

# Muslims in Medieval Hungary<sup>1</sup>

**Dr. Jaroslav Drobný**

**Lecturer of Arabic and Islamic History, Department of  
Classical and Semitic Philology, Faculty of Arts,  
Comenius University Bratislava**

## **Abstract:**

Islam appeared in the territory of Central Europe over a thousand years ago; its historical presence, however, was not continuous. Muslims were present in the territory of Hungarian Kingdom two times: in medieval times, essentially since foundation of Hungarian state to half of 13th century, and in early modern period, during the Ottoman invasion to Central Europe. The presence of Muslims in medieval Hungary is the least known. This paper tries to find answers to questions about the emergence, duration and destruction of Islamic community in Hungary in pre-Ottoman period according to the synthesis of Arabic and Latin sources.

## **Keywords:**

Medieval Kingdom of Hungary, Hungarian Muslims in medieval times, ancient Hungarians, auxiliary tribes, Mongol invasion to Hungary in 1242.

---

<sup>1</sup> This article was written within the scope of VEGA 1/0731/22 grant project. The text is based on DROBNÝ, JAROSLAV: Arabic Mentions of Islamized Ethnic Groups in The Carpathian Basin from 9th to 13th Centuries. [Dissertation thesis]. Comenius University in Bratislava, 2014.

## المسلمون في مملكة المجر في العصور الوسطى

د. ياروسلاف دروبني

مدرس التاريخ العربي والإسلامي، قسم فقه اللغة الكلاسيكية والسامية، كلية الآداب،  
جامعة كومينيوس براتيسلافا

### ملخص البحث

ظهر الإسلام في منطقة أوروبا الوسطى منذ أكثر من ألف عام. ومع ذلك، فإن وجوده التاريخي لم يكن مستمراً. تواجد المسلمون في أراضي المملكة المجرية مرتين: الأولى في العصور الوسطى، وخصوصاً منذ تأسيس الدولة المجرية حتى منتصف القرن الثالث عشر، والمرتة الثانية في أوائل العصر الحديث، أثناء الغزو العثماني لأوروبا الوسطى. أما وجود المسلمين في المجر في العصور الوسطى فلا يعرفه الكثيرون. يحاول هذا البحث الإجابة عن عدد من الأسئلة حول ظهور ومدة ونهاية المجتمع الإسلامي في المجر في فترة ما قبل العصر العثماني من خلال الإفادة من بعض المصادر والمراجع العربية واللاتينية.

### كلمات مفتاحية:

مملكة المجر في العصور الوسطى، المسلمون المجريون في العصور الوسطى، المجريون القدماء، القبائل المساعدة، الغزو المغولي للمجر عام ١٢٤٢.

## Muslims in Medieval Hungary

Dr. Jaroslav Drobný

There is no clear answer to the question of when Islam became widespread among the Old Hungarian tribes, at least to some small extent. If we think logically, it seems likely that Islam already had the chance to reach these tribes during its nomadic life on the steppes north of the Black Sea. In this area they came into contact, close contact, with ethnic groups for whom Islam was no longer a novelty. In this area, they were also under the influence (or rather in the sphere of interest) of the Khazar Khaganate, which, despite declaring Judaism as the official state religion, was largely religiously heterogeneous, and Muslims were especially numerous among the warrior component of its society. But we have no direct or indirect evidence of Islam among the ancient Hungarians before their resettlement in the Carpathian Basin.

Only upon arrival in Central Europe do we have such reports. First of all, it's al-Masūdī's report.<sup>2</sup> If he speaks of Islam among the ancient Hungarians, he speaks of them in the first half of the 10th century, i.e. before the reign of Prince Takshon (c. 955-971), when, according to the *Gesta Hungarorum* (Hungarian medieval chronicle from the 12th and 13th centuries), Muslim missionaries from Volga Bulgaria came to Hungary.<sup>3</sup> Since we have no other information about Muslim missionary activity before their arrival, al-Masūdī's report can nevertheless be regarded with some reservations as evidence, or rather an indication, that Islam arrived in Central Europe with the resettlement of the ancient Hungarians, and that it had therefore already spread among them in their old settlements.

<sup>2</sup> AL-MASŪDĪ: *Murūğ aḍ-ḍahab wa ma'ādin al-ğawhar*. Bayrūt, (without year), p. 206-209.

