

On the names of the historical Szepes County¹

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1. “The name Szepes is still subject to linguistic research” – wrote Márton Pirhalla in his study dedicated to the history of the provostship in the Szepes County in 1899 (cf. 1899: 1). Yet this could be said even today as researches have not reached a resolution in this field, despite the fact that more than two dozen etymologies have been formed since the 17th century, with the aim of interpreting the meaning of the name of the former Szepes County (for a review of the history of research see e.g. Pirhalla 1899: 1–3; Weber 1916: 1–12; Melich 1929: 34–35; Fekete Nagy 1934: 30–33; Sowa 2007). As early as in 1929, Elemér Moór wrote that there might not be too many toponyms that have been explained in as many ways and as many times as the name of the historical Szepes County (cf. 1929: 145). The last three reliable linguistic etymologies are fairly recent, and they typically offer an explanation for the name of this region from three different languages, a fact that also indicates an unresolved problem. Heinrich Kunstmann proposed a Thessalian origin (cf. 1996: 162–163), while Jerzy Nalepa thinks it was formed in a Slavic language (cf. 2003). Wojciech Sowa attempted to trace back the name of the region to a neo-Latin language (cf. 2007).

The large number of theories does not necessarily mean that the question cannot be answered. Instead, it indicates that none of the suggested solutions can be proven by and within the actual paradigm and methodology of historical linguistics. The problem is deepened by the fact that the origin of the name of Szepes County has been a linguistic and an ideological issue as well since the start of the first studies in the field which is the result of the re-

¹ This work was carried out as part of the Research Group on Hungarian Language History and Toponomastics (University of Debrecen–Hungarian Academy of Sciences).

gion's historical significance and multilingual environment. In my study, I do not wish to further increase the number of etymologies. In this phase of the research, I think that the review, comparison, and evaluation of the existing results can be much more productive than the construction of a new explanation.

There is a large number of linguistic and other aspects that must be considered in the study of a toponym etymology. In my paper, I highlight only one of these, and I attempt to demonstrate the problems related to the name forms denoting the historical Szepes County in relation with the aspects of historical phonology of linguistic borrowings. Thus, in this paper, I will not go into details of toponymic typology, semantic issues and the problems of sources and language prestige. However, these aspects are also necessary for the systematic study, and I am planning to detail these in another paper.

2. It is widely known that the region which is called *Szepes* in contemporary Hungarian, *Spiš* in Slovak and *Zips* in German, was inhabited by a number of ethnicities, from the establishment of the northern counties of the Kingdom of Hungary until the end of the Middle Ages.² Some smaller and larger Slavic communities had already settled down in the valley of the Hernád (Hornad) and Poprád (Poprad) rivers before the Hungarians arrived. The Hungarians who were in charge of guarding the border came later, and it is supposed that Saxons and, in less number, even neo-Latins entered the region before the Tatar attack (1241/1242) (see Fekete Nagy 1934: 9–51; Homza 2009; KMTL: *Szepes(ség)*, Kósa – Filep 1978: 177; Kristó 1988: 393–395; Lux 1938; Soják 2009).

These ethnicities spoke different languages, and this is reflected in the geographical names of the region. The name of the county has its forms in the different languages from the establishment. The most comprehensible summary on the origins of the name versions of the Szepes County in different languages was written by János Melich, who also examined the relations between the different variants. As Melich writes, “it is undeniable that the different names cannot be separated from each other from an etymological aspect. However, we cannot deny the fact that so far nobody has managed to determine which variant is the original which one is the name-giver, and which one is the borrower” (1929: 34). Indeed, the name of the county can be explained to some extent through different languages, from the aspects of

² There are no linguistic sources available from the years before the Hungarian counties were established, so I do not wish to deal with issues related to that period.

phonology, semantics and the onomatopoeic systems. The main problem is that the toponym variants of the borrowing languages cannot be explained properly through any of the relevant languages. The weakest point in the earlier etymologies is that they do not go into details about the phonological history of the linguistic borrowings. In the following sections, I would like to examine how the variants of the borrowing languages can be explained phonologically, while I also consider the supposed Slavic, Hungarian and German origin of the name of the county. I believe that this aspect can assist us to evaluate the feasibility of the explanations that rely on different languages. The validity of each deduction that is based on phonological history and etymology depends on the possibility it offers for explaining the variants that were borrowed by other languages.

We shall begin with the theory that is the most widely accepted one in the Hungarian linguistic literature.

3. Hungarian origins

Since the end of the chimerical etymologies, the explanation by János Melich is the first and only scholarly attempt to describe the Hungarian origin of the toponym (cf. 1925–1929: 324–327, resp. 1929). Melich thinks that the name in question came from the adjective *szép* ‘beautiful, nice’, but he explains the formation as a process that had gone through an anthroponymic stage (cf. 1929: 41). Apart from this, there are no more convincing theories which represent the primacy of the *Szepes* toponym variant, and thus prove the Hungarian origin of the region’s name. The later Hungarian studies all accept Melich’s perspective, and even Lajos Kiss used it in his work entitled *Földrajzi nevek etimológiai szótára* [Etymological Dictionary of Geographical names] (see Jakubovich–Pais 1937/1999: 73; P. Hidvégi 1955: 20; Papp – Kiss 1961: 258; Kósa – Filep 1978: 177, resp. FNESz: *Szepesség*).

Melich first explained the origins of *Szepes* name version in his book *A honfoglaláskori Magyarország* [Hungary in the Age of Hungarian Conquest]. Here he considered the word as a borrowing of the Slavic *Spiš* toponym, based on a phonological study (cf. 1925–1929: 196). However, in one of his later studies entitled *Szepes és Poprád* [*Szepes and Poprad*] he favours the Hungarian origin. This is important from our aspect as he claims to have changed his stance because he had found that there are Old Hungarian variants from which the German and Slavic forms can be easily derived (cf. 1925–1929: 324; 1929: 39). Thus in 1929, he argues with overwhelming confidence that the *Szepes* toponym could only be explained by Hungarian

origins, and both the German and Slavic name forms can be derived from that direction, not the other way around (cf. 1929: 39).

