

István Hoffmann (Debrecen, Hungary)

The name as a historical source*

1. When we talk about the issue of names as historical sources, we can primarily state that this subject matter, from a history of science point of view, has always been a central topic of Hungarian onomastics—but also of the onomastics of other languages. What is more, it is a central topic even today. I refer to onomastics in the broadest sense possible, including all types of scientific research into proper names.

As early as the 19th century, the focus of the Hungarian onomastics turned to names: the preparation of JÓZSEF TELEKI's dictionary and RÉVÉSZ IMRE's name collection were actually motivated by interest in history, and FRIGYES PESTI considered names as instances of the “national museum”. This approach is still visible in DEZSŐ CSÁNKI's work and it led to a great history of scientific synthesis and the creation of the historical geography of Hungary from the 15th century.

But this approach also determined the interest and activities of researchers in the 20th century: JÁNOS MELICH, ISTVÁN KNIEZSA, DEZSŐ PAIS, LAJOS KISS, ANDRÁS MEZŐ and many other excellent linguists have exploited the value of names as historical sources during their work. Furthermore, several great historians, GYÖRGY GYÖRFFY and GYULA KRISTÓ, to name just a couple, have created theories which contributed to founding the discipline of onomastics.

Hungarian onomastics had had periods when attention was drawn as much to the present as to the past; however, onomastics could make use of these results, too. Ethnographer JÁNOS JANKÓ conducted a synchronic name collection at the turn of the 20th century, but even in the contemporary onomastic corpus he investigated the roots of regional division of the Hungarian name corpus. And when ATTILA SZABÓ T.—inspired by folk language researcher, BÁLINT CSÜRY's programme—promoted a collection of contemporary toponyms, he did it driven by the intention to present this name corpus as a well-documented state of historical change.

If therefore, I was to present the topic indicated in the title completely, even if I restrict myself to Hungarian names exclusively, I would not be able to do it, since I would have to present all those lasting results and those debatable results and ideas from this discipline which have in the meantime been refuted.

* Presentation held at the 6th Conference of Hungarian Onomastics in July 2007 in Balatonszárszó.



2. I need to continue narrowing the topic from the point of view name types, since it is indisputable that different name types have different values as historical sources. After all, the proper name as a comprehensive linguistic category groups linguistic phenomena whose communicative and linguistic functions, formal and semantic features and history differ. Certain name types show more differences than similarities, scientific analysis can see connections between them only after a large-scale abstraction.

This difference shows in the ancient characteristic of certain proper name types. Even though we cannot go deeper into the issue of proper name genesis, intangible by purely linguistic means, it is still obvious that certain proper names are ancient elements of their languages, while others are far less old than that. It is hardly debatable, for example, that institution names indicate a higher development of the society, while personal and place names carry an ancient feature which none of the other name types can compete with. Consequently, ancient categories like this inevitably also have greater historical source value.

However, the ancient feature of proper names does not necessarily relate to their appearance in written sources, the factor that most directly influences their historical use. It is a well-known fact that in Hungarian onomastics the above two categories (i.e. place names and personal names) have a distinguished role: the period preceding the 15th century, with several hundred thousand Hungarian toponyms and personal names inherited in sources offer a linguistic record with which no other smaller early (contemporary with the above) linguistic record containing just a few words can compete, in the fields of history of orthography, phonology, vocabulary and morphology—to name just a few areas. It needs to be emphasized, of course, that the latter are used in other fields, in which the remnants do not provide for research possibilities.

It has also been established by many, that out of the two types mentioned above the historical value of toponyms is far greater than that of the personal names: many aspects and arguments can underline this statement. Here I will mention only one of them, an onomastic factor rarely stated. In the history of toponyms we see that they stayed relatively open to other classes of words: common nouns, personal names and other place names could basically become part of newly created place names almost without limits. Contrary to this, several of the personal name subsystems remained closed during the Old Hungarian period: within one-piece names, the inner pagan name-giving was replaced by borrowed names having religious reference, and the attributive component of a two-piece name transformed into an inherited family name which thus lost its openness to linguistic alternation. Such change of personal names naturally leads to fewer possibilities in using them as historical sources. Therefore, in what follows I will turn my attention to toponyms.



