

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

Following family tradition, young Károly Czeglédy started studying Protestant theology at the Faculty of Calvinist Theology at Debrecen University in 1932, and his imagination quickly became captivated by the world of the Old Testament. He prepared himself for the traditional professional career of Protestant Old Testament scholar, and, led by the desire to interpret the phenomena of the Old Testament in a wider context, he gradually broadened the scope of his studies to include Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Akkadian, Ugaritic and Arabic during the years he spent at Belfast and Utrecht (1936-1939). The outbreak of the Second World War, however, brought about a radical change in his career: he was obliged to return to Hungary where the Turcologist Julius Németh, and Louis Ligeti, the father of Inner Asian studies in Hungary, directed his interests towards Hungarian prehistory. Thus he added Turkish and Persian to his studies, and also familiarized himself with the intricacies of Islamic geographical literature under the guidance of Hans von Mžik during a scholarship in Vienna in the years 1940-1941.

Hungarian prehistory, a national discipline of central importance in Hungary, covers the history of the Magyars prior to the foundation of the Kingdom of Hungary in the Carpathian basin in 1000 AD. Although the reports of Arab/Muslim geographers, historians, travellers, merchants, spies, missionaries, religious propagandists and philologists occupy a central place among the sources of Hungarian prehistory, yet Czeglédy chose not to limit himself to the investigation of these sources only but to include into his researches sources pertaining to all the nomadic tribes which were active in Central and Eastern Europe in the period in question. This decision was due to a realization of the fact that the protean world of fast moving nomadic tribes on the Eastern European steppe and on its outgrowths in Central Europe must necessarily be regarded as a complex entity, whose closely interconnected constituents could only be studied according to their interaction within the

whole system. This necessity was all the more emphasized by the fact that, owing to the illiteracy of most of these peoples, first hand evidence is rare in this field of studies and most of the written source material is the work of settled, civilized peoples living to the South of the steppe, who more often than not had only vague ideas about the rapidly changing events in the North and the real identity of the protagonists in them, protagonists who followed each other in close succession. The disentanglement of many aspects of this intricate network of events was achieved in a series of brilliant articles by Czeglédy, who applied a complex philological method based on sound textual criticism in the investigation of the written historical and geographical records bequeathed to posterity by neighbouring civilized peoples (from Arabic, Persian, Middle Iranian, Armenian, Georgian, Turkish and Byzantine sources) in addition to the written and epigraphic source material that, though scarce, remained from these peoples themselves, the aim of these investigations being to shed light on various aspects of the history of these peoples, their historical geography, their tribal organizations and systems of power down to the Mongol era. In this respect, he took up the work initiated by Michael Kmoskó (1876-1931), his predecessor as the head of the Department of Semitic Philology, otherwise mainly known as an editor of *Patrologia Syriaca*, whose efforts to collect, annotate and comment on all the Oriental sources pertaining to Hungarian prehistory had been interrupted by his untimely death.

It is to Czeglédy that we owe basic assessments of the Muḥammad-an sources of Hungarian prehistory and of the history of the Magyars in Southern Russia. He succeeded in giving a sound account of al-Ġayhānī's now lost report on the Magyars. He successfully tackled the problem of the apparent contradictions between the two main sources of Hungarian history in the 9th century: al-Ġayhānī's report and the relevant data in *De Administrando Imperio* by Constantine Porphyrogenitus. Czeglédy examined the early occurrences of the ethnonym *Magyar* as well as the origin of important early Hungarian names of persons and dignitaries. He succeeded in giving a balanced appraisal of the true nature of Hungarian sacral dual kingship: its origin and its

role in the Hungarian tribal confederation. The history of the Khazars and their relationship to the Hungarians has always attracted Czeplédy's interest and he has elucidated and disentangled some basic problems of this intricate area, in addition to dedicating a number of important articles to the various aspects of the interaction of Caucasian peoples and neighbouring nomadic tribes. Czeplédy subjected Ibn Faḍlān's account of his journey to the Volga Bulgars to minute philological analysis; his interpretation of al-Hwārizmī's data on the region of the Danube resulted in a successful reconstruction of al-Hwārizmī's now lost map of this region.

Czeplédy was quick to realize, however, that the nomadic peoples participating in the great westward migrations of the 1st millennium AD, who can be traced back to Inner Asia as well as to the North Eastern regions of Asia, began their emergence within the horizon of the mighty Chinese Empire; thus after long years of strenuous effort he acquired a good mastery of Chinese in its various stages of development. This then enabled him to familiarize himself with the world of Chinese chronicles and geographical works and to find the Chinese equivalents of numerous Turkish, Iranian, Arabic, Persian and Armenian geographical, tribal and personal names as well as those of dignitaries. He was even able to trace these peoples back to their previous habitats on the fringes of the Chinese Empire and thus to see these processes in their entirety. In connection with this, mention must be made of his contributions to our knowledge of the migrations of the Huns and Avars.

His articles on the Muslims in the medieval Hungarian Kingdom and on the raid carried out by Hungarian horsemen in Northern Spain in 942 AD have disclosed new and little-known aspects of Hungarian history.

In the person of Professor Károly Czeplédy we are greeting, on his 80th birthday, an outstanding scholar of profound erudition, of exceptionally wide learning; a brilliant mind.

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