3.1. *Szepes* > *Zips*

We shall start by examining the possibility that the toponym which refers to the area was formed in Hungarian, and accordingly, the German *Zips* is a borrowing from Hungarian.

According to Melich, the *Zips* [tsips]³ variant cannot be explained by the Slovak *Spiš* [spiʃ] or Polish *Spisz* [spiʃ] forms. The word-initial cluster [sp] of the Slavic variants would have remained [sp] in the 12th-14th-century German language, where the word-initial [ʃp] of contemporary words was pronounced [sp]. That is to say, if a German variant came from the Slavic languages, it would be pronounced with the [spiʃ] form. According to Melich, however, the first consonant of the German toponym variant can be deduced from Hungarian without any problem. He has many examples of how the Hungarian word-initial [s] has been converted into the dialects of Germans living in Hungarian territories as [ts], as in the Transylvanian Saxon *zákəl*, *zækəl* ‘inhabitant of Transylvania’, the German *Zanig* ‘Szavnik’ words (cf. 1929: 37), but he also mentions the work of Gyula Gréb, which deals with the German dialect of the Szepes county, in which we also find examples of similar phonological parallels, e.g. *tsōns* ‘the town of Szandec’, *tsaŋkirtnr* ‘Szentgirnér’, *tsīrak* ‘Sziráč family name’ (cf. Gréb 1906: 43; Melich 1929: 37).⁴ Based on all these, Melich assumes that the *Zips* was formed from the Old Hungarian *Szipis* [sipiʃ] (e.g. 1251/1281: *Schypis*, Dl. 346) toponym variant, which in turn came from the Old Hungarian *Szips* [sipʃ] (e.g. 1260/1271: *Scips*, Dl. 25052) form, with the regular [s] > [ts] change of the word-initial sound that is regular in the German language (cf. 1929: 37).

On the basis of this it is conceivable from a historical phonological point of view that the German toponym variant was derived from Hungarian. At

³ In my transcriptions I use the IPA symbols.

⁴ It must be noted that not all of these examples refer to borrowing from Hungarian. There are examples, though, that indicate that the German [ts] in word-initial position was also formed through borrowing from Slavic languages. These include the Polish *Sajzy* > German *Zeissen*, Polish *Sądry* > German *Zandern* (see Sowa 2007: 78), and also the Czech *Slavonice* > German *Zlabings* (see Lutterer – Majtán – Šrámek 1982: 274–275). These indicate that the affricate in word-initial position in the German variant – with certain phonological restraints – can be traced back to Slavic origins. I elaborate on this issue in section 4.2. of the present paper.

least regarding the explanation of the word-initial sounds. Melich does not deal with the problem of the final consonant of the German form. Gyula Gréb draws attention to this in his work, which was published in the same year. According to Gréb, the change of the Hungarian [ʃ] at the end of words > German [s] at the end of the words cannot be explained in the German dialects of Hungary. In support of this, he lists several examples of the toponyms of Szepes County, where the etymological [ʃ] word-ending remained [ʃ] after having been transferred to German (cf. e.g. *Laps* > *Lapsch*, *Répás* > *Ripsch*, 1929: 123). He claims that the [sipʃ], considered to be primary by Melich, would have been transferred to German not in the form of [tsips], but in the form of [tsipʃ]. And since he says that the appearance of the word-ending [ts] cannot be explained in terms of historical phonology, he assumes that the *Zips* form was brought there by German settlers from their original habitat (cf. 1929: 124).

The issue was also discussed by Elemér Moór in 1929, and regarding the problem of the word-ending sound he rejects Gréb's theory on name transfer, because in his view a similar argument would still be acceptable in case of a specific settlement, but it is not relevant regarding the name of an area as large as Szepes County. He attempts to resolve the problem from a phonological approach, and he can find a parallel in the German dialect of Burgenland regarding the Hungarian [sipʃ] > German [tsips] adaptation at word-endings, which was debated by Gréb. The German language version of Hungarian *Gálos* [ga:loʃ] toponym, which is also mentioned by him, is used in the form of *Gols* [gols], which proves that in a name that was borrowed from Hungarian to German, the [ʃ] > [s] adaptations in word-ending positions could happen during or after the borrowing (cf. 1929: 149). Obviously, additional examples and their accurate chronological, phonological and dialectical examination would be necessary in order to reassuringly clarify whether all phonological elements of the German *Zips* can be derived from the Old Hungarian *Szips* variant.

3.1.1. In the following parts, I would like to add some philological remarks about the derivation of the German name form from Hungarian. Regarding the German variant, Melich only considered the later standardized *Zips* forms, and he only studied charter sources that he considered as Hungarian variants. However, there are many data from the earliest period that raise the possibility of another interpretation that the name was not loaned to German by the Hungarian [sipʃ] variant – as assumed by Melich –, but the later German [tsips] name form had a previous [tsipVʃ] or [tsipVs] variant in

German.⁵ That is, the change may be reconstructed as Hungarian [sipVj] (> German [tsipVj]) > German [tsipVs] > German [tsips]. If we accept that the [ts] sound in word-initial position is a result that was formed in the German language, then the following variants from original charters of the early period suggest the presence of the two-syllable German variants: 1246: *Chipus* (Dl. 68752), 1283: *Cypis* (Df. 263198); 1291: *Cypes* (Dl. 68765), 1294: *Cypus* (Dl. 60959); 1300: *Cypus* (Df. 263708).

