

Hungarian nationhood in the light of the ethnosymbolist theory

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to trace the emergence of the ethnic consciousness of the Hungarians and their becoming an ethnion on the basis of the ethnosymbolist paradigm's six criteria. Subsequently, the article also presents the transformation from ethnicity to nationhood based on Anthony D. Smith's model. From the perspective of the ethnosymbolist approach, the emergence of the Hungarian people can be dated to 970, and the birth of the Hungarian nation to 1848. When applying Smith's model to the Hungarians, it can be concluded that the Hungarian people only became a nation after more than eight centuries of further transformations. All this suggests that ethnosymbolism does not go astray in its search for an 'ethnic core' of modern nations back in the distant past. Rather, it would be more appropriate to reconsider whether the term 'nation' can indeed be applied only within the ideological and temporal framework of historical modernity.

KEYWORDS: Hungarians, ethnosymbolism, gentilism, Anthony D. Smith, ethnogenesis, national consciousness, Nationalism Studies

Introduction

Anthony D. Smith (1939–2016), who established nationalism studies as a separate discipline within the social sciences, is also the most prominent representative of the ethnosymbolist school. One of the distinctive features of this paradigm is that it does not see the modern era as a sharp dividing line in the emergence of nations. On the contrary, it recognises the close link between the modern nation and ethnic communities reaching back centuries in the past. Consequently, it differs essentially from the modernist school. In the literature, Smith has established the French term *ethnie* as the name of an ethnic community that existed in pre-modern times, and from which the nation in the modern sense has developed gradually. For ethnosymbolists, *ethnie*, or *ethnos* in Greek and *ethnicum* in the Latinized variant is fundamentally a cultural category. As such, it has had its formation and development, and is not a phenomenon with the apparent permanence of a natural endowment. It is along this criterion that ethnosymbolism can be distinguished from the primordialist school.

Smith defines ethnic communities as “named human populations of people with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity” (1986, 32.). The definition, based on Durkheimian foundations, describes ethnies as historically evolving solidarity communities, welded together into a value-based community by a shared notion of the common past (Malesevic 2004). In his classical work, Smith also explains in detail what criteria exactly must simultaneously coexist in order to speak of an ethnic community (1986, 22–31.). These attributes are (1) a collective proper name, (2) a myth of common ancestry, (3) shared historical memories, (4) one or more differentiating elements of common culture, (5) an association with a specific homeland, and finally (6) a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population.

The objective of this paper is to trace the process of the emergence of the Hungarians’ ethnic consciousness and their becoming an *ethnie* on the basis of the six criteria of the ethnosymbolist movement. Subsequently, the article will also present the transformation from ethnicity to nationhood based on Smith’s model. As we shall see, the example of the Hungarian people highlights especially well the importance of the *longue durée*, or process analysis over a long-term period, an approach also favoured by ethnosymbolists. Applying the theoretical framework of Anthony D. Smith to the Hungarian case is a gap-filling attempt since earlier research did not explicitly test the compatibility of this theory with the existing literature on the history of Hungarian nationhood. This article therefore utilizes literature review as its methodology, while examining a corpus of monographs and articles written mostly in Hungarian. As a result, hopefully much new information will be brought to the attention of the international scholarly community.

Given the temporal flexibility of ethnosymbolism and its sensitivity towards processes, findings of several historians focusing on early modern (1500–1800) Hungary might be easily embedded into this paradigm (Erdős 2017, 10–14.). Tibor Klaniczay (2001, 45.) claimed

that it was the turbulent and tragic 16th century that “gave birth to and shaped the national identity that is still the strength of Hungarian culture today”*. Following this train of thought, Sándor Őze (2006) also pointed to the first half of the 16th century, while exploring the deterministic factors of apocalyptic world view and a new sense of solidarity and identity among the population of the buffer zone on the border of the expanding Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Hungary. Zsombor Tóth (2010) detects an interesting parallel between the Calvinist theological style of speech and the discourses of patriotism around the turn of the 17–18th centuries. In his assessment, we can witness a gradual shift in frequency from mentions of sufferings endured for the (Protestant) faith and freedom of religion towards the sacrifices made for the homeland. Géza Perjés (1975, 90–93.) also highlighted the role of the 16th-century Reformation in the reinforcement and preservation of national identity amidst Islamisation. Among British researchers, the work of Robert Evans (2008) deserves attention, who extensively wrote about the 18th-century Central European perceptions of national identities and frontiers, with particular reference to the Hungarians. Last, but not least, Ágnes R. Várkonyi (1964, 28.) calls attention to the increasingly frequent usage of the terms “nation” and “homeland” [in Hungarian: *nemzet and hazá*] in 16th century written sources.

