

Following the trails of ancestors and relatives Wandering Hungarian researchers in the East and the North

Hungarians arrived in the Carpathian Basin from the East in 895. But where did they come from? This crucial question has motivated several adventurous researchers who set out to find the roots of Hungarians. In the decades after the Hungarian conquest, relationships flourished between the two groups of Hungarians, i.e. those already living in the Carpathian Basin and those remaining in the East. Later, this knowledge lapsed into obscurity. In the 13th century Julianus found the eastern Hungarians in Volga Bulgaria. In the 15th century, Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary, planned to search for them. On his journey to Moscow in the 16th century, Siegmund Herberstein, a Habsburg diplomat, heard that the rest of Hungarians lived in Yugria, at the foot of the Ural Mountains. In the course of the 18th century, it was realized that the Hungarian language is related to Finnish and Sami. On his visit to Lapland, János Sajnovics stated that “the Hungarian and the Sami language are identical”. Antal Reguly researched Khanty and Mansi languages in Western Siberia in the 1840s, and he also collected ethnographic material. His work was continued by several scholars in the second half of the 19th century: linguistic and ethnographic material was collected by Ignác Halász, Károly Pápai and Bernát Munkácsi. Researchers of Finno-Ugric languages and people were supported by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. At the turn of the century, Count Jenő Zichy launched several expeditions to find the eastern relics of Hungarians. The main target was the Caucasus, but Jenő Zichy sponsored József Pápay’s travels to the Ob-Ugric people in Western Siberia as well as the journey of archeologist Béla Pósa to the Volga–Kama region and Central Asia. Besides scientists, amateur prehistorians also looked for the traces of Hungarians from the Baltic Region to the Far East (e.g. László Berzenczey, Benedek Barátosi Balog). From the end of the 19th century on, archeologists joined the research. Besides Béla Pósa, Flóris Rómer and József Hampel also visited Russia to look for the eastern parallels of archeological finds from the era of the Hungarian Conquest. Between the two world wars, archeologist Nándor Fettich travelled to the Soviet Union for a study trip. In the 1930s two Hungarian writers recounted their meeting with people speaking genealogically related languages: János Kodolányi visited Finland, while Gyula Illyés travelled to the Soviet Union.

The origins of Hungarians and the genealogically related languages of Hungarian are still in the center of public attention. Expeditions and scientific study trips launched to reveal our past and explore the related languages all signal this unceasing curiosity. No comprehensive account of such trips has ever been published. The present study describes the Hungarian expeditions that aimed to find the ancestors and relatives of Hungarians, evaluates the results of these trips shortly and provides a comprehensive list of bibliography for the experts interested in expeditions and scientific study trips.

Keywords: prehistory, genealogically related languages, expeditions between 1232–1939.

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