<sup>3</sup> *Anonymi Belae regis notarii De gestis Hungarorum liber*. Ed.: Endlicher, I. L. Viennae, 1827, p. 201.

Another piece of information is the report of Ibrāhīm ibn Ya‘qūb.<sup>4</sup> It can be dated fairly precisely, having been in Central Europe between 965-966 - that is, during the reign of Prince Taxon in the Principality of Hungary. He thus speaks of Hungarian Muslims at about the time of the Bulgarian mission, but in its early days rather than after its full development.

We can therefore assume that Muslims arrived in the Carpathian Basin already in the Old Hungarian tribal union during its resettlement. These earliest Muslims were probably forced to convert at the time of the Christianisation of Hungary in the 11th century, along with other non-Christian inhabitants of Hungary. However, their communities persisted until the end of the 11th century, as King Ladislaus (c. 1040-1095) issued legal decrees against them.<sup>5</sup> These are still quite mild, especially compared to the laws of King Coloman (c. 1070-116)<sup>6</sup> – we must conclude that they were probably not effective.

As late as the middle of the 12th century, as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġarnāfī testifies, Muslims in Hungary were an oppressed minority who had to practice their religion in secret.<sup>7</sup> But in contrast to this group, there is another group in Hungary which, on the contrary, freely professed the Islamic faith. We must therefore conclude that a new wave of Muslim migrants arrived in Hungary in the first half of the 12th century, probably as a result of their military service, exercising their right to freedom of religion. The only such group to which these assumptions fit seems to us to be the Pechenegs.

When "pondering" over the homeland or place of origin of the Hungarian Muslims, the most reasonable alternatives seem to be Khorezm (Hwārizm) and Volga Bulgaria. But we must not forget Khazaria, or the area on the lower Volga, called "Khazar" in

<sup>4</sup> AL-BAKRĪ: *Kitāb al-masālik wa l-mamālik*. Bayrūt, 1992, p. 490.

<sup>5</sup> Sancti Ladislai regis decretorum liber primus. ZÁVODSZKY, LEVENTE: *A Szent István, Szent László és Kálmán korabeli törvények és zsinati határozatok forrásai*. [Sources of the laws and synod decisions of the time of St. Stephen, St. Ladislaus and Coloman.] Budapest, 1904, p. 159

<sup>6</sup> ZÁVODSZKY, 1904, p. 189-190.

<sup>7</sup> AL-GARNĀFĪ, ABŪ HĀMID: *Rihla al-Ġarnāfī: Tuḥfat al-albāb wa nuḥbat al-a‘ġāib* Ed.: Waḥab, Q. Bayrūt, 2003, p. 137-146.

Arabic sources long after the demise of the Khazar Empire. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġarnāṭī describes for us his stay in Sahsīn in words that hint of an ethnically diverse, outright cosmopolitan nomadic city, inhabited by Volga Bulgars, Suvars, Oghuzs, Khorezmians, and even merchants from the Arab West. Each of these nations had its own judges, interpreters of the law, and preachers.<sup>8</sup> There is no more appropriate area where Hungarian Muslims could seek out teachers of the faith, where they could find ideological support.

### **Muslims in the Defence Policy of the Hungarian Kings**

There are not a few cases in history when a nation (in the political sense of the word) was composed of several ethnic groups. Not always, but often it was a ruling class (warriors, nobility) of one ethnicity and the common people of a different ethnicity. The migration of peoples was often more about the warrior class moving to new settlements, where they replaced the previous ruling class (or merged with it) and over time formed a new nation. Of course, each such case had its own specificities, we can find many similarities between them, but even more differences. Consider, for example, the English nation, which was formed from a subjugated Celtic and Anglo-Saxon population and a Norman ruling class (heavily influenced by French culture and language). An even better example for comparison with the ancient Hungarians is the nation of Bulgarians, created by the fusion of the Bulgarian Turkic nomads and the Slavic settled population. In this case, the Slavic ethnic element "prevailed", the language of the newly created ethnicity being Slavic. In the case of the Bulgarians of the Volga region it was the other way around, the language of the nomadic "newcomers" prevailed over the subjugated population of the Finno-Ugric people.