Although former research, summarized above in a nutshell, might be indeed classified as Hungarian examples of ethnosymbolism, there are two major differences compared to the scope of the present study. First, historians were seeking for the earliest written sources of national consciousness, a period when individuals tangibly expressed sentiments of their own national identity. In other words, previous research focused on the emergence of national sentiment, not the nation as a collective group itself. Second, they did not apply Smith’s theoretical framework per se in their works. This leaves open the possibility to apply Smith’s model of ethnic and national formation in the Hungarian context, and to gain a new insight into the formation of the Hungarian nation. The following six sections will guide us through this process, explaining the evolution of the *ethnie*.

A collective name

When determining the existence of an ethnic community, the primary consideration is whether the group has its own self-designation, whether it is aware of its own uniqueness. The identification of ethnonyms is therefore of paramount importance not only from the point of view of the history of languages, but also of nationalism. It is generally accepted that the Hungarian language is of Finno-Ugric origin, but the Hungarians moved away from the Ugric language community as early as around 1000 BC and came under the influence of Iranian and Turkic linguistic environment. All this is related to the transition to a nomadic

lifestyle in the Eurasian steppe. The high degree of alienation of the Hungarian language from the surrounding ethnic groups actually helped to preserve its linguistic distinctiveness and to avoid slow, but steady assimilation (Veres 1996).

The *magyar* [Hungarian] ethnonym itself derived from the same etymon as the ethnonym of the closest Ugric kin folk, the Mansis. From this we can conclude that the Hungarian ethnonym was formed in the period when the pre-Hungarian groups lived in the loose bonds of the Ugric community to the east of the Ural Mountains (Fodor 1996, 24.). As several issues related to Hungarian prehistory, the origins of the ethnonym are contested and besides the above explanation, Indo-Iranian, Turkish, or Turco-Hungarian theories of origin are also held by other linguists (Gulya 1997). Either way, but especially in light of the Ugric ancestry, the existence of a common ethnonym can be dated to the beginning of the first millennium BC with great certainty, based on linguistic and archaeological research.

A common myth of descent

The ancient myth of origin of the Hungarians was embodied in the so-called Wondrous Stag [in Hungarian: *Csodaszarvas*] legend, as the research of Jenő Szűcs (2022, 99–100.) clearly confirmed. The earliest known written version of the legend survives in Simon of Kéza's chronicle *Gesta Hungarorum* [The Deeds of the Hungarians] from the 13th century. According to the saga, the brothers named Hunor and Magor spotted the Wondrous Stag while hunting, and after a long chase, the deer led them and their peoples to a suitable place to settle. However, the ancient version of the legend is not just about finding a new home, in which the deer plays the role of the leading animal. In the archaic version, the stag appears as a totemic animal whose mating with a predatory animal gave birth to the Hungarian people (Fodor 1996, 26.).

In the Scythian period (8th–3rd centuries BC), deer origin sagas were widespread among many peoples in the Eurasian steppe (Figure 1). It was probably during this period that the Hungarians began to regard the deer as a totemic ancestor, since the nomadic equestrian peoples of this region resembled each other not only in their material culture, but also in many aspects of their beliefs (Fodor 1996, 28.). Although Szűcs (1997, 110.), on the basis of the structural elements and historical moments of the surviving medieval chronicle, places the date of origin of the Wondrous Stag myth, and thus the development of the “myth of origin of the community calling itself Hungarian”^{**} between the 6th and 9th centuries AD, archaeological and religious anthropological research suggests that it can be dated much earlier. According to Fodor (1996, 30.), the Hungarians already had their separate tradition of origin around 500 BC, thus possessed two of the most important supporting pillars of ethnic consciousness by this time.