The organizers of this conference have previously instructed me to bring the issues of principles and methodology of onomastics into the foreground. I believe I can fulfil this request in the best possible way if I concentrate on the problems which are overwhelming Hungarian onomastics today and which make it difficult to exploit names as historical sources. In my opinion, it is by pointing to the critical parts and to the discrepancies that can help us the most to find the most appropriate direction for development.

3. In this context, I would like to refer to the complexity and interdisciplinary nature of onomastics. The development of onomastics is most frequently discussed in the context of its becoming an independent scientific discipline instead of remaining a supporting one. This change can be explained both by methodological and principled arguments, but also by features relating to institutional structure.

Independently of the above, we experience that there are basically two areas which use names as historical sources to the full: historical linguistics and historical science. The representatives of these sciences, however, essentially apply the methodology and principles of their own disciplines, while involving the results of other scientific disciplines as well; and this procedure is in order, provided that the methods and applied knowledge suit the requirements of modern science.

If there is a change in this area, it can be described as a stronger professional communication among the representatives of these disciplines than before. From this point of view, I especially regret the fact that there are hardly any representatives of historical science and ethnography at the conference today, even though the biggest names in these disciplines took part in events like this in the past.

In my view, besides the analysis of the Hungarian language from a historical point of view, the role of onomastic examination has been re-evaluated recently. But together with this it can also be established that the historical scientific interest, and receptiveness to ethnic character and to the history of culture present in historical linguistic research from its beginning, has disappeared.

Consequently, the balance between the discovery of our early past and the disciplines responsible for its investigation has been lost. In other words, Hungarian historical linguistics and within it, historical onomastics, could not appropriately follow the increasing pace of research in historical science. This debt naturally had consequences: historians, since they cannot allow themselves to work without the results of onomastics, had to rely on outdated and often even false data. And the role of historical linguists usually narrowed down to warning their historian colleagues of the uncertainty of using linguis-



tic information. All this indicates that, in subject matter where the work of different disciplines is closely connected and their results complement each other, it is easily detectable if one of them falls behind.

The earlier the period of Hungarian history that is investigated, the closer cooperation there should be between historically-oriented areas of science. Consequently, quite a few issues of Hungarian ethnicity from the Arpad age, from the 10th to 13th century (and not only those referring to the inner regularities and structure of the language) cannot be discussed without the research results of historical linguistics and historical onomastics. Mutual interdependence is especially visible in areas without resources, such as Transylvania.

Historical linguists—as stated by LORÁND BENKŐ—should be grateful to their historian colleagues for their “wide-ranging corpus discovery work which put at our disposal an early Hungarian toponymic corpus appropriate in quantity and quality, and in a user-friendly format” (1998: 112–3).

The linguistic, onomastic research of the Old Hungarian toponymicon has to a large degree been supported by GYÖRGY GYÖRFFY’s “The historical geography of Hungary in the Arpad age”. However, another work initiated by him, “*Diplomata Hungariae Antiquissimae*”, a series of critical charter publishing, whose published first volume contains the earliest and therefore most significant certificates of Hungarian relevance, is also of great importance. Let us hope that the historians researching the Middle Ages will have the strength to continue GYÖRFFY’s magnificent enterprise with which they may help the work of other disciplines, especially that of Hungarian historical linguistics.

4. So far I aimed at introducing the relationship between historical onomastic research and linguistic onomastic research; but the relationship between the linguistic research of names and general historical science is not without problems, although these problems are rarely discussed. The traditional approach has actually not separated the proper name and non-proper name elements in a historical linguistic evaluation (for example, in a phonological or morphological sense). In recent decades, however, especially abroad, but partly in Hungary as well, onomastic research focusing on the general and specific characteristics of the proper name category have strengthened, and they aim at presenting the name features of language elements.