Certainly not the only cause, but one of the most important nameable reasons why the Finno-Ugric ethnic element prevailed among the Old Hungarian tribes can be found in the defeat at the

---

<sup>8</sup> PAULINY, 1999, p. 157.

Battle of Lechfeld <sup>9</sup>, where the Old Hungarian military elite (we can speak of a warrior class, perhaps inaccurately the military caste, the term “nobility” would be inadequate) was slaughtered and as a result the language of the common people prevailed in the core of the Old Hungarian tribal union (the subjugated indigenous population is not now considered). It was certainly not ethnically homogeneous either, but its Finno-Ugric part must have been the most numerous.

Of course, not all the Old Hungarian warriors died at the Battle of Lechfeld, in which case the Old Hungarian tribal federation in the Pannonian Plain would not have survived and would not have been able to form the basis of the future Hungarian state. But the fact that its expansion, the predatory raids into Western Europe, was halted shows that the main “pro-expansion” component lost its position, or the driving force of the expansion, the nomadic warriors, lost the ability to carry out predatory raids. The demise of the military elite on the battlefield is the most logical explanation for this state of affairs.

The demise of the Turkish military elite was also one of the main reasons why the influx of new nomadic warriors from the eastern steppes was necessary. One of the reasons for the success of the Old Hungarian raiders in their predatory expeditions; perhaps even the most important reason, was their military tactics. The use of fast cavalry assault troops of archers proved to be the main reason for the tactical superiority of nomadic armies against European early medieval armies, composed mainly of infantry and slower, albeit heavier, cavalry, both in the earlier (Huns, Avars) and in the later (Mongols) period. Despite the transition of the Old Hungarian nomads to a settled way of life, light cavalry formed an important part of the Hungarian army in later times, disproportionately larger than in the surrounding early medieval states.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Garnāṭī colorfully describes for us how King Géza II. respected the Muslim warriors. But Hungarian sources are

---

<sup>9</sup> The crushing defeat of Hungarian army in 955, the end of Hungarian invasions of Western Europe.

silent on this. On the contrary, however, the *Chronicon Pictum* (medieval illustrated chronicle from the kingdom of Hungary from the 14th century) informs us about the fighting morale of the Pechenegs (and the Sikuls) (albeit two centuries later), which writes about the battle of Géza II with the Austrians that “the wicked Pechenegs and the disgraceful Sikuls all scattered at once like sheep before the wolves.”<sup>10</sup>

### Muslims in the Economy of Medieval Hungary

Despite laws restricting the Muslim element in economic activity, Latin reports from the time tell us of conversions<sup>11</sup> of Christians to Islam, which was of great concern especially to church leaders. In their correspondence of 1231 and 1232 we find complaints and agitation over the actions of Muslims and Jews who were gaining high positions and enslaving the Christian population<sup>12</sup>. In 1235, Muslims were already obliged to pay the church tithe<sup>13</sup> regardless of the fact that they were not Christians.

Perhaps this is what al-Qazwīnī is telling us when he says that “*they pay tribute to the Christians, just as the Christians here pay tribute to the Muslims.*”<sup>14</sup>

Strong Islamic influences can be seen in Hungarian money and coinage. It is not only the strong representation of Arab coins or coins originating from Islamic countries that may have reached the territory of Hungary, either as spoil from the raids of Hungarian tribes or as a result of the activity of Muslim merchants or the intensive trade exchange between Central Europe and Muslim countries.<sup>15</sup> Another interesting fact is that in the territory occupied

<sup>10</sup> SOPKO, JÚLIUS.: *Kroniky stredovekého Slovenska*. [Chronicles of Medieval Slovakia] Budmerice, 1995, p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> FEJÉR, GEORGIUS.: *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis, studio et opera T. III. Vol. 2. p. 295.*

<sup>12</sup> FEJÉR, 1829, p. 241-242.

<sup>13</sup> FEJÉR, 1829, p. 426.

<sup>14</sup> AL-QAZWĪNĪ, ZAKARIYĀ IBN MUḤAMMAD: *Atār al-bilād wa aḥbār al-ibād*. Bayrūt, 1998, p.609-610.

<sup>15</sup> There is no doubt about the activity of Muslim traders in the Carpathian Basin or Central Europe. The transit routes of trade between the Middle East

by Hungarian tribes, archaeological finds dating back to the 10th and 11th centuries contain coins of a similar type to those found in finds from Iran, Mongolia and Kazakhstan.