It may be assumed that these word-initial *ch* and *c* letters should be read as [s], but in the era it would be exceptional (cf. Kniezsa 1952: 39), and the cited sources, except the one from 1300, are from the Szepes Chapter, which functioned in a German language environment (cf. Kniezsa 1952: 42; AOklt 19: 336; Fekete Nagy 1934: 163) and are related to the affairs of the Saxons in the county. So I am convinced that these can be read in [tsipVj] or [tsipVs] forms. Kniezsa himself is on the opinion that in this era the *c* character in the names referring to Szepes County as an area does not refer to an [s], but to the German [ts] pronunciation (cf. 1952: 40).

In addition to this, it is still possible that in the variants the *z* character did not always indicate an [s], but a [ts] sound instead. Thus, some of the following sources may be linked to the two-syllable German variant: 1255: *Zepus* (Df. 264116), 1258: *Zypes* (Dl. 63605), 1272: *Zepus* (Dl. 83133), 1278: *Zepes* (Dl. 71613), 1283: *Zepus* ~ *Zepusien(sis)* (Dl. 83140), 1284: *Zepus* (Dl. 63893), 1300: *Zepus* (Df. 263708), 1300: *Zepes* (Dl. 102890).

According to Kniezsa, the spelling of [ts], especially in *loca credibilia*, such as the Szepes Chapter at this time, was very often the letter *z* (cf. 1952: 42). However, all of these charters were made in the royal chancery, because of which, in my opinion, makes it more likely that they can be pronounced as [s] at word-initial position (cf. 1952: 42).⁶

⁵ The issue of the vowel in the second syllable will not be discussed in this paper, since the discussion of the borrowings is not directly affected by the quality of the vowels and showing the form variants would only complicate the presentation of the phonologic processes. Accordingly, I ignore the alternation of the vowel in the first syllable of the Hungarian variant, and I assume that it contained [i], as this is the most probable option regarding the timeline of the borrowing.

⁶ The charter from King Andrew III, registered as Df. 263708 and issued in 1300, deserves special attention. In fact, it has the *Cypus* variant besides the *Zepus* form. It is worth considering that these are not merely written variants that resulted from the inconsistencies of medieval orthography. What we see here is the simultaneous representation of the Latinized variant – based on the Hungarian toponym – and the ver-

In connection with the chronology of the Hungarian [sip] > German [tsips] borrowing suggested by Melich, it must be noted that no example has been found from the 13th century which would reassure the early presence of the one-syllable German [tsips] form. The sources that may support this reading, in my opinion, is related to Latinization, and they might not reflect the pronunciation of a spoken dialect: 1278: *Cypsensi* (Dl. 63609), 1294: *Cip(sie)n(sis)* (Df. 266957), 1297: *Cypsiensium* (Df. 263034).

For the evaluation of these data, it is worth taking into account the charters, in which the two-syllable basic form of the Hungarian version of the *Szepes* name and its derived *-(i)ensis* form in Latin are also listed. Although Melich interpreted these differently in his readings (cf. 1929: 35–36), I think that in the following cases the vowel of the second syllable does not necessarily refer to a phonological variant, but some of them were affected by Latinization: 1264: *Scypis* ~ *Scypsien(sis)* (Dl. 40058), 1264/1294: *Scypis* ~ *Scypscen(sis)* (Dl. 26751), 1279: *Scepus* ~ *Scipsiensis* (Dl. 74779), 1280: *Scep(us)* ~ *Scepsiensi* (Dl. 63613), 1295: *Scepus* ~ *Scepsien(sis)* (Dl. 63621), 1297: *Scepus* ~ *Scepsien(sis)* (Df. 253113).⁷

Accordingly, the above-mentioned Latinized forms, written with *c*, are not clear evidence of early use of the [tsips] name variant. They can contain the two-syllable [tsipys] and other forms. There is a datum from 1301 which is spelled as *Cips* (Df. 272735), thus at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries the German form, that corresponds to the modern variant, could have already existed. However, it is worth pointing out that this form does not occur later in Latin language charters, but only in German documents or in German translations of Latin language charters from the 15th century. In order to evaluate this issue, we must also consider the name using characteristics of Latin language charters.

It is evident that in the 13th century the presence of the second syllable in the name is alternating since there are a large number of sources that refer to one-syllable name forms: 1260/1271: *Scips* (Dl. 25052), 1272: *Scypis* (Dl. 68756), 1274: *Scypis* (Dl. 68757), 1275: *Sceps* (Dl. 74778), 1278: *Scyp(s)* (Dl. 63610), 1278: *Scypis* (Dl. 63609), 1281: *Sceps* (Dl. 63614), 1293: *Scips*

nacular variant that reflects German pronunciation. This means that not both of these sources should be read with a [ts].

⁷ From this aspect the *Cypsensi* datum from 1278 is the most uncertain, since the name is also listed in the charter in *Scypis* form. However, due to the charter-writing practice and the multilingual use of the name of the county, this alone does not prove that the [tsips] variant could be behind the *Cypsensi* form (cf. Dl. 63609).

(Dl. 83143), 1298: *Scyps* (Dl. 40249), 1299: *Scyps* (Dl. 40277), 1300: *Scyps* (Dl. 40277).

Contrary to Wojciech Sowa, I do not think, that in the practice of the Hungarian chancery and the Szepes Chapter the *sc* characters – shown in the examples – indicated [ts] in the 13th century, so it is not necessary to read these as [tsips] (cf. KMHSz 69; Kniezsa 1952: 42–43; Sowa 2007: 75–76). I think that these if they were forms from live language usage, are related to Hungarian use. Melich also brings examples of other toponyms to confirm that a [sipiʃ] > [sipʃ] change was possible in Hungarian (cf. 1929: 36).

For the issue of the [s] in word-ending position in the German [tsips] the above-mentioned charter sources do not provide any guidance.