Figure 1. Scythian golden stag from the 6th century BC. The artefact was found in Tápíószentmárton, Central Hungary and is on permanent exhibition in the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest. Source: mnm.hu/en

A shared history

Myths of origin themselves are an important component of national memory. In addition to the origin of the people, sagas about the mystical origin of the dynasty might also be included. In the case of Hungary, such is the so-called *turulmonda* [legend of the *turul* bird], intended to underpin the divine origin of the kings of the Árpád dynasty. In *Gesta Hungarorum* written by Anonymus, the unknown notary of Béla III, at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries, a saker falcon (Figure 2) appears in the dream of Emese, wife of the clan chief Ügyek, and draws a spring of water from the womb of the pregnant woman. According to the current state of research, this story, dated by the chronicler to the year 819, is an allegorical representation of the fact that Emese's son, Álmos [meaning 'sleepy' in English], is destined for a bright fate and that his descendants will become great leaders in a foreign land (Dümmerth 1986, 34–98.).



Figure 2. The saker falcon (*Falco cherrug*) on a hair braiding disk from the first half of the 10th century. The artefact was found in Rakamaz, North-Eastern Hungary and is on permanent exhibition in Jóna András Museum, Nyíregyháza. Source: muvtor.btk.ppke.hu

It is worth highlighting the remark that Anonymus adds in foreword to his his gesta preceding the saga. He claims that around 1200, he had heard it “from the false stories of the countryfolk and the gabbling song of minstrels” [*ex falsis fabulis rusticorum vel a garrulo cantu ioculatorum*] (Rady 2009, 685.). In other words, we have a reason to assume that we are facing a story that has been alive and passed down since the 9th century, and moreover which has survived among the lower classes of the society. This clearly shows that the Hungarians did have a collective historical memory already in the early Middle Ages, and in terms of the legend of the Wondrous Stag, even much earlier.

A distinctive shared culture

John Armstrong (1982), considered a forerunner of ethnosymbolism, has drawn extensively on the binary opposition theory of the Norwegian cultural anthropologist Fredrik Barth. According to this theory, groups of people often define themselves not in terms of their own characteristics, but in opposition to other groups. Because of the mutability of the we ↔ they dichotomy, the self-definition of the we-group is also constantly fluctuating, which makes

it considerably more difficult to identify the objective characteristics of the group. For this reason, it is much more appropriate to analyse the mechanisms of boundary construction between groups, since these also determine the sense of identity of the community which delimits itself.

While examining the etymological and semantic contexts of the concept of “barbarian” people, Szűcs (1997, 201.) notes that

the individual has created the broader, secondary in-group, the concept of a people, by transferring images associated with the primary groups (face-to-face groups in sociological terms) that directly determine one’s social embeddedness and loyalty. It is precisely this phenomenon that constitutes the kind of sociological group-consciousness (We-consciousness) that qualifies as ethnic consciousness, in so far as the distinction between «We» (in-group) and other groups, the category of «Them» (out-group), is based on ethnic traits and characteristics.*

Finally, the medievalist Szűcs (1997, 232.) concludes that in the perception of the Hungarian conquerors by around the year 900 the latest,

the common elements of law and religious beliefs can be regarded as ideological components which, drawing a clear boundary between the broadest circle of «We» and the «foreigners», reinforced a more or less latent sense of objective linguistic and cultural links and elevated it to the level of self-consciousness. In this sense they are functionally essential factors of ethnic consciousness.*

Other researchers have dated back the us vs. them confrontation earlier. What István Fodor, Péter Veres or Antal Bartha also called “folk consciousness” was already brought to life around 500 BC via the existing ethnonym, the common sense of origin and the high level of endogamy (Kristó 1998, 100–102.). Considering that, as discussed in the previous sections, the distinctive elements of the common ethnonym and the common myth of origin were already present among the Hungarians in the middle of the first millennium BC; in my view it is not an exaggeration to accept the existence of a binary opposition from this time onwards.

An association with a specific territory

It is interesting to raise the question whether in the case of a nomadic people, is it even possible to talk about attachment to a particular homeland. In Smith’s (1986, 34. and 42.) understanding, ethnic community formation is related to sedentary lifestyle. The Hungarians led a semi-nomadic way of life until the end of the 9th century and, due to the invasions

of Europe during the 10th century, were often on the move decades after reaching the Carpathian Basin. Of course, not even a nomadic lifestyle means moving without interruption for longer or shorter periods. The Hungarian people travelled from the eastern part of the Ural Mountains to the Carpathian Basin over a millennium and a half, passing through several intermediate areas of settlement during this time (Figure 3). However, permanent settlement, a lasting attachment to a given territory is obviously alien to the nomadic mindset.



