

**UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED**  
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**CONTEXTUALIZING THE MOUNTED PASTORAL NOMADIC POLITICAL  
ECUMENE: THE CONQUERING HUNGARIANS' POLITICAL AND SOCIAL  
PATHWAYS**

**Summary of the Ph.D. Dissertation**

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Mounted pastoral nomadism represents one of the most pivotal developments in human history, shaping the political, economic, and social dynamics of numerous regions. Despite its profound influence on global history, mounted pastoral nomadism has been underrepresented in scholarly studies of world history and world systems. The predominant Eurocentric perspective has been increasingly criticized, particularly since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. This study responds to such critiques by focusing on mounted pastoral nomads within the frameworks of *world history*, *world-systems theory*, and the history of mounted pastoral nomadic systems. As a result, a new approach has been adopted, leading to the development of the “*mounted pastoral nomadic political ecumene*” model. This model draws on concepts from political thought and world systems but applies them specifically to the medieval period and the mounted pastoral nomads to provide a clearer understanding of their political structures.

The decision to focus on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian history is significant for several reasons. First and foremost, the Hungarians represent a unique case among pastoral nomadic societies due to their successful integration into the Western Christian political ecumene without the collapse of their political power. They originated from a mounted pastoral nomadic political ecumene and managed to establish themselves in a settled state while retaining their political coherence. This integration process is particularly noteworthy, as most studies on mounted pastoral nomadism have traditionally concentrated on communities in Inner Asia. Here, the focus shifts westward to the Carpathian Basin, examining the significant impact of the Hungarians on European political and military dynamics during this period. The campaigns led by the Hungarians deep into Europe and their subsequent settlement significantly altered the continent's balance of power. As Marc Bloch posited, the Hungarians, alongside the Northmen and Muslims, were instrumental in consolidating “*Feudal Europe*” from the outside.

To develop a comprehensive understanding of the social structures, political formations, and economic systems of the *mounted pastoral nomads*, particularly the *conquering Hungarians* of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, this research employs a two-fold approach. Initially, it considers perspectives from system histories and world history while incorporating specific methodologies from mounted pastoral nomad system histories. This framework defines mounted pastoral nomads through the concepts of “*political ecumene*” and “*core-periphery*,” drawing on theories and works by scholars such as Eric Voegelin, Janet Abu-Lughod, and Peter Golden. Such a theoretical foundation allows for a focused exploration of phenomena like *state formation*, *sedentation*, *social organization*, and *social stratification*.

Moreover, the examination of the mounted pastoral nomadic state considers what constitutes a state in the early Middle Ages and how the Hungarians can be classified regarding state formation. The introduction of the *mounted pastoral nomadic political ecumene* concept provides a structured model for understanding the political dynamics of these societies. The model, influenced by the works of Peter Golden and György Györffy, transcends the limitations of a purely Voegelinian framework, which tends toward a spiritual focus. Instead, it emphasizes political legitimacy, etiquette, and symbolism as foundational elements, structuring a comprehensive model that can be applied to other contexts.

Through this lens, the Hungarian case offers a unique opportunity to view the process of *state formation* among mounted pastoral nomads. Unlike other nomadic groups, the Hungarian society managed to maintain political stability and integration within a new political ecumene without losing their identity or social coherence. This process involved significant adaptation, as the Hungarians transitioned from a mobile, nomadic lifestyle to a more sedentary existence. Facilitating this transformation was their ability to balance nomadic traditions with the demands of a settled political structure, thereby contributing to the development of a distinct political ecumene that combined elements of both nomadic and sedentary governance.

In addition to political developments, the process of *sedentation* is examined in detail through the specific example of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarians. This analysis considers various factors, including geographical, commercial, economic, and political influences, drawing insights from recent archaeological studies on settlements in the Carpathian Basin. The exploration includes whether the *conquering Hungarians* replaced existing populations or blended with them and how these interactions influenced the social and political dynamics of the region. As a “*frontier zone*” of cultural interaction, the Carpathian Basin prompts questions about the cultural mixing that occurred during this period and the implications of such interactions for understanding the broader historical trajectory of the region.