The findings from the charter sources can be summed up in two conclusions:

1. The borrowing did not happen the way Melich suggests, and not the [sipʃ] variant was transferred to German from Hungarian, but the two-syllable [sipVʃ]. With the affrication of the word-initial [s] in the German language, the [tsipVʃ] or [tsipVs] variant could have been formed rather early, even at the time of the borrowing. As for the second syllable: based on the Hungarian *Répás* > German *Ripsch* (cf. Gréb 1929: 123) or the Hungarian *Gálos* > German *Gols* changes – the former from the Szepes region, the latter from Burgenland – the loss of the vowel in the second syllable in the German dialects of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary is not unprecedented, and the sources prove that the vowel loss in the case of *Zips* occurred later, in the German language, and not at the time of the borrowing.

2. However, the variants with the initial [ts] from the above-listed forms may not have been formed in the German language. In principle, the affrication could also have occurred in Hungarian. Based on the examples of Magyar hangtörténet [Hungarian Historical Phonology] by Géza Bárczi, this change might have happened in the Hungarian language in the 13th century, and it can be supported by data (cf. 1958: 163). And the alteration of [sipVʃ] > [tsipVʃ] that can be read in the sources of that period does not necessarily reflect the German borrowing. In this case, it could be supposed that a Hungarian [tsipVʃ] or [tsipʃ] was loaned, and not the Hungarian [sipʃ] form. However, the likelihood of this is weakened by several factors. This is because in the Hungarian language the [ts] sound was not widely spread (cf. Bárczi

1958: 115, 163),⁸ and the number of Saxons living in the region was increasing at the time. Therefore, it is easier to presume that the [tsipVj] or [tsipVs] variants were developed in the German language.

3.2. Szepes > Spiš

We shall now attempt to explain the origin of the [spij] variant that is used in contemporary Slavic languages, assuming that the Hungarian variant is the primary.

In Melich's view, the Slavic [spij] can be easily explained from Hungarian. He argues that the Old Hungarian [sipij] became [sɔpij] then later [spij] in Old Slovak or Old Polish by the weakening and the loss of the vowel of the first syllable. He lists the Latin *missa* > Ancient Slavic *mъša* > Slovak *mša* ~ *omša* 'mess', the Latin *cimiterium* > Slovak *cimiter* ~ *cmiter* 'cemetery', and the East German *silings* > Western Slavic **sɔlędzɔ* > Polish *Śląsk*, Czech *Slézska* 'Silesia' as similar phonological processes (see Melich 1929: 37–38; FNESz: *Szilézia*). In addition to what Melich writes about the loss of the first vowel, the Etymologický slovník jazyka staro slovenského (ESJS) dictionary lists other examples that resulted in [sp] initial consonant clusters, similarly to the supposed [sipij] > [sɔpij] > [spis] change. These include the Old Slavic *sъpasti* ~ *sъpasetь* 'to defend, to save' > Slovak *spasit'*, Ancient Slavic *sъpati* 'to sleep' > Slovak *spat'* (cf. ESJS 15).

3.2.1. I think that it is still worth considering some circumstances regarding Melich's explanation. On the one hand, the chronological aspects of the sound change assumed by him should not be ignored. In the manner described above, Melich explains the sound structure of the Slavic [spij] as something that was formed through the disappearance of the jer in the first syllable. In the Slavic literature, however, it is commonly accepted that the loss of the jer in the so-called weak position in the 10th-12th centuries had al-

⁸ Bárcezi emphasises, however, in connection with the Hungarian [s] > [ts] affricate change, that in the 13th century it was primarily related to Slavic borrowed words (cf. 1958: 163). This may be important in case we assume the primacy of the Slavic toponym variant, compared to the Hungarian one. Further investigations should also be carried out in order to clarify whether a supposed [tsipyj] could appear as the influence of the German variant and is it conceivable that the authors of the charters adapted the [tsips] form, used in German, to the early *Scepus* form that soon became standardized in the Latin writing. It would mean in essence that the two-syllable forms, that seem as German ones, were formed only in literacy. The discussion of these issues, however, is beyond the scope of the present paper.

ready happened in the Western Slavic languages that were undergoing a process of separation (see Carlton 1991: 165–167, 239; Krajčovič 1975: 48–50; Stieber 1979: 49–52; Sussex – Cubberley 2006: 211–215; Zoltán 2015, 2016). So Melich’s idea about the adaptation and the subsequent change can only be accepted in case the Hungarian *Szepes* form had been transferred to the language of the local Slavic communities even before the end of the 12th century. It is obvious that the question could be answered by a more precise definition of the period when the Hungarian toponym variant was created. According to our present knowledge, this happened during the time of the Northern expansion of the Kingdom of Hungary. The establishment of the county, and thus the arrival of Hungarians in significant numbers in the region happened around the 12th and 13th centuries, and not earlier. Archaeological studies have shown that the construction of the present-day castle begun in the last quarter of the 13th century (see Zsoldos 2001: 24, 2003: 34), and the establishment of the Szepes provostship might be dated to the early 13th century (see Labanc – Glejtek 2015: 12–18). Although Antal Fekete Nagy believes that the first Hungarian border guard troops were present in the region from the first half of the 11th century, Gyula Kristó claims that the Hungarians arrived from the neighbouring counties sometime later, in the middle of the 12th century (see Fekete Nagy 1934: 34–36; KMTL: *Szepes(ség)*). Unfortunately, the written sources do not provide us with more definite points for answering the question. Even the earliest charters that include the name of the area are from the first decades of the 13th century, and there are no data from the 10th-12th centuries.⁹ However, the formation of the toponym and the organization of the county might be studied separately, and it is possible that originally the toponym was not used to refer to the county or its centre, the castle. It can be assumed that the name was based on an already existing toponym, which could have been created earlier in the language of the Hun-