Figure 3. Possible migration routes and hypothetical homeland of the ancient Hungarians. The map is based on the research of Csáky et al. (2020) Source: biorxiv.org

For the above reasons, the Hungarians could have hardly developed strong territorial ties before the conquest of Hungary [in Hungarian: *honfoglalás*] in 895. Under the leadership of Grand Prince Árpád, the Hungarian tribes settled clan by clan, mainly in the lower-lying plain lands. In symbolic terms, the conquest also marked the fulfilment of several myths. On the one hand, according to the aforementioned legend about the Wondrous Stag, the brothers hunting the deer lost sight of the legendary animal when crossing the Carpathian Mountains. This momentum symbolically conveyed the message that the age of hunting and migration had come to an end, and that this was the place where the people had to settle down for good (Györffy 1993, 205.).

On the other hand, the legend of the “turul” bird is also related to the conquest. In the 9th century, during the sojourn in Levedia, a falcon appeared in the dream of the prince, driving away the eagles that were decimating the livestock. Soon afterwards, the falcon appeared again, this time to drive away vultures feasting on the carcasses of animals killed by murrain. From then on, the mythical bird became the leading animal which protected the Hungarians and showed them the way to Pannonia, where, just like the Wondrous Stag, it disappeared. This was a warning signal that the Hungarian people had arrived at their final settlement area and had found their new homeland. These elements of legends simultaneously transformed the Carpathian Basin into a quasi-sacred site of the Hungarian community’s memorial heritage, into a *lieu de mémoire*, as French historian Pierre Nora (1986) put it later on.

From a geographical point of view, it is also a noteworthy circumstance that the westernmost extension of the forested steppe region, a familiar environment for the semi-nomadic Hungarians, was the Carpathian Basin. The westernmost steppe lake on the Eurasian continent is Lake Fertő, currently lying on the border of Austria and Hungary. Finally, the westernmost nesting place of the saker falcon (*Falco cherrug*), known in Hungarian mythology as the “turul” bird, is also located here.

In addition to the world of myths, military events also had an impact on the adoption of a sedentary, land-bound way of life. In 970, the increasingly frequent failure of adventurous expeditions led Grand Prince Taksony (931–973) to terminate raids targeting Western Europe and Byzantium. This forced the Hungarians to give up the remnants of their nomadic lifestyle and, while remaining in the Carpathian Basin, to forge new ties within the territorial unit of the Principality of Hungary. On the basis of all this, the emergence of attachment to a given homeland can be dated between 895 and 970, i.e., approximately the 10th century.

A sense of solidarity

Before the 10th century, the Hungarian people formed a tribal/clan society. According to tradition, the Hungarians consisted of seven tribes, which moved together only loosely bound to each other. Apart from their common language, beliefs and lifestyle, they were not subordinate to any supreme political or military leader; as a matter of fact chieftains could even launch campaigns at their own discretion. Based on this, we cannot talk about strong societal solidarity, even though the Hungarian people of the time cannot be considered vertically highly stratified, since the bulk of the society was made up of commoner, free warriors (Dienes 1972, 12–19.). In the present case, therefore, it is not worth examining the degree of solidarity on the basis of social class, but much rather in the system of relations between the particular autonomous tribes.

In the last pre-Conquest settlement area, Etelköz, a significant change took place in the tribal/clan system. The seven chiefdoms, also called tribes in former literature, entered into a closer alliance with each other than before and elected a commander-in-chief, a Grand Prince in the person of Álmos. The foundation of this strong tribal alliance was symbolised by the act of the blood oath [in Hungarian: vérszerződés] around 870. The naming derives from the fact that the leaders of the seven Hungarian tribes poured their own blood into a chalice (Figure 4), thus embodying the community of blood formed among them. This act of union, not uncommon among nomadic peoples, was considered by many historians and archaeologists to be a key moment in the process of ethnogenesis. According to Tibor Joó (1940, 43.), “tradition and science agree that the Hungarian nation was born when the seven tribes, which were later joined by the Kabars and Szeklers, accepted Álmos as their common leader”.* István Dienes (1972, 26.) takes a similar stance: “the tradition of the compact sealed with blood – when the seven chiefs symbolically entered into blood-brotherhood in the interest of concerted action – preserves the memory of the Magyars as they united into one people.”