Genetic research plays a crucial role in this study, shedding light on the intermingling between the *conquering Hungarians* and indigenous communities, such as the Late Avar and Slavic populations. Questions regarding the extent and nature of this intermingling are explored, including whether the settlement process of the *conquering Hungarians* involved displacing existing populations or integrating with them. Moreover, the study examines the genetic interactions among the *conquering Hungarians* themselves, particularly the practice of exogamy among different tribes and the social implications of these interactions for their community structure.

Beyond social and genetic dynamics, broader geographical and environmental factors are considered for their influence on the settlement and migration patterns of the Hungarians. The impact of river basins, climate phenomena like the Medieval Warm Period, and the strategic advantages provided by the Carpathian Basin's landscape are evaluated for their role in shaping settlement processes. For instance, the possibility of chernozem black soil, similar to that found in the Khazar region, existing in the Carpathian Basin and its potential impact on agricultural practices is explored. Additionally, the research investigates whether geographical conditions facilitated the formation of a "vacuum empire" in the Carpathian Basin, as proposed by Thomas Barfield.

Furthermore, the concept of a "*vacuum empire*" proves particularly relevant for understanding the political dynamics of the Carpathian Basin following the collapse of the Avar Empire. The political vacuum created in this region, combined with the absence of a successor dynasty or nomadic group, led to a period of instability and transformation. This vacuum lasted approximately 85 years, disrupting political traditions and continuity. In this context, the Hungarians are analyzed as a group that capitalized on this vacuum to establish a new political structure, which retained elements of their mounted pastoral nomadic traditions while adapting to the demands of a more settled existence.

In engaging with theoretical frameworks of world systems theory, the "*vacuum empire*" model developed by Thomas Barfield is critically examined. The Carpathian Basin is reconceptualized as a core within the mounted pastoral nomadic ecumene, which remained vacant for an extended period following the Avar collapse. The notion of a "*vacuum empire*" helps explain how the *conquering Hungarians* maintained their political and social structures during a period of significant geopolitical flux. This model is further refined by addressing the limitations of Barfield's approach, particularly in dealing with internal dynamics and the complexities of social stratification within nomadic societies.

Concluding the research, the contributions to the understanding of mounted pastoral nomadism and the history of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>-century Hungary are summarized. The unique position of the Hungarians as a mounted pastoral nomadic group that successfully transitioned into the Western Christian Political Ecumene is highlighted. The transformation of the Carpathian Basin from the westernmost edge of the mounted pastoral nomadic *core* in Western Eurasia to a core area of the Western Christian Political Ecumene underscores the dynamic and fluid nature of mounted pastoral nomadic societies and their capacity to adapt to changing political, social, and environmental contexts.

Additionally, this study provides a comprehensive model for understanding the *mounted pastoral nomadic political ecumene* and its broader applicability. The model developed herein emphasizes the importance of legitimacy, political etiquette, and symbolism as foundational elements, structured around two pillars: jurisdiction and cause or idea. This approach enables a more nuanced understanding of the political dynamics of mounted pastoral nomadic societies, particularly concerning their interactions with sedentary communities and their strategies for maintaining political coherence during periods of significant change.

Ultimately, the Hungarian case presents a distinctive example of the processes of state formation, sedentation, and social stratification among mounted pastoral nomads. The research demonstrates that mounted pastoral nomadism, with its inherent dynamism, was a highly adaptive way of life capable of addressing the unique needs of specific historical and geographical contexts. The Hungarians' successful integration into the Western Christian political ecumene exemplifies the flexibility and resilience of mounted pastoral nomadic societies in navigating the complexities of medieval geopolitics. By adopting a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates genetic research, archaeology, and historical analysis, this dissertation contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of mounted pastoral nomads in shaping the medieval world and provides a framework for future studies in this field.

## **Publications**

1. *The Role of Jalalad-din Khan and Golden Horde Soldiers in the Battle of Žalgiris*. In *Materials of the International Scientific and Theoretical Conference on the Topic "The Golden Horde: at the Crossroads of Civilizations," Dedicated to the 750th Anniversary of the Formation of the Golden Horde*. Conference: Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan 2021.06.22. (AL-FARABI KAZAKH NATIONAL UNIVERSITY). Alma-Ata: Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, pp 34-41. ISBN: 9786010457270 (2021). Chapter in Book (Conference paper).
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