With the transformation of socio-economic relations in the 11th and 12th centuries, monetary exchange and the associated financial transactions using interest became increasingly important. It was the non-Christian bankers who found a niche in this exchange.

The management of financial operations is placed in the hands of Muslims, which provokes reactions on the part of the Hungarian Church. However, the role played by Muslim financiers in Hungary is also closely related to their ability to ensure the exchange of goods between their place of operation and their place of origin.<sup>16</sup> Evidence for this statement can be found in the fact that after the Tartar invasion, or after the occupation of the East European (and West Siberian) steppes by the Mongols and the interruption of trade routes between Central Europe and Central Asia, the reasons and opportunities for further Muslim merchants to operate in Hungary disappeared. On the contrary, the Jews, as they provided both goods and money exchange mainly with the European West, did not lose their role and in the following period fully replaced the Muslim financiers.

We find much stronger arguments in the Hungarian coinage. Very interesting is the occurrence of Hungarian coins with Arabic inscriptions, or with embossing imitating Arabic script. From the reign of King Stephen IV and Bela III. we are familiar with coins of "Oriental type", which at first glance appear to be of Muslim origin. A closer examination of these plates, however, reveals that

---

and Western Europe had always passed through the area under study. But the territory of Central Europe was certainly not only a transit but also a destination area for long-distance trade. However, the possibility of commercial activities of Central European merchants and traders in Islamic countries cannot be argued against either, despite the lack of more specific knowledge about this.

<sup>16</sup> GYONGYOSSY, MÁRTON: Magyar penztortenet (1000-1526). [Hungarian monetary 1000-1526]. In: Magyar középkori gazdaság- és penztortenet. Jegyzet és forrásgyűjtemény. [Hungarian medieval economic and monetary history] Budapest, 2006.

the writing, although strikingly similar to the Arabic of the Kufa type, is not legible, or the inscription makes absolutely no sense. Attempts by many Orientalists to decipher it have been futile. A possible explanation is that in the 13th century coinage in Hungary was (if only briefly) in Muslim hands. This assumption is indirectly confirmed by the Golden Bull of King Andrew II. Article XXIV states: "Chamber counts, minters, salters, and tollmen may be the nobles of the kingdom. Ishmaelites and Jews cannot become them."<sup>17</sup> Since the laws tend to reflect something that had already happened in the past, we can safely assume the following in the aforementioned authorities of Jews and Muslims before the Golden Bull was issued. The possession of the aforementioned positions gives the possibility of capital accumulation, which the presence of "professional" financiers directly implies.

Coins with inscriptions reminiscent of Arabic script directly indicate the assumption that their minting was initiated by Muslims, since such an act has no meaning for Christians.<sup>18</sup> However, the inscriptions that make no sense are also evidence of the very low level of education of their authors, and even of the absence of Muslim clerics or Arabic-speaking educated Muslims in their vicinity.

### **The Assimilation and Christianisation Policy of the Hungarian Kings**

We have already mentioned the laws that punish "former" Muslims for returning to the old religion. By comparing the articles of the decrees of King Coloman and Ladislaus, which deal with Ishmaelites and Jews, it strikes us that the punishment only threatens the Christianized Muslims, not the Jews. Does this mean

<sup>17</sup> *De bulla aurea Andreae II regis Hungariae, 1222*. Ed.: Besenyei, L., Érszegi, G., Pedrazza Gorlero, M. Verona, 1999, p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> Unless we consider these imitations as an attempt to counterfeit the coin in order to circulate it in the Islamic area. Aside from the fact that such an attempt would be doomed to failure from the outset, however, such a possibility is pure speculation.

that the return to the old religion (or its secret practice) was tolerated by the Jews? Or were there not Christianized Jews living in the country? It's not out of the question. Suppose some older regulation, which we do not know, commanded Muslim "merchants who call themselves Ishmaelites" to convert to Christianity. However, not everyone respected the decree and returned to the old religion. Such secret Muslims faced the threat of punishment that they would have to leave their villages and forcibly move elsewhere. But they have the opportunity to defend themselves in court if they have been wrongly accused of secretly practising Islam. Apparently, such false accusations were also common. However, this did not apply to the Jews, who were not punished by law for returning to their old religion. Why? On the other hand, according to the following article, marriage between Ishmaelites and Christian women is not legally suppressed, nor is there any threat of penalty. Weren't such marriages common? Why, then, were they common among the Jews?