⁹ Some of the researchers say that the first written form of the region is *Scipien(sis)* from a 1198 charter (Df. 248310). Others, however, follow János Karácsonyi in stating that it refers to a settlement near the Danube (see Karácsonyi 1901: 1050; CDES 1: 99; Homza 2009: 126; Labanc – Glejtek 2015: 12–18; RegArp. 1/1: 54). Yet this source refers only to the very end of the 12th century. The lack of charters from this period – considering other resources in connection with the history of Szepes County – might indicate that the Hungarians were not present in greater numbers in this region in the 10th-12th centuries.

garians who were responsible for the construction and protection of the northern borders.¹⁰

It is clear that the chronological uncertainties surrounding the creation of the toponym weaken Melich's explanation. In order to justify the phonological derivation that he outlined, the origin of the Hungarian name should be dated back earlier than the 12th century. This is the only way to link the Hungarian [sipi] > Slavic [spi] transfer to the sound change tendency in Slavic languages that resulted in the disappearance of jers. However, neither the history of the local Hungarian communities nor the history of the authorities of the region in this period has been studied to an extent that could support this.

In order to support his theory, Melich elaborates on the origin of the medieval variant of the present-day settlement Smižany. He assumes that the current Slovak form *Smižany* comes from the Old Hungarian *Somogy* variant, by the weakening and eventual loss of the vowel in the first syllable, similarly to [sipi] > [spi].¹¹ He claims that such a change happening at the same time and at the same place in a different toponym proves his explanation irrefutably, thus the primacy of the Hungarian *Szepes* form over the Slavic variants (cf. 1929: 38–39).

This parallel, however, raises further problems in addition to the chronological issues mentioned above:

1. There are data of the Hungarian version dating back to the middle of the 13th century,¹² and in the first third of the 15th century, the German *Schmögen* variant was used as well.¹³ However, the Slavic variant can only be found in

¹⁰ For example, the form *silva Zepus* in *Gesta Hungarorum* can be a reference to this (cf. Melich 1929: 41).

¹¹ Melich claims that this toponym originated from the Hungarian language, and he assumes that is a derived form of the plant name *som* 'cornus' (cf. 1929: 38–39). Others insist it can be traced back to the Polish *szum*, *szuma*, which means 'forest' (see Goótšova – Chomová – Krško 2014: 355).

¹² 1245–1248/Más.: *Simik*, v., (Labanc 2014: 72), 1254: *Sumug*, t., v. (Dl. 2514), 1289: *Symigy*, v. (Df. 263061), 1293/1322: *Sumugy*, de, t. (Dl. 71627), etc.

¹³ See 1423/1787: *Schmegen*, v. (Dl. 71611). The fact that the charter containing this datum is only available today in copies from early modern times. That is why we must consider the actualization of the toponym variant. The earliest copy from the 16–17th century is damaged in this part, but both the Df. 282605 charter from 1774, and the 1787 authorized copy – which was mentioned above – contain this variant. It might be possible to consider the *Syndramus filius Cristanni de Smegen* form from 1438 as an

sources from later periods, after the Middle Ages.¹⁴ But, based on the lack of data, the Hungarian variant was not in use at that time, so the Slavic variant turns up alternatively with the German form in the sources from this period (see Kenyhercz 2014: 242, 2015: 207). So chronologically it seems likely that the Slavic toponym was not derived from Hungarian but from German.

2. I think the German and the Slavic forms are more similar to each other than the Hungarian and the Slavic. On one hand, because of the similarities of their phonological structures, on the other hand, according to Camillo Reuter, the inner vowel of the Slavic variant can be explained by the German *Schmögen*, through the [g] > [h] > [ʒ] change (cf. 1980: 80, according to the literature, however, the Slavic toponym can be derived from the Hungarian as well, see FNEŠz: *Szepessümege*, Melich 1929: 38–39).¹⁵ And if we consider the fact that there is a relation between the Hungarian *Somogy* and the German *Schmögen* in terms of their origin (see for example the Hungarian *Somogyom* and the German *Schmiegen* toponym-pair from Kis-Küküllő County), it is much easier to explain how the Slavic *Smižany* came from the German toponym that originally begins with a consonant cluster.

Thus, the example of *Somogy* > *Smižany* does not seem to be an irrefutable argument in stating that the disappearance of the first vowel in the Slavic language of 13th-century Szepes County would have been obvious.

All in all, however, Melich may be right when he discusses the direction of the transfer, even if his attempt to reconstruct the phonological processes in *Spiš* and *Smižany* could be wrong. Returning to the main question, it is also possible that the disappearance of the first vowel in Slavic [spij], which is derived from Hungarian, cannot be explained by any kind of regular Slavic sound change. Instead, we can assume an adaptation phenomenon that resulted in a change in the phonological structure of the toponym taken from the Hungarian language. This might have been based on the phonological structure of Slavic languages.¹⁶ In this case, the adaptation can be discussed separately from the disappearance of jers in the 10th-12th century.

early example of the German form, but the source offers no data that could help to identify the settlement mentioned there (see Tüskés 2008: 153).

¹⁴ See e.g. 1570: *Smyssan*, 1582: *Smizan*, 1593: *Smyzan*, 1598: *Smysan*, 1647: *Szmisan*, 1696: *Szmisan*, etc. (Kenyhercz 2014: 242).

¹⁵ Tracing back the initial [j] > [s] in both languages raises the same questions.

¹⁶ There are a number of toponyms that prove that in this period the initial consonant cluster was a typical phonological structure in Slavic languages (see Kenyhercz 2013b: 49–183). In the case of adaptation, this could definitely act as an analogy.

