Joseph Deguignes (1721-1800), the famous French orientalist, edited his pivotal work *Histoire générale de Huns, des Turcs, des Mogols et des autres Tartares occidentaux* between 1756 and 1758.⁴ We know that this work was obtained and sent to Pray by Ferenc Ribics SJ.⁵ Therefore, Pray could have used this work as a source long before its German translation appeared between 1768 and 1771.⁶ In short, we can state that the books of Pray are abridged paraphrases in Latin of Deguignes' original masterpiece. During his lifetime, the official language of the highest public administration and the language of education in the Kingdom of Hungary proper was Latin. Hungarian was used in public administration only in Transylvania. Pray himself was a *Hungarus* (a member of the feudal society of Hungary) but we must wonder whether he had a good enough command of Hungarian to compose any works in this language. What we are sure about is that he wrote all his works in Latin and sometimes in German, but we have no works that were written and published by him in Hungarian.

Before stepping further into this area, we should take a short look at the political situation of the country that was then called Hungary. When Charles of Lotharingia and Queen Maria Theresia (1740-1780) ascended to the thrones of their countries, namely the Holy Roman Empire and the Hungarian Kingdom respectively, an all-European war broke out. Friedrich II of Prussia declared war on the "usurpers": this was called the "War of the Austrian Succession" (1740-1758). A second war followed this, namely the "Seven Years War" (1756-1763). The young queen understood that the most important sovereign crown

rerum scriptoribus congesti, opera et studio Georgii Pray, Societatis Jesu sacerdotis, Vindobonae MDCCLXI.

² G. Pray, *Epistola responsoria ad diss. apologeticam Josephi Innocentii Desericii ... auctoris commentariorum de initiis ac majoribus Hungarorum*, Tyrnaviae MDCCLXVI; and *Supplementum ad Annales Veteres Hunnorum, Avarum, et Hungarorum congestos*, opera et studio Georgii Pray, Societatis Jesu sacerdotis, Tyrnaviae MDCCLXIV respectively.

³ I. Vásáry, "A jezsuita Cseles Márton és a Julianus-jelentés (A Magna Hungaria és a Jugria-kérdés történetéhez)," [The Jesuit Márton cseles and the report of Julianus] in: *Középkori kútforrások kritikus kérdései*, [Critical problems of Hungarian medieval sources] ed. J. Horváthy, Gy. Székely, Budapest 1974, 261-275.

⁴ J. de Guignes, *Histoire générale des huns, des turcs, des mogols, et des autres tartares occidentaux*. Paris 1756-1758.

⁵ G. Lischerong, *Pray György élete és munkái*. [The life and works of György Pray] Budapest 1937, 42.

⁶ J. de Guignes, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Hunnen und Türken, der Mogols und anderer occidentalischen Tartarn vor und nach Christi Geburt bis auf jetzige Zeiten*. Greifswald 1768-1771.

for her dynasty was the Crown of Saint Stephen, and she began to transform the once forgotten and nearly colonial countries of Saint Stephen's Crown (granted as a hereditary but independent country for the Habsburgs by the *Pragmatica Sanctio* 'Order of Succession' in 1733) into a flourishing backyard for the dynasty. Therefore, she needed to create a settlement with the Hungarian nobility. According to this tradition, the freedom of the Hungarian nobility (and also the Kingdom of Hungary) was not only established by the *Golden Bull* of King Andrew II (which held a real parallel with the *Magna Charta Libertatum* in England), but also by Attila the King of the Huns (a symbolic predecessor of the later rulers of Hungary) and Árpád, the first pagan chieftain of the land taking Hungarians. This tradition had its roots deepened not only in Hungary but all over Europe. Its most famous representative was John of Twroc (in Hungarian, Turóczy János, cca. 1435-1489) who offered the *Chronica Hungarorum* to King Matthias I of Hungary (1458-1490). This work was printed for the first time in Brünn (Brno, 1488) and was considered to be a standard reference book of Hungarian history all over Europe.⁷ Albeit Deguignes referred to it many times; he was the first scholar who drew attention to the falseness of this tradition.

"One might wonder why I did not make use of the Hungarian historians for the intrusion of the Huns under Attila. The Hungarians, who are holding themselves for the descendants of the Huns, come up with a lot of details regarding to the maneuvers, intrusions, and conquests of the peoples, including thousands of particularities what we cannot find in other sources. My main reasons to reject them were their weak coincidence with the Greek and Roman historians, their falling into great anachronisms, and the tales that they include making me doubtful in the rest."⁸

Deguignes put the first nail in the coffin of this more or less invented Hun-Hungarian tradition. The second nail in the coffin was delivered by Pray. Of course, he was conscious about what he had done. To defend himself from the attacks that his work might cause, he offered his book to Innocentius Desericus (Desericzky Ince, 1702-1763) OSP, who wrote the last compendium of the clas-

⁷ J. de Thurocz, *Chronica Hungarorum* (reprint), Budapest 1991; J. Thuróczy, *Chronicle of the Hungarians*, trans. F. Mantello; forew. and comm. P. Engel, Bloomington 1991; E. Mályusz, *A Thuroczy-krónika és forrásai*, [The Chronicle of Thuroczy and its sources] Budapest 1967.