From these two decrees we can infer, perhaps incorrectly, that the Hungarian official state power (if we are not talking directly about the king) somehow blended Jews and Muslims. A regulation that mentions only Ishmaelites should also apply to Jews; conversely, a regulation that mentions only Jews should logically also apply to Ishmaelites. Were these two concepts merging then? Perhaps yes, but more likely no. For we do not believe that there is any confusion or conflation or overlapping of the terms "Judeus" and "Ishmaelite". Rather, we have here perhaps, if not proof, at least an indication that Islam faced an existential threat in Hungary at this time. There were no official Muslims in Hungary at that time, at least not recognised by the state. The state power knew only the so-called Ishmaelites (merchants who are called Ishmaelites), whom it punished for returning to the old religion. Even, on the whole, the mild punishment for returning "*to his old law through circumcision*" after baptism suggests that it did not apply to the Muslim religion as such, but only to some of its manifestations; a custom rather than a belief. On the contrary, Jews were still (more accurately at this time) tolerated as people who

professed a different faith. Therefore, there could not even be a situation where a Muslim had a Christian wife – just being a Muslim would have been illegal and he should have been punished for it.

If we look at the period of the creation of these regulations, a possible reason why Islam was outlawed in Hungary comes to mind. The regulations of King Ladislaus and Coloman date back to the end of the 11th and the beginning of the 12th century, i.e. to the beginning of the Crusades, when the Muslim element probably did not have suitable living conditions in Christian countries.

Other legal regulations, which appear in the laws of King Ladislaus and Coloman, also confirm our conjecture. Because they still only deal with Jews, they do not mention Muslims. King Ladislaus' decree forbidding Jews to “provoke” Jews with work during Christian holidays<sup>19</sup> does not mention Muslims. The Law acknowledged only the baptized Ishmaelites, whom it punished for falling away from the faith and returning to the old faith. It didn't know Muslims professing Islam, although it knew Jews.

King Coloman's first book of decrees forbid the Jews to trade in Christian slaves<sup>20</sup>, permitting them only to trade in Gentile slaves. The second book of King Coloman's decrees even had a whole chapter devoted to the relations between Christians and Jews,<sup>21</sup> their mutual business relations or the settlement of disputes between them, but no mention of Muslims. The term “Ismaelite” (hysmaelite) there obviously just refers to baptized or converted to former Muslims Christianity. Muslims, who apparently existed only deeply “underground” at the time.

No Latin source explicitly states that the Hungarian Muslims were only members of auxiliary ethnic groups or mercenary warriors from the eastern steppes. Latin sources mostly speak of either ethnic or religious affiliation. They in no way restricted adherence to Islam to solely certain ethnicities, but neither did

<sup>19</sup> ZÁVODSZKY, 1904, p. 162.

<sup>20</sup> ZÁVODSZKY, 1904, p. 192.

<sup>21</sup> ZÁVODSZKY, 1904, p. 195 – 196.

they, conversely, label any ethnicity as adherents of Islam only. It almost begs writing that ethnic and religious identity were strictly distinguished. On the contrary, Arabic sources explicitly state several times that Hungarian Muslims did not differ from Hungarian Christians in language. Even Abū Hāmid al-Garnāfī, who visited Hungary in person, does not particularly emphasize the ethnic distinctiveness of Muslims from the rest of the Hungarian population, despite hinting at it. However, even that hint speaks of origin (abnā' al-maḡāribā, abnā' al-ḥwārizmīja) rather than linguistic reality. The ethnonym was defined linguistically, therefore Hungarian Muslims who spoke Hungarian, regardless of their origin, had to be considered Hungarians. In the same way, if some Muslims were settled in areas with a predominantly non-Hungarian ethnicity and assimilated there, we must already consider them as members of that particular ethnicity.

There are Muslims in Hungary whom an eyewitness speaks of as descendants of the Maḡribians, but whom all scholars suppose to be Pechenegs. And then there were the Muslims of Khorezm who had to conceal their religious beliefs (according to the same witness) despite the fact that they probably got there together with the Pechenegs (since according to al-Bakrī, al-Ḥawālīṣ lived among the Pechenegs<sup>22</sup>).