3.2.2. In his work published in 1980, Šimon Ondruš does not accept Melich's theory and the idea that the Slavic variant came from Hungarian due to reasons connected to phonological structures. In his opinion, the [spiʃ] variant cannot be derived from Hungarian. This is because in the Slovak language in the 12th-13th century the CVCVC phonotactic pattern was absolutely common, so in case of an adaptation, a [sipiʃ] > [spiʃ] change would not have been justified. Instead, the [sipiʃ] form would have survived (cf. 1980: 282). Although it is a theoretical statement, the cornerstone of modern theories about phonological changes is that the structures most exposed to changes are the ones that are irregular or even unusual in a given language (see Bakró-Nagy 1992: 35; Vennemann 1988: 2). However, we need to understand that sometimes linguistic changes that do not seem justified from a phonological point of view, can also happen. I studied this phenomenon in relation to the history of first syllable consonant clusters in the Old Hungarian language. Many examples that I have come across show that the dissolution of initial consonant clusters can happen in the Hungarian language even if the change would not have been inevitable from a phonotactic point of view (see Kenyhercz 2013b: 195–204). Adaptive and analogical changes or modifications are especially characteristics of linguistic borrowing. However, Ondruš's assumption is supported by the lack of any parallel examples that would show a similar Hungarian CVCVC > Slavic CCVC adaptation (see e.g. FNESz, Kenyhercz 2013b; Rocchi 2010: 29–52; for adaptations regarding other languages see e.g. Rospond 1984; Lutterer – Majtán – Šrámek 1982, etc.). The change in the phonological structure – proposed by Melich – may indeed not be relevant and general in relation to the 12th-13th century. But contrary to what Ondruš writes, I do not think that this fact alone proves that the Hungarian origination is incorrect. It only opens the way for further studies and different explanations.

4. Slavic origins

We shall look at the problems we face when by assuming that the Slavic variant is the primary, we attempt to derive the Hungarian and the German variants from it.

In this case, we cannot rely on information from charters. There is no trace of the Slavic toponym variant in 12th-13th-century official documents. However, this alone does not necessarily mean that it was not used by the Slavic-speaking community. In this period the prestige of Slavic languages in the Kingdom of Hungary was low, so Slavic toponyms that had Hungarian or

German counterparts were often omitted (see Hoffmann 2007: 91; Kenyhercz 2013a, Hoffmann – Rácz – Tóth 2018: 50–52). Yet the chronicle of Boguchwał II from 13th-century Poland includes the Slavic variant of the region in the form of *Spis* ~ *Spys* (KSA, p. 32). Although the original source is not available any more, its copies can be found in 14th-century codexes. From the aspect of historical linguistics, this data can be considered valid in relation to the time period when the codexes that include the copy were made. While all early and late copies of the above-mentioned chronicle feature this phonological variant (see Bielowski 1872: 508), it is possible that the 13th-century original already had the [spiʃ] toponym variant. The ethnical conditions of Szepes County also indicate that the Slavic toponym variant was already in use besides the Hungarian and German forms, during the inhabitation of the region. This makes me believe that the lack of early charter data alone does not mean that the Slavic form could not be the primary.

The number of explanations of the subject in question from Slavic languages is greater than the explanation from any other languages. Of these the previously mentioned work by Šimon Ondruš from 1980 is maybe the most widely accepted. According to Ondruš, the toponym *Spis* meant 'deforested area', which he traces back to **sʷ-pich-jb* and **iz-pich-jb* forms, meaning *рѣчати* 'to cut up wood by an axe'. Ondruš claims that *sʷpišb* was formed by palatalization and the deletion of the first [i] sound, and eventually, the *spis* variant was formed after the disappearance of jers (cf. 1980: 281).¹⁷

¹⁷ The 1984 etymology by Stanisław Rospond must be mentioned here as well. He also considers the Slavic as the primary form. In *Spis* (written this way) he sees a word meaning 'mountain with forest', and the toponym's root is the Ancient Slavic *šipъ* 'thorn', from which *Šip-iš* and *Šip-uš* forms came. According to Rospond, later the first syllable was deleted (he does not include a chronology for this idea) and this resulted in the Slavic form. He thinks that the Hungarian variant was formed through the Slavic form, but he does not discuss how the initial [ʃ] in the primary [ʃpiʃ] toponym became [s]. He does not explain the origin of the German form as well (cf. 1984: 200). The historian Jerzy Nalepa assumes a different semantical background in his 2003 paper, but he also refers to Slavic origin. He thinks that the toponym originally referred to a mountain, on which a castle was built. The reconstructed **sʷpišb* variant meaning 'spiky mountain, hill' refers to this. According to Nalepa, this is how the castle got its name, and later the toponym was used to refer to the whole region (cf. 2003). From the aspects of historical phonology, these theories and other Slavic derivations start out from words that have a similar phonological structure to the one Ondruš used. That is why everything I discuss Ondruš's etymology refers to the Slavic derivations in general.

We shall take a look at whether the Hungarian toponym variant can be traced back to the Slavic form.

4.1. Spiš > Szepes

Ondruš thinks that the Hungarian toponym variant can be easily deduced from the Slavic form. In fact, he claims that the Slavic [spiʃ] > Hungarian [sɒpiʃ] adaptation is absolutely regular because the initial consonant clusters of Slavic words were generally eliminated from the Hungarian language. And as I have mentioned it earlier, he assumes that the explanation of Slavic initial consonant clusters is not possible through the Hungarian language, he considers the Slavic [spiʃ] as the primary variant (cf. 1980: 282–283).