This approach has recently gained ground in historical science research, but I believe it should get even more emphasis. The main feature of this approach is the idea that certain names cannot only be measured according to other instances of linguistic inventory, but primarily as elements of a proper name system in which they have developed and in which they function, and in which they bear all their typological, morphological, phonological and semantic characteristics. All this should not, of course obscure the relationship



between common names and proper names, but only draw attention to the threats of a mechanical identification.

5. In any onomastic analysis we need to answer two types of requirements. Firstly, a detailed investigation of the most secure philological background is indispensable. Secondly, it is unavoidable to compare the name instances with a set of examples as wide as possible—especially in connection to how they are determined in the onomastic system. The first requirement is secured by reliable source publications, whereas the second depends on compendiums and dictionaries edited according to linguistic criteria.

Although I fully understand the insecurities concerning the latter, I believe that their necessity is unquestionable. An excellent example is KATALIN FEHÉRTÓI's Personal name registry from Arpad age,¹ which contains a significant majority of names from that period. Although there are some elements in the registry which with or without doubt do not belong to the registry, I believe this work will have a significant impact in the future. Maybe the project started in the recent past and entitled "An early Hungarian dictionary of toponyms"² will play a similar role.

In recent times intentions to re-evaluate the results of Hungarian onomastics have gained more ground—especially in the field of personal names. LAJOS KISS already faced this problem at the time of writing his "Etymological dictionary of geographical names" but it became an important programme in LORÁND BENKŐ's work in the past one and a half decades. He urged a remediation of those "sick" etymologies which played a crucial role in the discussion of our early history. This intention shows us that we can freely rely on the great tradition of Hungarian onomastics, but a far-fetched and unconditional reliance on its results is an anti-scientific attitude. A precedent like this has been set by our great ancestors, JÁNOS MELICH, to name one, who has criticized his own early work.

There have been no great shifts of paradigm in Hungarian and international onomastics; its development—sometimes faster, sometimes slower—was characterised far more by continuity. In a scientific context like this, the necessity for re-evaluation of results is evident. Every single name's linguistic-onomastic interpretation relies directly or indirectly on the complete knowledge of linguistics and is based on the universally valid—i.e. reflecting the development of science—theories and methods. Consequently, etymologists have to analyse the sources according to current, contemporary knowledge, which results in old source material that has been known for many years and

¹ Cf. *Onomastica Uralica* 5: 96–101.

² Cf. *Onomastica Uralica* 5: 101–109.



has been analysed many times to be shown in new light; all this may therefore give way to new conclusions.

It follows from this line of thought that I consider it important to systematically re-evaluate those linguistic and etymological sources which have played a key role in the cognition of the Hungarian past. The majority of these were used in the monographs of excellent Hungarian linguists more than half of century ago—such as DEZSŐ PAIS's Charter of the Nuns of Veszprémvölgy, ISTVÁN KNIEZSA's Zobor document, or the classical work of GÉZA BÁRCZI, The deed of foundation of Tihany abbey—but it is exactly their results that support us in the future analysis of these sources.

An excellent example of a re-evaluation like this is LORÁND BENKŐ's reassessment of Anonymus's *Gesta Hungarorum* (Deeds of Hungarians). BENKŐ's model of source criticism and the renovation of knowledge from specialized literature can be followed in other remnants of key role. Besides the above mentioned sources I also consider it timely to re-examine all charters from the 11th century and monographic evaluation would be worth conducting in the cases of Census of Tihany, The Charter of the Crusaders of Székesfehérvár and the *Regestrum* of Várad.

The need for this is even greater since the already mentioned complexity of onomastics results in outdated linguistic knowledge getting into circulation in historical science, and therefore incorrect or even false concepts of the past form a basis for further distortions.