Perhaps it would be appropriate to stop thinking about the ethnic origins of these groups and start thinking about the two legal traditions, the two legal statuses of Muslims in Hungary. Of course, to stop thinking about ethnicity is not to be taken literally, just stop thinking of the two groups (tolerated Muslims and oppressed Muslims) as two ethnic groups. It is much more likely that the ethnic composition of the two groups was diverse, if not identical in both, then similar.

But if we consider the dual legal (?) status of Muslims, another problem arises. Why does one group have the right to practice its own religion (and if not the right, at least it is tolerated or not punished) and the other group, on the contrary, is forced to secretly practice as a cult? What separates these groups, according to al-

<sup>22</sup> AL-BAKRĪ, p. 446.

Ġarnātī's reports, is origin, or rather only the tradition of origin. On the basis of two traditions of origin, can we also consider two legal statuses? On the basis of the Hungarian legislation of the time, we cannot say anything of the kind. The latter refers to Muslims as a whole.

The thirteenth-century reports are also interesting in that they ignore the ethnic difference between Hungarian Muslims and Christians. There may be two reasons for this:

The first is the progressive assimilation of Hungarian Muslims. Religious assimilation certainly went hand in hand with ethnic assimilation, but it is not impossible that for a time (perhaps only a short period) Hungary was home to a group of Muslims who adapted to the surrounding ethnic environment and adopted the language of the majority population in the region they inhabited. Muslim merchants and financiers tended to live in small communities in the individual royal towns, the market centres. Only in the most important centres of the kingdom can we assume a higher Muslim population. In the smaller towns in the rest of the area, only small groups, perhaps only individuals with family members, were likely to have lived there (if at all!). In defending their religion, they thus lost the advantage enjoyed by large groups performing military service for the king. It was in the group of settled, urban Muslims that the process of assimilation, both ethnic and religious, was most rapid. In reality

The second reason may be the failure of the report's author to linguistically distinguish Muslims from the rest of the country's population. However, a combination of both reasons is not excluded.

### **The Disappearance of the Muslim Community in Hungary**

In the years just before the Mongol invasion, the Muslim element in Hungary reached its peak. Recall that several decades before the Tatar invasion, students of Islamic law from Hungary

informed Yāqūt that their settlements were not fortified.<sup>23</sup> It is therefore logical that they fell victim to Mongol plunder. Although we do not have detailed reports on this, we must assume that it was the Mongol invasion that caused the greatest harm to Islam in Hungary. The surviving community was no longer able to restore its former power.

Of course, some Muslims certainly survived the Mongol invasion unscathed. But it is more likely to be those less free traders and merchants who lived scattered among the majority population, even in fortified towns. Groups of freely professing Muslims – soldiers living in unfortified towns – were heavily decimated.

The letter of King Otakar II of Bohemia to the Pope<sup>24</sup> can be regarded as proof that even twenty years after the Tartar invasion of Hungary, the Muslim community was still able to send soldiers to the royal army in numbers that would have been noticed even by the enemy. But at the same time there is a doubt about whether this was not just a propaganda move by the Czech king, an attempt to slander the enemy. In the letter he listed all possible nationalities (except Jews) that could be found in Hungary at that time, but between the lines we can see a kind of emphasis on their non-affiliation with Western Christianity – an emphasis on the schism and hereticism of many of them.

The demise of the Hungarian Muslim community can therefore be assumed to have occurred as early as the 13th century, a generation or two after the Tatar invasion.

However, we should not look for a problem only in the eastern side of the Carpathians. The relations of the Mongol conquerors of the South Russian steppes with the Russian principalities were at times tense, at times peaceful, but mainly they were relations. On the contrary, the contacts of the territories ruled by them with Hungary seem to have ceased, despite several trips by various

<sup>23</sup> YĀQŪT AL-ḤAMAWĪ, SHIHĀB AD-DĪN: *Mu‘ğam al-buldān*. Bayrūt, 1995, p. 384-385.