In this context, it is worth considering the phonological characteristics of the dissolution of the initial consonant clusters. It is known that in the Old Hungarian language the initial consonant clusters were generally eliminated by the insertion of a vowel between the two consonants. The only exceptions were the [ʃ], [s] + voiceless stop combinations, as the clusters were eliminated in them by a vowel inserted before the syllable (see e.g. Bárczi 1958: 137–140; Kálmán 1972: 59–60; Kenyhercz 2013a, 2013b, Nyirkos 1992, 1993: 17–25, 1997, for the general phonological background of this see Szigetvári 1998: 203). Thus, a Slavic [spiʃ] sequence in the 12th-13th century must have been adapted by the Hungarian language in the form of [ispiʃ] or [ɛspiʃ]. But none of the numerous sources of this toponym refers to this. Besides, as for Ondruš's assumption about the elimination of the [ʃ], [s] + voiceless stop cluster by an inserted vowel, in the complete medieval toponym corpus of the Carpathian Basin, I do not know one similar example. In the works of István Nyirkos that cover the whole history of the Hungarian language only these six data can be found: the nouns *skarlát* 'scarlet fever' and *superlát* 'ornamental curtain, canopy', and *szapora* 'quick, prolific', *szekernye* 'high-high shoes or buskin', *szekrény* 'wardrobe' and *szikla* 'rock', based on etymology (cf. Nyirkos 1997: 137–144, and the relevant entries of EWUng). However, there are countless examples for the elimination of [ʃ], [s] + voiceless stop clusters by vowels inserted to the front of the syllable (Kenyhercz 2013b; Nyirkos 1992, 1993: 17–25, 1997). Because of these, I believe that Ondruš's explanation, regardless of the fact that he was right or wrong about the direction of the adaptation, bears no greater significance, as he attempts to use an exceptional phonological change in his reasoning related to the 12th-13th century.

Theoretically, it is not impossible to assume that the *Szepes* toponym was adopted to Hungarian from a Slavic language, but it cannot be explained by the above-mentioned irregular elimination of initial consonant clusters inserting a vowel between the two consonants. According to Elemér Moór, in the Hungarian language the Slavic [spiʃ] variant first became [sipʃ] by metathesis, then [sipiʃ] by the elimination of the closing consonant clusters (cf. 1929: 145). It would require further examinations to prove this, because Moór's example, the Slavic *Kriva* > Hungarian *Kirva* is not an obvious analogy. On one hand, it includes the connection of sounds with different phonological characteristics as in the case of *Spiš*. On the other hand, the formation can be explained in another way as well, as the Slavic [kriva] first became *[kiriva] in Hungarian by the addition of a vowel. Later due to another phonological tendency of the Old Hungarian language the second open syllable lost the vowel, thus the [kirva] variant was formed. It is very unlikely that the latter happened with [spis], because the dissolution of the initial [sp] cluster with a vowel inserted between the two consonants is an irregular change.¹⁸ That is why I suggest another solution.

In order to dissolve the phonological contradictions of Slavic [spiʃ] > Hungarian [sipiʃ] change, it is worth mentioning that the Slavic toponym was borrowed to Hungarian in a form that still contained the jers, and not later, in its [spiʃ] form, that has an initial consonant cluster. But for this, we need to assume an adaptation that happened not later than the 12th century. In this period the Western Slavic languages still had the jers in weak positions. In connection with the Slavic-Hungarian linguistic contacts in the 11th century András Zoltán notes that the so-called jer – contrary to what is wrongly believed – was not a reduced sound, but a full vowel, which could be easily recognised by speakers of those languages that had contact with Slavic languages. Zoltán quotes Gyula Décsy, who believes that in the above-mentioned period the palatal reduced vowel (ь) could still have been heard as [i], the velar reduced vowel (ѣ) could still have been heard as [u] or a similar sound by Hungarian speakers. To demonstrate this, András Zoltán brings up a source that was written around Kassa – an area not far from the old Szepes County – in 1261. The first part of the toponym *Pistrungus potoc* comes from the Slavic *pъstroǫbъ* 'trout'. The jer in the initial syllable was adapted from Slavic to Hungarian as a palatal [i] sound. This, according to Zoltán, shows that the borrowing had happened before the end of the 12th century when the jer in

¹⁸ For the definition of metathesis and the so-called 'two-open-syllable tendency', see Kálmán 1972: 58, 65, and the works of Csilla Katona (e.g. 2016a, 2016b).

the initial syllable was still an audible vowel, as it disappeared from the surrounding Slavic dialects by the end of the 12th century (cf. Zoltán 2015: 38–39, 2016: 40–41; and see e.g. Krajčovič 1975: 49–55). Therefore, in case of attempting to derive the Hungarian *Szepes* from the Slavic variant, it is worth tracing back the contemporary Slovak [spi] and the Hungarian [sipi] – theoretically – to a mutual antecedent, that is a Slavic *[sьpīšь] ~ *[sьpīšʲ] ¹⁹ or another word with a similar phonological structure. In this case the subsequent differences in the phonological structure would be the results of the different phonological development of the two languages: in the Slavic variant the jer in the initial syllable disappears, while it is adapted to the Hungarian language as an [i] sound, and it is only affected by qualitative changes later. I find this explanation much less irregular than linking the problem of the initial syllable in Hungarian to the breaking of consonant clusters. The weak point here is the chronology, too, as the toponym must have been borrowed to Hungarian in the 10th-12th century when the Slavic variant still had the vowel in the initial syllable (see Zoltán 2015: 41). It must also be mentioned that all the etymologies that I have come across have the velar [ɣ] sound in the first syllable. This means that in order to prove my theory, a Slavic antecedent is needed, in which the palatal [ɣ] can be reconstructed in the first syllable. ²⁰

In the following, I attempt to explain the formation of the German variant from a Slavic origin.

4.2. Spiš > Zips

The question of tracing back the German variant to a Slavic form is a secondary issue in the literature. At this point, I also think that the German variant can be explained more easily by the connection with the Hungarian language even if we accept the Slavic origin. Besides, the Hungarian and the Slavic forms are fairly close to each other in terms of phonology (see Gréb 1929: 124), thus the explanation of the German variant by the Slavic origin raises the same questions as tracing it back from Hungarian. That is why I

¹⁹ The first vowel in this case, is not velar (ɣ), as Ondruš or Nalepa assumed, but a palatal (ɣ̣). Otherwise, the front vowel in the first syllable of the Hungarian variant could only have a secondary explanation, which in our case would represent another problem.