Figure 4. Gold cup from the Treasure of Nagyszentmiklós (today: Sânnicolau Mare, Romania), allegedly used during the blood oath. The treasures are of Avar origins and date back to the early 9th century AD. The artefacts are on display in the Museum of the History of Art, Vienna.

Source: Wikipedia.org

Whether this event really is the ethnogenesis or the birth of the nation is too early to decide at this stage of the article. What can be said for certain is that the blood oath, with its political and military significance, was an unprecedented step forward in strengthening lateral societal solidarity and cohesion. For this reason, we can rightly consider the period around 870 as a time when societal solidarity between the specific constituent groups (clans) of the population was already in place.

Further on the road of nation-building

The six preceding sections of this article have followed the history of the emergence of the Hungarians, as a pre-modern ethnic group, along the lines of Anthony Smith's criteria. According to the analysis, the Hungarian people, the Hungarian *ethnos*, came into being roughly during the two millennia between 1000 BC and 970 AD. At the same time, according to the ethnosymbolist paradigm, this means that the Hungarians can be regarded as *ethnie* already by the early Middle Ages. It is worth noting that some Hungarian scholars, such as András Róna-Tas, consider the existence of only three criteria, namely the ethnonym, a shared sentiment of descent and differentiation from other *ethnoi* to be necessary in the process of forming a people. Ethnogenesis itself is defined by Ildikó Ecsedy as "the historical process of the formation of a people (ethnos), usually in the era before modern nation-states and their political boundaries, in the pre-industrial, archaic phase of community development"* (Kristó 1998, 99.). If only the "abbreviated" list of criteria were taken into account, we could in fact speak of a Hungarian people as early as around 500 BC, since territorial flexibility and loose societal organisation resulting from nomadic lifestyle would have less impact on the process of ethnogenesis.

A very similar concept to Smith's *ethnie* was created by Jenő Szűcs (2022, 85–108.) during the 1970s, inspired by Reinhard Wenskus' (1961) theory of the kernel of tradition, namely the concept of gentilism. This term, derived from the Latin word *gens* [~tribe, nation], refers to the phenomenon of pre-feudal, "barbarian" ethnic formations evolving into medieval nationalities during the 6th to 9th centuries in Western Europe and the Mediterranean and the 9th to 10th centuries in Eastern and Northern Europe respectively. In the case of "Eastern" gentilism, which also includes the Hungarians, there was no discontinuity between these late antique "gentile" structures and medieval "nationalities". Consequently, already prior to the 9th century, an "intrinsic collective consciousness" of the Hungarians can be detected, which lacks territorial factors, class-dependency relations, or social-legal conditions, and instead builds on common language and a belief in the community of descent (*lingua et natio*). This type of culturally grounded, early nationhood is identified in relation to the Hungarians as *gens Ungarorum* or *genus Hungarorum* in different medieval sources.

In fact, we may add that differing concepts of nation between Eastern and Western European societies are present to date and are likely to persist in the subsequent decades, as confirmed by research on the links between national and religious identity (Kövecses 2022, 22.).

However, Smith clearly focused his model on settled, agricultural peoples. This is even more apparent in his definition of a nation as “a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, a public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members” (Smith 1991, 14.). By his own admission, he sought to define the nation as a Weberian ideal drawn from the various concepts and ideas of the nation held by self-styled nationalists (Smith 1983, chapter 7). We can observe that Smith had already moved away from the Durkheimian positivist approach to the concept of the nation and defined this human community from the perspective of Weberian antipositivism. The definition itself is rather flexible, since already Smith himself noted that one may consider ancient Jews as a nation, whereas late medieval Frenchmen still only qualify as an *ethnie* (1999, 107–114.). Compared to an ethnic group (*ethnie*), the nation thus has two additional characteristics: a common economy on the one hand, and common rights and obligations for all its members on the other. The following sections of this paper will illustrate how these aspects can be applied to the example of the Hungarian people.