<sup>24</sup> FEJÉR, GEORGIUS. *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis, studio et opera*. Tom. 4, Vol. 3, p. 15.

missionaries or emissaries to the East. After the consolidation of Mongol power in the Golden Horde, the ports on the Crimean Peninsula became the centre of the main transit trade route,<sup>25</sup> from where goods travelled to Western Europe by sea via merchants from the Italian city republics of Venice and Genoa. In Hungary, after the Tatar invasion, some psychological barrier seemed to have formed in relation to the danger from the East. The situation in Hungary after the departure of the Tatars was probably not pleasant for the Muslim element. As it is usually the case with similar disasters, the search is usually for the culprit and if not the real culprit, then someone who will at least be blamed for the situation. In Hungary, the Cumans were first in line, but the Muslims (and Jews) were not spared the wrath of the population either. Besides, the Tatars pulled out quite unexpectedly and nobody knew if and when they would return. The mood of the society, which at any time might have expected a repetition of the previous catastrophe, was probably not favourable to people who professed another faith.

Hungarian Muslims were strongly tied to two kinds of activities – they were either warriors or merchants (or financiers). Muslim merchants, i.e. the non-military component of the Islamic community in Hungary, had been under pressure from the Christianisation policy of the Hungarian kings long before the Tatar invasion. The Tartar disaster, or the subsequent severing of relations with the original homeland (whether in the Volga region or in Khorezm) only completed a process that had begun at least a hundred years earlier.

On the other hand, the warrior component of the Islamic community, which had resisted Christianisation for a long time, was confronted with the loss of its privileged position after the Tatar invasion. As we have already mentioned, the recruitment of fighters from the east was due to the need for the presence of army units fighting in the nomadic way of warfare, after the Hungarians themselves had settled down and had lost control of this way of

---

<sup>25</sup> CIOCÎLTAN, VIRGIL: *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*. Leiden, 2012, p. 33.

warfare. The fact that these eastern fighters were Muslims was only a consequence of the unavailability of non-Muslims. But even before the Tartar invasion a large (compared to the previous ones very large) group of eastern nomadic warriors arrived in Hungary, which for a very long time (practically forever) satisfied the Hungarian demand for light cavalry. But this group of Cumans was not Muslim,<sup>26</sup> they were pagans (shamanists, animists) and partly perhaps Christians. Had they been Muslims, the process of their Christianisation would have been much more complex and there would have been more references to it, at least to the extent that information on their massive (but gradual) conversion has survived. The process of the demise of the Muslim community in Hungary was not so much connected with the severing of relations with the East – only the merchant class of Muslims, who had long before been in the position of secret Muslims, would have disappeared. It is related to the fact that the Hungarian state no longer needed them and thus no longer tolerated their different religion.

This is especially obvious when compared to the other community of non-Christian inverts, the Jews. While the Jews, after the fall of Tartary, enjoyed, if not the popularity of the Hungarian state, at least the interest of the crown, the Muslims were ignored by the crown. Of course, we can take it as a near certainty that the previous legal restrictions (regardless of whether and how they were complied with) remained in force. In 1251, Belo IV granted the Jews a privilege that guaranteed them significant economic and social status, the right of free movement and trade, personal freedom and the free exercise of their faith. They were subordinate to the royal chamber, the king administering his overlordship in their affairs through the office of the Jewish judge (Iudex iudeorum), whom he himself appointed.<sup>27</sup> He does not grant any similar privileges to Muslims.

Of course, Islam did not disappear from Hungary immediately, it perhaps took a few generations. But while the importance of the

<sup>26</sup> This also settles the question of the possible Muslim religion of the Cumans.

<sup>27</sup> PATAI, RAPHAEL: *The Jews of Hungary*. Detroit, 1996, p. 61.

Jewish community grew, or at least relatively stabilised, the Muslim community became increasingly marginalised, even to the point of being overlooked by official documents.<sup>28</sup> This does not mean, of course, that references to (and associated with) Muslims were disappearing from the documents. Rather, we want to point out that these references were already referring to persons of Muslim origin (not denomination!), who must have already been considered Christians. The signs of belonging of their ancestors (perhaps not too ancient) had not been lost from their names or nicknames.

Unlike Muslim communities in southern Europe (Spain, Portugal, Sicily), which were forcibly Christianised, we have no such reports from Hungary. Apart from the regulations of the late 11th and early 12th centuries, we do not know of any legislation that could be considered forcible conversions.<sup>29</sup> Even the aforementioned edicts of Kings Ladislaus and Coloman punished a return to Islam, not its practice. Of course, we can think of kinder treatment of Muslims in Hungary, since they did not come from the conquered population of the conquered territories, but belonged among the immigrants. There were no political reasons behind their Christianisation. It would be naive to think that there was no violent form of Christianisation by the church and state, but we have no evidence of its mass use.