6. Etymology is considered the strongest subdiscipline of Hungarian onomastics. I believe this is true despite the fact that numerous etymologies are awaiting their re-evaluation and correction, and many more etymologies are yet to be established for certain words. I do not wish to elaborate on these questions in this presentation, although I think it is important to note that a survey of the principles and methodology Hungarian name etymology would serve as a lesson both in a purely theoretical and in a history of science perspective.

Many linguists, when talking about the layers of origin of the Hungarian name inventory, consider the matter of loanwords fairly clear, while issues relating to the inner genesis of words remain rather obscure. I myself believe there are not great differences in the situation of the two groups of names; what is more, I think we have greater debts in the case of foreign origin words and maybe—which is especially regrettable—even the prospects are weaker. In the etymology of loanwords, the majority of explanations which consider the name individually, without an appropriate or in an overgeneralized linguistic system, largely disregard the place and time characteristics of these names. These discrepancies can be observed in all loanword groups, but they



are probably the most significant in the analysis of Turkish relations, already overborne with difficulties. As for Slavic loanwords, they mainly lack an inner chronological layering; the German and Romanian borrowings, however, are in need of systematic processing.

In this area, the bulk of the serious work is awaiting Turkic, Slavic, Germanic and Romanian scholars, but there are no signs of linguists—at conferences these fields are barely represented—who would be able to carry on with the legacy of JÁNOS MELICH, ISTVÁN KNIEZSA, LAJOS KISS, ELEMÉR MOÓR, KÁROLY MOLLAY, GYULA NÉMETH, LAJOS LIGETI.

The above issues of the onomastics in the Carpathian basin could be promoted by international scientific cooperation programmes in which research centres and foreign universities, which operate in bilingual areas, could take part. We could also profit from research of name usage in the modern era, since the experience from multilingual territories may offer conclusions with regard to evaluating language contact in the early period.

In the investigation of the Hungarian name inventory—even in the etymological analysis area—major results can be achieved by a systematic, typological approach. The historical toponym typology invented by KNIEZSA did not achieve its original aim, i.e. to be able to find out the time of origin independently of the recorded date, at least not in its rigid form in which the procedure was applied in the mid third of the last century, and even in the period to come. But independently of this the discussion of different types of names enhanced the issue of Hungarian toponomastics: in this respect, monographs such as MIKLÓS KÁZMÉR's work on names containing the elements *falu* 'village' (1970) or ANDRÁS MEZŐ's work on patrociny settlement names (1996) have established new and generalised knowledge. Further semantic and morphological types are waiting to be processed: especially ethnic and tribe names, names of professions, settlement names of equal form as personal names, and also derived names. These analyses could be then complemented by an adequately detailed alternation typology.

7. The basis—what is more, the only objective in the early times—of historically aimed, linguistic name analysis is etymology. However, in my opinion, modern onomastics cannot be limited to etymology as interpreted in its narrow sense. Traditional etymology is usually satisfied by presenting a form of a name in a language: its phonological and morphological structure, and the meaning of lexemes within it.

The historical-etymological analysis of names can be interpreted in a much wider sense, however: the procedure according to which we take into account more factors than what is present in a traditional approach is called name reconstruction. Name reconstruction examines source data according to their re-



relationship within the source, it reconstructs the possible pronunciation of the names based on the denotative identification and as a member of a determined set of data, it casts light on the morphological and semantic structure of the name, aiming at giving clues rather than purely discussing possible motivation of name giving; furthermore, it places great emphasis on determining the social value of names appearing in the sources. A multifactorial reconstruction analysis like this does not only increase the validity of etymology, but it also offers more possibilities for the use of linguistic results.

A detailed description of principles and methods of name reconstruction is not possible within the frame of this presentation and the degree to which it can surpass the results of traditional etymology will also be indicated through presenting only a subdiscipline: this aspect refers to the sociological evaluation of name data, a point rarely discussed.