Common economy

King Saint Stephen I (1000–1038), who established the Christian Hungarian state, was the descendant of the aforementioned Grand Prince Álmos. He founded ten bishoprics on the model of the Old Testament and began to establish the network of counties in the central regions of the country. As a result of his efforts to organise the state and the church, the Hungarians gradually transited from a consanguineous social structure to a public administration based on territory (Györffy 1994). In addition to establishing sovereign statehood, he also strived to achieve economic stability. In this spirit, he minted money shortly after his coronation – these were called the silver denars (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The silver denars of St. Stephen I from 1001. Source: penzvero.hu

The Hungarians had been using metal coins in the pre-Saint Stephen era, but these were exclusively foreign coins. The country and its people had no so-called “national currency” before 1001. On the obverse of the silver denars the circular inscription reads as *lancea regis* (the king’s spear), referring to the insignia of royal supremacy, while the inscription on the reverse states *regia civitas* (royal city), referring to the place of minting and the royal seat, Székesfehérvár (Kovács 1995). Already in the Middle Ages, coinage was a state (royal) monopoly, an expression of sovereignty. It is no coincidence that counterfeiting was considered treason and was usually punishable by death. The money minted by Hungarian kings was not only used domestically, but also preferred abroad.

As with coinage, the collection of customs also appeared under St. Stephen, reflecting the idea of a single economic area. External customs imposed on foreign trade were sometimes twice as high as internal customs applied within national borders. Furthermore, the supervision of foreign trade was under the direct control of the royal court, since long-distance traders needed the seal of the royal tollman to import or export goods from the country. These provisions were clearly intended to protect the internal market (Weisz 2001, 178–179.). Regulating the collection of customs among the laws dealing with trade indicates that in the public thinking of the 11th century, the territory of Hungary was already treated as a sort of economic unit.

The combination of coinage and the application of high external tariffs reflect the economically unified nature of the country under St. Stephen. This unity was maintained and strengthened further in the centuries that followed, practically until the division of Hungary into three parts in 1541. At the same time, it is important to anticipate that the economic unity of the Carpathian Basin was maintained even in the midst of the turmoil caused by the Ottoman era (16–17th centuries) through lively trade relations and multiple taxation

(MEK 1999). For most of this time, not even customs were introduced on goods transported between the three parts of Hungary, since the elites treated the entire country as a single economic area (Péter 1995, 225.).

Legal unification

Of the criteria discussed so far, achieving equal rights and obligations between members of the population was perhaps the most protracted. Although I have already mentioned in the section on social solidarity that the majority of the Hungarians can be regarded as free commoners, this setup gradually disappeared with the establishment of the feudal state, and in fact, from the 11th century onwards we can witness the stratification of society. Consequently, it is in vain that one of the fundamental criteria for national existence – economic unity – appears to be fulfilled at the beginning of the 1000s, when at the same time the conditions of the other criterion seems to be disappearing.

As a starting point, let's take the Hungarians at the time of St. Stephen, where the sovereign power belongs to the king and the monarch shares power with the narrow circle of the royal council at most. We must also bear in mind that the gradual decline of the free peasantry was accompanied by the emergence of serfdom. From a legal point of view, however, the most important aspect is the almost unlimited nature of royal power, which allows the monarch to make laws by a unilateral expression of will. This form of government is known as patrimonial monarchy, where the majority of the population is excluded from decision-making. The peasantry is subject to taxation, while the emerging nobility owes armed service to the ruler.

From a legal point of view, a significant change occurred in the 13th century, following the Golden Bull [in Hungarian: *Aranybulla*] of King Andrew II. The principle of the one and indivisible nobility (*una eademque nobilitas*) was established, and the king could now exercise his power only in accord with the nobility. The year 1222 can therefore be seen as the time when the estate monarchy was established, with the high clergy and the nobility having the right to participate in the affairs of the country, in addition to the king. This privileged political community, represented in the Diet, can also be called the “noble nation” (*natio Hungarica*) (Szűcs 1997, 337.). Other, not explicitly legal, but rather socio-cultural approaches suggest that the birth of the Hungarian nation itself can be dated back to the 13th century (Kristó 1998, 137–201.).

The next milestone in the process of the extension of rights was the Diet of 1608. At this time, representatives of the royal free cities were officially proclaimed as a full-fledged estate, even though they already had the opportunity to participate since medieval times (H. Németh 2013, 148). Although this offered only limited opportunity to advocate their

interests, since the delegates of the cities altogether had only one vote (Act I of 1608, §10), it is customary from then on to consider the bourgeoisie as the fourth estate, alongside the prelates, the magnates and the nobility.