In the relationship between majority Christianity and Islam in Hungary, there were probably periods of clashes and periods of relative peace, during which the members of the different religions did not live in brotherly love, but if they did not accept each other, they at least tolerated each other.

---

<sup>28</sup> One more possibility could be outlined here, but it is highly speculative. Considering the slow disappearance of references to Muslims and the almost unchanged intensity of reports about Jews, when we add the occasional merging or overlapping of the terms “Jew” and “Muslim” (Judeos, Ismaelitas), the idea of the merging of at least a small proportion of Muslims in the Jewish community is highly heretical.

<sup>29</sup> BEREND, NORA: *At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims and 'Pagans' in Medieval Hungary c. 1000- c. 1300*. Cambridge, 2001, p. 237

**SOURCES:**

- 1) AL-BAKRĪ: *Kitāb al-masālik wa l-mamālik*. Bayrūt: Dār al-Ġarb al-islāmī, 1992.
- 2) AL-GARNĀṬĪ, ABŪ HĀMID: *Rihla al-Garnāṭī: Tuḥfat al-albāb wa nuḥbat al-aḡāib* Ed.: Waḥab, Q. Bayrūt: Al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabīya li ḍ-dirāsāt wa n-nashr, 2003.
- 3) AL-MASŪDĪ: *Murūḡ ad-ḍahab wa ma'ādin al-ḡawhar*. Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmīya (without year).
- 4) AL-QAZWĪNĪ, ZAKARIYĀ IBN MUḤAMMAD: *Aṭār al-bilād wa aḥbār al-'ibād*. Bayrūt: Dār Sādir, 1998.
- 5) *Anonymi Belae regis notarii De gestis Hungarorum liber*. Ed.: Endlicher, I. L. Viennae: Caroli Gerold, 1827.
- 6) BEREND, NORA: *At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims and 'Pagans' in Medieval Hungary c. 1000- c. 1300*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001.
- 7) CIOCÎLTAN, VIRGIL: *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.
- 8) *De bulla aurea Andreae II regis Hungariae, 1222*. Ed.: Besenyei, L., Érszegi, G., Pedrazza Gorlero, M. Verona: Valdonega, 1999.

---

مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

- 9) DROBNÝ, JAROSLAV: *Arabic Mentions of Islamized Ethnic Groups in The Carpathian Basin from 9th to 13th Centuries*. [Dissertation thesis]. Bratislava: Comenius University, 2014.
- 10) FEJÉR, GEORGIUS.: *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis, studio et opera T. III. Vol. 2*. Budae: Typogr. regiae Universitatis Ungaricae, 1829.
- 11) FEJÉR, GEORGIUS. *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis, studio et opera*. Tom. 4, Vol. 3. Budae: Typogr. regiae Universitatis Ungaricae, 1829.
- 12) GYONGYOSSY, MÁRTON: Magyar penztortenet (1000-1526). [Hungarian monetaries 1000-1526]. In: Magyar középkori gazdaság- és penztortenet. Jegyzet és forrasgyűjtemeny. Budapest: ELTE, 2006.
- 13) PAULINY, JÁN.: *Arabské správy o Slovanoch 9. – 12. stor.* [Arabic Reports about the Slavic People from the 9th till the 12th Centuries]. Bratislava: Veda, 1999.
- 14) PATAI, RAPHAEL: *The Jews of Hungary*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996.
- 15) SOPKO, JÚLIUS.: *Kroniky stredovekého Slovenska*. [Chronicles of Medieval Slovakia] Budmerice: RAK, 1995.

16) YĀQŪT AL-ḤAMAWĪ, SHIHĀB AD-DĪN: *Mu'ğam al-buldān*. Dār Sādir. Bayrūt, 1995.

17) ZÁVODSZKY, LEVENTE: *A Szent István, Szent László és Kálmán korabeli törvények és zsinati határozatok forrásai*. [Sources of the laws and synod decisions of the time of St. Stephen, St. Ladislaus and Coloman.] Budapest: Stephaneum, 1904.