⁸ «On sera, peut-être surpris que je n'aie fait aucun usage des Historiens Hongrois pour l'irruption des Huns sous Attila. Les Hongrois, qui se regardent comme descendus des Huns, entrent dans les grands détails sur le passage, sur les incursions, sur les conquêtes de ces peuples & nous apprennent mille particularités que nous ne trouvons point d'ailleurs. C'est principalement cette raison qui me les a fait rejeter; le peu d'accord que j'ai trouvé entre eux & les Historiens Grecs ou Romains, les anachronismes grossiers dans lesquels on les voit tomber, les fables qu'ils débitent, me font douter de l'exactitude du reste.» Deguignes, *Histoire générale...*, I/1, xii.

sical Hungarian historical tradition.⁹ This work was offered to Joseph II, then King of Germany. In this way Desericzky wanted to call the attention of Joseph, then also Crown Prince of Hungary, to the merits and liberties of his future realm.¹⁰ Joseph, however, chose another way. He never became a crowned King of Hungary; he only tried to rule the lands of Saint Stephen's Crown on the basis of the *Pragmatica Sanctio*. Therefore, he is still held to be an usurper in the Hungarian historical tradition. Pray should be aware of the fact that his breaking with the traditional Hungarian historical conscienceness might cause serious consequences.

On the other hand, one should take into consideration the traditional rivalry between the two orders: the Jesuits and the Piarists.

The third, and perhaps the most important factor, that should constitute the background of this work is the so called "rite debates". It is a well-known fact that the Jesuits working in China were blamed for their adaptiveness of the Chinese tradition. What if the prehistory of Hungary, a highly esteemed member of the *Res Publica Christiana*, could have been written on the basis of these blamed Chinese authors? We can surmise that the book by Pray first served as a defence for the Jesuits; it was written only in the second plan as a reshaping of the Hungarian historical tradition.

The content of the works

Although inspired by Deguignes, Pray placed the focus of his work on the prehistory of the Hungarian nation (*natio Hungarica*), which at this time was more a political than an ethnological term. All nobles or otherwise privileged members of society in the lands of Saint Stephen's Crown were held to be "Hungarians" *versus* the "slaves", with no regard for their real ethnic backgrounds. Pray was a pioneer in searching for real ethnic affiliations instead of political legends, but even he could not totally eliminate this long-embedded political ideology. He made the first clear differentiation between the nomadic peoples who invaded and settled in the Carpathian basin, the Huns, Avars, and later the Hungarians. Therefore, according to his explanations, Attila and his Huns were no longer the forerunners of the Hungarians.

As for the land taking Hungarians, according to Deguignes, they were to be identified with the various remnants of the Western Turks,¹¹ who were de-

⁹ Josephi Innocentii Desericii, Hungari Nitrensis, Clerici Regularis Scholarum Piarum: *De Initii ac Majoribus Hungarorum Commentaria quibus accedit circa finem Libri secundi insigne ac per antiquum manuscriptum ex Vaticana Bibliotheca derontum hac tenus desideratum* I-V., Budae ac Pestini 1748-1760.

¹⁰ A. Görömbei, "Az ősmagyarság képe felvilágosodás- és reformkori történetírásunkban," [The image of the ancient Hungarians in the Hungarian historiography of the Enlightenment and Reformation] *Studia Litteraria* 60 (1971), 65.

¹¹ Deguignes, *Histoire générale...*, I/2, 452-506.

scribed by the Chinese historians as *Tujue*. The link between the two bulks of people was searched for in the work of the famous Byzantine author, Constantine Porphyrogenitus, who named the land taking Hungarians as Turks (*Tourkoi*).¹² He also tried to establish a dynastic link between the Western Turks and the forerunners of the Hungarians. He mentioned that in 840 A. D., the lord of the *Kie-kia-su* (*Xiajiasu*, i.e. the Yenisei Kirgiz), who lived in the ancient territories of the Tim-lim (*Dingling*) and the Kien-kuen (*Jiankun*, and the Paleo-siberian ancestors of the Yenisei Kirgiz) revolted against the Uigurs, the successors of the Turks in Inner Asia.¹³ Their leader was Oge-khan, in whose name Deguignes sees the name of the grand-grandfather of Árpád, Ugeck, known by him through the data of Thuróczy.¹⁴ As to the name of Oge-khan, one can surmise that it can be identified as *ügä* ('chancellor, governor'), a well-known Old Turkic title of the age.¹⁵ As to the historical facts, one can suppose that the Oge-khan mentioned by Deguignes can most possibly be identified with the name (or more possibly the tile) of *Wujie* (烏介, EMC ?ɔ-kəj^h/kɛ:j^h LMC ?uə-kja:j^h) Khagan. In 842, he was the last to enthrone himself as the ruler of the Uigurs in the territory that is now Outer Mongolia.¹⁶ The affinity between the names *ügä* and Ugeck/Ügyek (as it is now read in Hungarian historiography) had already been analysed by György Györffy.¹⁷ Such an etymology is far not improbable, but it still needs further argumentation. As for the historical identification of a

¹² Deguignes, *Histoire Générale...*, I/2, 510- 518; Görömbei, *Az ősmagyarság...*, 66; A. Várnai, "Az európai Kína-kép alakulása és hatása a felvilágosodás korában," [The evolution and impact of the European China-image at the time of the Enlightenment] In: *Dolgozatok a feudáliskori művelődéstörténet köréből*, [Studies on the history of feudal culture] ed. G. Klaniczay, G. Pajkossy, É. Ring Budapest 1974, 32.

