

Subject: Comments on the Hungarian Székely Script

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Dear Deborah,

in answer to your letter of the 6th February I can write you the following:

The Hungarian Székely Script is a historical script first mentioned by the Latin chronic by Simon de Kéza around 1282-1285, but it surely existed earlier. In the time from which we have its first monuments in the 15th century, it was used by only a small group of literati. Since then it has been many times renewed, reformed, new letters were added, new orthographic rules introduced. There was no central school for scribes, it had many variants. It was used for falsifying documents, as cryptography in letters of Jesuits, and Hungarian nobelmen and from the 1920s as a semiofficial writing of the Hungarian boy scouts.

The last renewal of the Székely script began after the political changes in Hungary around 1990. Enthusiastic groups and people with good will but without scholarly and systematic training began to spread alphabets, organized courses and competitions. This situation is slowly changing, but none of the current proposals is widely accepted, though all claim that.

There is no need to invent a new name for the Hungarian Székely Script.

The Hungarian word *rovás* has its primary meaning 'something carved' from the verb *ró-* 'to carve', and never denoted itself the script, only in the composition *rovás írás* 'carved script'. In the modern Hungarian sentence *sok van a rovásán* it yet means „s/he has much on her/his account”. The word *rovás* was borrowed by the neighboring languages as such, Rumanian *răvăș* 'Kerbe, Kerbholz', Croatian *rovaš*, *raboš* etc. 'Kerbholz' etc. and nowhere denotes any type of writing.

The so-called Carpathian Script has a few dozen of monuments. Two of them are longer, the inscription of Szarvas and the inscriptions of the treasure of Nagyszentmiklós. However until now there do not exist reliable readings and translations. The „Hungarian” readings of Vékony

are not acceptable. Even worse is the case with the writing system(s) called „Kazar“. There exist now about a hundred (!) small inscription from East Europe to Siberia. Only two or three of them are edited with scientific care and method, all other are only published in unreliable drawings. Here the next step to be done is to compile a corpus based on autopsy and modern techniques. This is on its way in Russia.

The Hungarian Székely Script is a historical script and the first task should be the reconstruction of its original alphabet as it existed in the 15th-16th centuries. I made a proposal in my book 1999 pp. 438-439 where I compared the oldest three alphabets and opted for the alphabet of Nickolsburg (before 1484). Of course this can be debated. The second step would be the general acceptance of a modern variant.

There was put a lot of work in both competing proposals. For a final proposal, both computer-based suggestions may be useful. I do not see need for any hurry. I am sure that a final solution can be found with the help of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Bibliography, most recent and in non Hungarian:

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A. Róna-Tas (1999): *Hungarians and Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, CEU Press, Budapest, 566 p.

A. Róna-Tas (2002): *The Inscriptions of the Nagyszentmiklós Treasure*, in Kovács, T. – Garam, É. (Eds), *The Gold of the Avars*, 120-129.

A. Róna-Tas (2007): *The Khazars and the Magyars*, in: *The World of the Khazars, New Perspectives. Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium*, ed. P.B. Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai, A. Róna-Tas, Leiden-Boston, 269-278.

If you need more information, please do not hesitate to write me

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