

CONCERNING THE HISTORY OF THE MAGYAR—SLOVAK LANGUAGE FRONTIER

BY

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It is an interesting phenomenon that in Hungary until 1934 demography made no development, — or at any rate the development of that science was not on a level with that of political historiography, despite the fact that it is indispensably necessary as an aid to that science. Prior to the first Great War Hungarian science was permeated with a spirit of peace and toleration in respect of demographic questions. This attitude was the result of the general inner equipoise of the country. The Hungarian (Magyar) State-idea regarded every ethnic group as a Member. And there was no friction within the country as between the several peoples. There was nothing whatsoever to urge the scholars and research students to carry out ethnographical researches for political purposes "in the interest of the ruling race". In Hungary all peoples alike were "ruling races". We may say indeed that the "nationality problems" were imported into Hungary from outside. The Rumanian "nationality question" came into being on the farther side of the Transylvanian mountains. The Croatian "nationality questions" were fanned into flame by Serbian imperialism. The Slovak "nationality problem" was brought to Rózsashegy and a few other towns in the Hungarian Highlands from Prague. These outside influences resorted also to the empty accessories of pseudo-science. They would fain employ demographic arguments in support of their imperialistic aspirations. This was the origin of the false theory known as "Daco-Romanism", as also of the unfounded theory which pretended that the Slavs had been in Upper Hungary prior to the coming of the Magyars.

Now it is of interest to observe that with the peoples living in the immediate neighbourhood of the Magyars demographic researches show a development advancing in intensity in proportion to the intensification of the political

propaganda aimed against the Hungarians. *The neighbouring peoples have placed this science at the service, not of objective scientific cognition, but of political interests.* The conciliatory attitude of the Magyars in evidence in nationality matters — this fact must not be forgotten in this connection — was late in realising the real situation. Today Hungarian demographers have to take the field against a whole legion of pseudo-scientific works. Recently there appeared in the Slovak book-market a work by Branislav Varsik dealing with the development of the Hungarian-Slovak language frontier during the last two centuries. A point characteristic of the method employed by Varsik is that his criterion for deciding whether the several villages lying on the Magyar-Slovak language frontier are to be regarded as Slovak is whether at any one period of their development (at least at one time in their history) they had a majority of Slovak inhabitants. The number of sources to be consulted is very large; at least about 10 works have to be employed for the purpose of re-constructing the nationality development of the villages of Northern Hungary during the last two centuries. Now Varsik, if he finds one of the 10 figures proving the existence of a Slovak majority, regards the village in question as an original Slovak settlement; in his system no importance whatever attaches to the other nine figures showing the Magyar character of the village in question. Such a pseudo-scientific method is the product of propaganda endeavouring to achieve cheap, ephemeral political results.

Not long ago there appeared in the Hungarian book-market a work by Stephen Kniezsa, professor in the University of Kolozsvár, entitled "Concerning the History of the Magyar-Slovak Language Frontier". Kniezsa employs entirely different means from those used by Varsik. The first thing to be noted in connection with his work is that he has nothing whatever to do with (and probably has no sense for) ephemeral propaganda as has his Slovak colleague. His book is an unpretentious work; but the results obtained are all the more unerring. Whereas Varsik roams desultorily about the whole Magyar-Slovak language frontier, Kniezsa modestly concentrates his researches exclusively on the

counties of Pozsony and Nyitra. Hereby, on the other hand, he has been able to obtain more unequivocal results in the smaller area subjected to research.

What are the results obtained by Stephen Kniezsa?

He proves that *after the original settlement of the Magyars the demographic frontier was 60—70 kilometres farther north than the present Hungarian-Slovak political frontier.* As is well known, the Magyars enclosed their country with a ring of forts (the so-called "gyepű" system). Respecting this system as existing in the north-western districts of Hungary the Hungarian scholar makes the following statement: — *"The primary object of the most ancient Magyar "gyepű" system was to safeguard the routes leading out of the country. The frontier guards (marchmen) also stationed themselves at all times along the roads. Routes of the kind leading out of the country were to be found in the earliest period also in the territory under discussion, — there being two such running from S. to N. through the valleys of the Vág and the Nyitra. The "gyepű" gateway near Pöstyén served to close the road running along the banks of the Vág. That the marchmen guarding this "gyepű" gateway were living here already in the tenth century, is proved by the Slav nasal vowels preserved in the Magyar place-names, which vowels in the tenth century disappeared from the Slovak language, being preserved only by being taken over by the Magyars (e. g. Dombó — Slovak Dubovány, etc.). Another proof of the presence of a considerable number of Magyars is that the Slovaks have here taken over several place-names from the Magyar (e. g. Zsolnafalu — Slovak Zolnafalu, to the north of Pöstyén; Veresvár — Slovak Veresvar, Beregszeg — Beregszeg).* In connection with the latter borrowing (i. e. that of Beregszeg) we must pause for a moment. This borrowing betrays a historical fact of an importance that is decidedly surprising. For the "g" sounds have disappeared entirely from the Slovak language, having changed to "h". The name of Visegrád, for instance, was changed to Visegrad. The transformation of the sound "g" into "h" was completed already in the thirteenth century. Consequently, the fact that the Slovak language has taken over the name of the village Beregszeg unchanged (i. e.

with "g") proves that the borrowing took place at a time when the change of "g" into "h" in the Slovak language had already become a fact. We repeat: this change must have taken place at the end of the thirteenth century; and the fact that we find the name of the village Beregszeg unchanged in the Slovak language, shows that it was not until after the end of the thirteenth century that the Slovaks took over this place-name, — a circumstance that allows of our presuming that it was not until after the thirteenth century that the Slovaks appeared in the vicinity of Pöstyén.

There are numerous other historical facts to support Stephen Kniezsa's statement founded upon linguistic data. To give one instance, *numerous deeds of donation that have come down to us from the days of King Robert Charles speak of the mountainous district stretching to the north of Pöstyén as entirely uninhabited by human beings, it being the haunt of wild animals and in particular of bisons.* And the circumstance must be emphasised that in Kniezsa's method the facts shown by the Slovak language endorse this historical truth.

This is what the alleged autochthonism of the Slovaks in the Hungarian Highlands looks like in reality. *The Slovaks moved into these territories from Moravia through the passes of the Carpathians.* Slovak propaganda still claims the roughly 600.000 Moravian Slovaks living within the territory of the Moravian Protectorate. The settlement of this mass of more than half a million souls still remains entirely unexplained by Slovak historians. That the Slovaks of Moravia continually migrated to Northern Hungary through the passes of the Carpathians, is shown by numerous historical data. The liberal-minded nationality policy of the Hungarian Kingdom never threw any obstacles in the way of immigrants. And in establishing these facts we would merely note our determination not to allow the ancient Magyar character of these territories to be bargained away by the machinations of the pseudo-scientific propaganda of the Slovaks.