¹³ Deguignes: *Histoire générale...*, 504-505; M. Drompp, "Breaking the Orkhon Tradition: Kirghiz Adherence to the Yenisei Region after A.D. 840", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119 (1999), 391.

¹⁴ «Árpád est reconnu encore aujourd'hui pour le premier Prince, & un des principaux des Madgiars ou Hongrois; il étoit fils de Salmuts que Thwrokz [Thuróczy, D.M.] appelle Almus. Son pere Eleud fils d'Ugeck, regnoit dans la Scythie, & prétendoit être issu d'Attila. Cet Ugeck dont les Historiens Hongrois ont conservé le nom pourrait être Oge-khan, qui l'an 840 regnoit dans le Tartarie à l'Occident de l'Irtich.» Deguignes: *Histoire générale...*, I/2, 512.

¹⁵ F. W. K. Müller, *Zwei Pfahlschriften aus der Turfanfunden*. Berlin 1915. I. Ecsedy, "Uigurs and Tibetans in Pei-t'ing," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 17 (1964), 83-104.

¹⁶ M. Drompp, "The Uighur-Chinese conflict of 840-848," In: *Warfare in Inner Asian History* (Handbook of Oriental Studies/Handbuch der Orientalistik, VII/6), ed. N. Di Cosmo, Leiden-Boston-Köln 2002, 79; M. Drompp, *Tang China and the Collapse of the Uighur Empire. A Documentary History*. Leiden-Boston 2005, 54-55; 76-77; Drompp transliterates this name as Öge-khan.

¹⁷ Gy. Györffy, *Tanulmányok a magyar állam eredetéről. A nemzetségtől a vármegyéig, a törzstől az orszáig. Kurszán és Kurszán vára*. [Studies on the origins of Hungarian statehood. From clan to county, from tribe to country. Cursan and Cursan's castle] Budapest 1959, 82-83.

legendary ancestor of Árpád with any real ruler of Inner Asia, this is of course impossible.

The innovations of Pray

The first innovation in Pray's argumentation is that in narrating the story of the land taking Hungarians, he made use of the famous work *Gesta Hungarorum* of Master P. (*P. dictus magister*), or the Hungarian Anonymous.¹⁸ This work was preserved only in one manuscript in Vienna and was then in Budapest from 1928 onwards. It was first published by Georg J. Schwandtner and Matthias Bél in 1746 (*Scriptores Rerum Hungaricum I*). It could have remained totally unknown to Deguignes. Pray tried to identify the land taking Hungarians with the Kabars, who, according to him, unified with the *Turks* coming from the South.¹⁹ Pray also added that, based on his sources, the Ottomans should also be held to be relatives of the Hungarians. Later, Pray also added that the Hungarians were Finno-Ugrians by language,²⁰ and accordingly the Huns and the Avars should also be seen as Finno-Ugrians.²¹

¹⁸ The most important editions of this work are: *Gesta Hungarorum*, (Bibliotheca scriptorum medii recentisque aevorum: Saec. XII-XIII,) ed. L. Juhász, Budapest-Bononia-Lipsia MCMXXXII; Anonymus, *Gesta Hungarorum*, Facsimile with a Hungarian Translation by D. Pais, Budapest 1977; Anonymus (Notary of King Béla), *The Deeds of the Hungarians*, ed. trans. ann. M. Rady, L. Veszprémy, in *Anonymus and Master Roger* (Central European Medieval Texts vol 5), Budapest–New York 2010; for the most detailed information on this work see: Gy. Györffy, *Anonymus. Rejtély vagy történeti forrás? Válogatott tanulmányok*. [Anonymus. A mystery or a historical source? Selection of studies] Budapest 1988.

¹⁹ On the Kabars see: M. V. Gorelik, "Tri plemeni kabar," In: *Hungaro-Rossica. Byulleten' Obshchestva vostokovedov*, vyp. 9, ed. V. V. Vasil'ev, Moskva 2002, 47–51.

²⁰ G. Pray, *Dissertationes Historico-Criticae in Annales veteres Hunnorum, Avarum et Hungarorum* (Vindobonae MDCCLXXIV), 1–2.

²¹ "Prius autem, quam Finnos Hunnicæ originis populum fuisse ostendam, necesse est, ut Avars, & Hungaros, ex Hunnorum corpore, & numero itidem fuisse declarare, quod quamquam alias haud parce conatus fuerim, hoc tamen loco in primis faciendum mihi video." Pray, *Dissertationes Historico-Criticae*, 2.