Enlightened absolutist rulers of the 18th century Habsburg Monarchy took significant steps to improve the legal status of the serfs. The so-called *Urbarium* of 1764 by Queen Maria Theresa (1740–1780) deserves special attention due to its limitations on noble arbitrariness and uniform regulation of the obligations of serfs. Her son, Emperor Joseph II (1780–1790) moved forward on this road and issued a decree dedicated to the improvement of the serfs' status in 1785. The term "serf" itself was abolished and the freedom of movement was finally granted, meaning that peasants not satisfied with their landlords could move to another landlord without limitations. No wonder that an English traveller visiting Hungary in 1793 envisioned an evolutionary curve with regards to the gradual improvement of the peasants' legal status and their parallel integration into the Hungarian nation (Townson 1797, 102–109.).

From a societal point of view, the laws of April 1848 certainly brought about the greatest change. Serfdom was abolished and public taxation [in Hungarian: *közteherviselés*], in other words a universal obligation to pay taxes was introduced. With the abolition of privileges granted to various groups with collective autonomy, the estates and the nobility, in principle a civil society was created, consisting of civilians sharing the same legal status. The extension of rights, as a political-national ideal was strongly emphasized in the first half of the 19th century in the public discourse of Hungary. The concept of homeland was bound together inseparably with the abstract categories of nation and rights, as the following excerpt of the poem titled 'The People' from 1846 by the best-known Hungarian Romantic poet and revolutionary, Sándor Petőfi (1823–1849) illustrates:

And when the enemy comes, why shed blood?
 Why do they take the sword?
 To defend the homeland?... indeed!...
 A homeland is only where there are rights,
 And the people have no rights. (Petőfi 1997, 312–313.)

The question remains, however, to what extent does the existence or the lack of the right to vote affect the principle of 'equal rights and duties'? In fact, only 7.2 percent of the country's population was entitled to vote in the first parliamentary elections in the summer of 1848, due to limitations on age, language, gender and wealth. If we take a broader interpretation of Smith's definition, we can conclude that the abolition of estate-based privileges and the introduction of public taxation led to the legal unification of the Hungarian population in 1848.

However, if we insist on the (nearly) complete equality of rights, we can only mark 1918 as the birth of the Hungarian nation. It was around this time that the Károlyi government introduced general and secret suffrage, without limitations on language skills, wealth or gender; although women could only vote above the age of 24 and literate, whereas men

could do so even if they were illiterate after the age of 21 in accordance with Act I of 1918, §1. Eugen Weber (1976) also argued in favour of national unity emerging at the time of the First World War, when he examined the process of the French peasantry's integration into the nation and arrived at this particularly late date. However, it is undisputed that, when understanding the nation as a legal concept, it is problematic to speak of nations before the 19th–20th centuries, since in most countries societies consisted of groups with distinct legal statuses. This differentiation could not be fully resolved even by the possible existence of linguistic and cultural links.

Conclusions

From the long-time perspective of the ethnosymbolist paradigm, the emergence of the Hungarian people can be dated to ca. 970, and the birth of the Hungarian nation to 1848. As it can be seen in the present study, the separate elements of Anthony D. Smith's criteria do not necessarily follow one another in chronological order, but are essential components of an ethnic community and the nation that evolves from it. A highly interdisciplinary approach is essential for the study of many of these components, including the utilization of research findings from the field of archaeology, linguistics, anthropology of religion, ethnography, or even numismatics, among others. During the study of *ethnies*, it is particularly important to take into account non-written sources as well, due to their antiquity.

When applying Smith's model to the Hungarians, it can be concluded that the Hungarian people, already existing in the 10th century, only became a nation after more than eight centuries of further transformations. In this respect, therefore, Smith's concept of nationhood overlaps with the modernist paradigm, which also places the beginnings of nationhood in the post-Enlightenment, industrial period. Smith, however, did not consider the role of nationalist ideology decisive in the emergence of nations, but rather the interweaving of pre-existing "ethnic cores" with genuinely modern political, economic and educational factors. He therefore stressed the vital importance of cultural foundations.

Despite this, he is often accused of basing his theory on mischaracterisations, fallacies and contradictions (more recently see Maxwell 2020; Özkirimli 2010, 157–164.). This case study, however, highlights that the cultural foundations of Hungarianness, for instance, were already evident nearly a millennium before modern national existence. What is more, with the exception of legal equality, other elements of Smith's definition of nationhood were already tangible in the 11th-century Kingdom of Hungary. All this suggests that ethnosymbolism does not go astray in its search for a certain "ethnic core" back in the far-away past. Much rather, it would be more appropriate to reconsider whether the term "nation" can indeed be applied only within the ideological and temporal framework of historical modernity.