The importance of the above was first mentioned by LORÁND BENKŐ's in his Anonymus studies. BENKŐ questioned the validity of several names mentioned by Anonymus and many of them were proven to be had been invented by Anonymus himself, i.e. that they had no real name use to support them. Name reconstructions like this are rare among settlement names, but Latin settlement names raise the question of actual name use.

Anonymus's work is of special importance, explaining this author's influence for studies of this kind of text and the languages used in it. This standpoint is valid with respect to more numerous source materials, although in this latter case we are talking about legal charters. If we want to evaluate the name sociology situation of Hungarian, or rather non-Latin elements in charters, firstly, we have to take into consideration that the certificate will bear the language influence of the person/people who issued it.

In charters—primarily with regards to toponym use—the authors' effort to a keep a norm is obvious: a most important instance of it is the application of Latin forms, which—contrary to approaches which considered this phenomenon occasional—is an activity governed by well-defined rules, although not a rigid activity. However, not only the Carpathian basin toponyms occurring in Latin, but certain Hungarian names can also be attributed to the authors of charters, can also be connected to their language use. These elements are either the fairly frequent geographical common names cataphorically or anaphorically referring to toponyms from the texts, or the equally frequent tree names which randomly alternate with their Latin equivalents in border districts. In connection to these types of elements we need to note that we can, or more precisely, we should look for a broader layer of language users in their background.



Besides the above, we need to take into account some further possibilities with regards to the name-forming activity of charter authors. It is very rare, for example, that a charter author makes a mistake when using a certain name. It is of course difficult to form a picture about a situation like this, since we are informed precisely by the very charters. However, we can rightly assume that this is the reason for the ambiguity of certain data.

Since charters from the Middle Ages—as legal documents in general—are connected to each other, it is reasonable to suppose that the persons in charge of certain matters decided to take over name forms from previous documents, even if they were not used in those forms anymore, or even if they have already been forgotten.

I am not familiar with any instances of falsified name use by the charter authors—if we disregard Latinised solutions, of course. The effort to preserve forms, to remain faithful to the original, derives from the legal purpose of charters. GYULA KRISTÓ had a similarly determined unequivocal opinion: “Under no circumstances did [the scriptors] forge toponyms” (2000: 27). However, there very probably examples of using linguistic forms on the basis of existing toponyms, which were not used in everyday speech; and all this due to the effort to avoid ambiguity and create precise formulations.

If, taking account of the above circumstances, we adopt the view (as a starting point for further elaborations) which is generally accepted today, namely, that charters and basically also narratives—due to their purpose—in the majority of cases they employ toponyms in the form used at the given period, then we have to add to this statement that large numbers of written documents contain linguistic elements which can be considered as linguistic imprints of the charter authors. During a name sociology analysis, the first step is to separate these from other remnants, and—if possible—to look for actual linguistic forms in their background.

Examining the activity of charter authors, we cannot rule out the possibility that the authorities issuing the charters translated into Hungarian or Hungarianised in other ways the toponymic corpus of German, Slavic or even Romanian groups living in Hungarian settlements in the Carpathian basin. However, the fact that it was not a general tendency to translate names into Hungarian is proven by obvious circumstances. Namely, many highly prestigious Hungarian settlements have names which are borrowed from Slavic: counties like *Csongrád* and *Nógrád* and also *Visegrád*, which functioned as a royal residence for a while. Although these settlements obviously had a Hungarian population during the chartering period, their Hungarian names never occur. And all this even though there were no obstacles to Hungarian names appearing in the documents, since in Anonymus’s work *Csongrád* occurs as *nigrum castrum*, and in charters from the Anjou period *Visegrád* appears as *Altum*



Castrum, all of which refers to the fact that the people in the chancellery were aware of the original structure of the names (see KRISTÓ 1986: 32–33).