²⁰ The final position jer is not explained in more details in this paper. According to András Zoltán, there can be many reasons behind its disappearance from the Hungarian and Slavic languages (cf. 2015: 40–41).

am not going to discuss these again. However, it must be noted that the Slavic origin of the German variant could be plausible only if the Slavic [spiʃ] variant would have been borrowed in German by affrication and metathesis in [tsipʃ] or [tsips] forms. Yet the charter sources contradict this because they support the two-syllable [tsipiʃ] or [tsipis] variant, which reflects the use of the German language (please see section 3.1.2. for examples). Explaining the formation of these two-syllable forms from Slavic would be more demanding than any other description. Besides, the Slavic [spiʃ] > German [tsipʃ] borrowing is not a predictable change due to the characteristics of the phonological structure, because the initial consonant cluster would have been kept in the German form as well (see Melich 1929: 37).

5. German origins

Finally, we consider the possibility of taking the German form as the primary source.

The first serious theory is from Gyula Gréb, which I have mentioned earlier. However, he does not claim the absolute primacy of the German variant, but due to phonological problems related to last syllables, he supposes that the German variant is not directly connected to the Hungarian. Instead, he says that the German settlers adjusted the [sipʃ] form of *Szepes* – that had already been in use – to the *Zips*-type toponyms that were familiar to them as folk etymology. Yet he does not elaborate on the question of whether variants from other languages can be derived from it, or they are independent of this form (cf. 1929).

More recently, Wojciech Sowa has also addressed the question of the primacy of the German form. In order to clarify the formation of the German variant, he emphasises the effect of the language of a neo-Latin community that was settled in the county during its formation. According to Sowa, the toponym refers to *cepus* ~ *ceppus* (meaning 'log or trunk' in medieval Latin) and its derivatives in neo-Latin. He links *cepus* to Hungarian word *gyepű* 'march, an artificial boundary for defence purposes', which is a reference to the role of the historical Szepes County in protecting the border. And although he does not imply a direct etymological connection between the two words, he still claims that the name-giving might have been based on semantic and phonological reasons, i.e. the fence on the border was built of wood (cf. 2007: 77–78). While he explains the semantic background, Sowa does not detail the interpretation of Slavic and Hungarian variants (cf. 2007: 78–79).

He initially starts from the German variant instead of the Slavic and the Hungarian, because in the charters he reads the starting *c*, *ch*, as well as *sc* and *z* letters as [ts], according to certain procedures of the European Latin literacy (cf. 2007: 75–77). I believe, however, that this theory is not exactly self-evident, especially in relation to the practices of the chancellors and officials of the Kingdom of Hungary. The entries of the *Korai magyar helynévszótár 1*. [Dictionary of Early Hungarian Toponyms 1.] that start with [ts] or [s] show that until 1350 all words with the [ts] in initial position were spelled with *c* and *ch*, while those with [s] in the initial position were spelled with *s*, *sc* or *z* (cf. *KMHSz 1*: 69, 246–270; and see e.g. Kniezsa 1952: 42–43). During my name collecting works related to the old Szepes region, I did not find any examples for a different spelling. This means that the primacy of the German variant cannot be based merely on its spelling in the charters. However, Sowa himself emphasises that his explanation should be considered a suggestion.

Before turning to the explanation of the Slavic and Hungarian forms on the basis of the German variant, I must add that the primacy of the *Zips* variant is put into doubt by the fact that the German-speaking settlers arrived in the region after the Slavic and the Hungarians (please see section 2), so the Germans could only be considered name-givers if the region would not have had Hungarian or Slavic name or it would have had a different name. We shall nevertheless examine the questions raised by the derivation of the Hungarian form from German.

5.1. *Zips* > *Szepes*

If we look for a direct phonological correlation between the German and Hungarian forms, we have to face some problems. This is due to the supposed [ts] > [s] change at the initial position. It is very unlikely that at the end of the 12th century – the supposed date of the borrowing – the Hungarian language adapted the initial German [ts] sound in the form of [s]. Instead, it would have been borrowed as [tʃ] or would have remained [ts] (see Bárczi 1958: 111–112, 137). This makes the explanation of the [s] > [ʃ] and the dissolution of the closing [pʃ] cluster secondary. Therefore, I believe that before the first decade of the 13th century (the first sources of the Hungarian variant are from this period) the German variant could only have been the source of the Hungarian form in very special circumstances (please see also footnote 11).

5.2. Zips > Spiš

There are also a number of difficulties with regard to the derivation of the Slavic form from the German language. Even if authentic examples of word-initial [ts] > [s] adaptation or examples of subsequent sound changes were found (see Lutterer – Majtán – Šrámek 1982: 268–269), proving that the Slavic [spiʃ] form, which has an initial consonant cluster, originated from the German [tsips] would be difficult, especially with regular analogies. Deriving the Hungarian variant from the German form cannot be done logically, so it is unlikely that the Slavic was formed through a Hungarian variant. Thus, the borrowing described here is not the most probable solution.

6. Summary

Although linguistic borrowings and the subsequent phonological changes do not always follow the strict logic of historical linguistics, in my paper, I attempted to evaluate the plausibility of the typical and thus probable changes in the context of the original hypothesis. From the borrowing processes demonstrated in this paper, I consider the Slavic and the Hungarian variants as the most probable primary forms. But as I indicated it in the different sections of my work, there are problems in both cases with the derivation of forms from other languages. I think that the complex linguistical relations between the name forms denoting the historical Szepes County can be further investigated by expanding the perspectives of their studies. Thus, the studies in toponymic typology, semantics, source-criticism and linguistic prestige are still needed in the full reconstruction of the genesis of *Szepes*, *Spiš* and *Zips* toponyms.

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