All this comes down to the issue of defining the term “nation”. The main question is whether we define the concept of nation in exclusively modernist terms, or whether we leave room for framework definitions that span over historical periods. Russia-expert historian Gyula Szvák (2008, 739.) proposed a preliminary frame definition of pre-modern nations, describing them “as groups of people living in a common area, speaking roughly the same language and sharing a sense of belonging, fuelled by common historical traditions and culture”.^{*} This definition is open-ended in the sense that it lacks political or economic criteria linked to modernity, and emphasizes cultural and psychological bonds deeply rooted in the past. In this sense, it departs even from the ethnosymbolist paradigm.

Concerning the usage of the concept of “nation” in the historical past, Erdős (2017, 70.) notes that

[I]t was not a radically new formation which was born in the Modern Age, instead the components that gradually emerged between the 13th and 17–18th centuries were re-arranged and interconnected in a certain way, in accordance with the social, economic and political milieu of the modern age. Although the concept of «modern nation» indeed displayed structural innovations as it emerged in the modern period, this just as well does not justify a terminological distinction from the «pre-modern nation», as the profound changes of our time do not necessarily compel a distinction between the concepts of nation which were dominant in the 19–20th centuries and those that are in the process of transformation at the dawn of the 21st century.^{*}

A similar position is taken by the medievalist Kristó (1998, 9–10.), who recommends avoiding typically modern concepts when defining the nation, while at the same time incorporating concepts appropriate to the language of the sources. Consequently,

if there is essential continuity in the basic formula of medieval and modern phenomena, if we can find a notion of nation that is not extended in a shoreless manner, we do not need to necessarily refrain from using the word applied to modern phenomena in relation to the middle ages.^{*}

Kristó’s research on and argumentation for medieval nations is well-fitting with the works of Susan Reynolds (1984), Adrian Hastings (1997), Patrick Geary (2002) and Luigi Andrea Bertó (2022) known from the English-language literature.

If we look back to the work of Armstrong (1982), we also find that he applied the term “nation” to pre-Enlightenment ages. Although, like Smith, he was aware of certain differences between modern nations and pre-modern nations, it was precisely because of the presence of “essential continuity” that he did not use other substitutes, such as *ethnie*. All this raises the question of whether the separation of the categories *ethnie* and nation is justified at all, or whether this was in fact Smith’s gesture to the modernists? The present case study suggests that there is almost complete overlap between the criteria of ethnic community and nation, with the exception of the distinctly modern criterion of equal rights.

Only a few decades elapsed between the culmination of ethnogenesis and the establishment of economic unity in Hungary. In the light of all this, I believe that a chronologically broad use, or to quote Armstrong, an “extended temporal perspective” of the concept of nation can be justified. ■

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ENDNOTE

* Quotations marked with an asterisk were translated from Hungarian into English by the author of this article.

KIVONAT

A magyar nemzet kialakulása az etnoszimbolista elmélet fényében

A tanulmány célja az, hogy az etnoszimbolista paradigma hat kritériuma alapján nyomon kövesse a magyarság etnikai tudatának kialakulását és néppé (etnikummá) válását. Ezt követően a dolgozat Anthony D. Smith modellje alapján bemutatja a népből nemzetté válás folyamatát is. Az etnoszimbolista megközelítés szempontjából a magyarság kialakulása 970-re, a magyar nemzet megszületése pedig 1848-ra datálható. Smith modelljét a magyarokra alkalmazva megállapítható, hogy a magyar nép csak több mint nyolc évszázados átalakulást követően vált nemzetté. Mindez azt sugallja, hogy az etnoszimbolizmus nem jár tévúton, amikor a távoli múltban keresi a modern nemzetek „etnikai magját”. Sokkal inkább azt lenne célszerű újragondolni, hogy a „nemzet” fogalma valóban csak a történelmi modernitás időbeli és ideológiai keretei között alkalmazható-e.

KULCSSZAVAK: magyarság, etnoszimbolizmus, gentilizmus, Anthony D. Smith, etnogenezis, nemzettudat, nacionalizmustudomány