LORÁND BENKŐ was the first one to notice, when analysing the toponymic corpus of mainly German-populated areas in the Middle Ages, that charters contain Hungarian names besides German names. These can refer to Hungarian name forms, consequently, to a Hungarian ethnic environment, but it is not ruled out that “they are artificially formed by the charter authors” (2003: 130, see also 1998: 115).

In my opinion, the statement made by KLÁRA SÁNDOR on “purely historical linguistic” analyses is especially true for the history of toponym analysis; namely, that “we tend to disregard bilingualism because the analysis usually focused on linguistic data”. Linguistic borrowing, the substratum effect, is impossible without a certain degree of bilingualism (1998: 7–8). We also know that in their formation and change, in any period of time, linguistic prestige also plays a role, and prestige on the other hand, reflects social value relations based on many different factors.

Even if we are lucky enough to be able to analyse the name sociology situation of sources according to the complex system of parameters described above, we cannot directly conclude which ethnic group inhabited the settlements denoted by a given name. Even in spite of the fact that names have had a significant role in determining from long ago, and especially with respect to the period around the Hungarian Conquest: this is the keynote of the works of JÁNOS MELICH (1925–1929) and ISTVÁN KNIEZSA (1938), but GYULA KRISTÓ (2000) also applies this method. The last to conduct a deep analysis into Southern Transylvanian settlements was LORÁND BENKŐ (2002).

The problem of identifying the name, the language and the ethnic group is, in my opinion, an integral part of name reconstruction. This procedure, however—although this is an important question, and we have seen some fortunate applications of it—can hardly be elaborated with scientific exactness. Researchers using names as historic sources still have to solve a large number of problems, or, to put it differently, they still have to complete the biggest task in this area.

References

BENKŐ LORÁND (1998) *Név és történelem. Tanulmányok az Árpád-korról*. Budapest.

BENKŐ LORÁND (2002) *Az ómagyar nyelv tanúságtétele. Perújítás Dél-Erdély Árpád-kori korai történetéről*. Budapest.



- BENKŐ LORÁND (2003) *Beszélnek a múlt nevei. Tanulmányok az Árpád-kori tulajdonnevekről.* Budapest.
- FEHÉRTÓI KATALIN (2004) *Árpád-kori személynévtár (1000–1301).* Budapest.
- GYÖRFFY GYÖRGY (1963–1998) *Az Árpád-kori Magyarország történeti földrajza I–IV.* Budapest.
- GYÖRFFY GYÖRGY ed. (1992) *Diplomata Hungariae Antiquissima. Vol. I.* Budapest.
- HOFFMANN ISTVÁN ed. (2005) *Korai magyar helynévszótár 1. Abaúj–Csongrád vármegye.* Debrecen.
- KÁZMÉR MIKLÓS (1970) *A »falu« a magyar helynevekben (XIII–XIX. század).* Budapest.
- KISS LAJOS (1988) *Földrajzi nevek etimológiai szótára I–II.* Budapest.
- KNIEZSA ISTVÁN (1938) *Magyarország népei a XI.-ik században.* In: *Emlékkönyv Szent István király halálának kilencszázadik évfordulóján.* Edited by SERÉDI JUSZTINIÁN. Budapest. II, pp. 365–472.
- KRISTÓ GYULA (1986) *A Kárpát-medence -grad ~ -grád utótagú helyneveiről.* In: *Névtani Értesítő* 11, pp. 31–41.
- KRISTÓ GYULA (2000) *Magyarország népei Szent István korában.* In: *Századok* 134, pp. 3–44.
- MELICH JÁNOS (1925–1929) *A honfoglaláskori Magyarország.* Budapest.
- MEZŐ ANDRÁS (1996) *A templomcím a magyar helységnevekben. 11–15. század.* Budapest.
- SÁNDOR KLÁRA (1998) *A magyar–török kétnyelvűség és ami körülötte van.* In: *Nyelvi érintkezések a Kárpát-medencében.* Edited by LANSTYÁK ISTVÁN–SZABÓMIHÁLY GIZELLA. Pozsony, pp. 7–26.