



HUNGARIAN KINGDOM IN EUROPE BEFORE THE 8TH CENTURY?

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Norma Lorre Goodrich's well known and received book the *Medieval Myths*[1] popularizes the great myths of Western Europe. She is also known for her work on the ancient Near Eastern and Eastern myths leading up to the time of the Romans.

She discusses among the myths of the Middle Ages the myths of Skandinavia's *Beowulf*, Wales' *Peredur*, France's *Roland*, Austria's *Sifrit*, Germany's *Tannhäuser*, Ireland's *Cuchulain*, Russia's *Prince Igor* and Spain's *El Cid*. Among these she also discusses France's legend of *Berta of Hungary* which the author considers of equal importance to the aforementioned. Even so, interestingly, as far as I can remember Hungary's Berta was never mentioned during our student years. My present writing would like to shed some light on the existence of this myth which brings many hitherto undiscussed aspects of European and Hungarian history to the forefront.

The life story of Hungary's Berta was found by accident in 1270 by the then very famous minstrel of Belgian origin, Adenes li rois, or Little Adam, the King of Minstrels. His life's work became important in his own age and is considered significant even now because he practiced his art not only as an oral transmission of stories, but he has also written them down, so the stories were luckily preserved for posterity. the form of his art was somewhere between an epic and romance. Most of his poems are connected with the age of Charlemagne and the Crusades.

Other similar compositions – like Roland for example – talk about life from the nobility's point of view. Adenes was more at home with the simple people of the land, in the world of deep forests and great stretches of meadows. His poetry is rich in the choice of words, which rhyme beautifully throughout his work. His story on Berta of Hungary could easily provide a prototype to the later stories of the Western world, like the "*Sleeping Beauty*", "*Rose Red and Snow White*" says Lorre. there are psychological elements in this story which will surface only in the 19th century in the West. Lorre quotes a section of this poetry:

Rosa rubicundior

Lilio candidior

Omnibus formosior

Semper in te glorior!

(Redder, than a rose, whiter than a lily, shapelier than all others, I'm always delighting in [or boasting about] you.)

These lines not only remind us of "Snow White", but these words and pictures follow us through the story of Berta of Hungary.

A recurring important element of his poetry is the rose. Researchers of his poetry remind us that this image leads us back into antiquity since the most ancient cathedrals – like Chartre's and the Notre Dame in Paris – already pay tribute in their architecture to the rose; which is also the symbol of the Virgin Mary. In Hungary the rose and also the lily symbols lead us back to prehistory, to the Golden Age as the Magyar archaic poems, collected by Zsuzsa Erdélyi[2] attested to this fact. We also have to mention that the connections between the West European and Hungarian lore does not end here. Hungarian masterbuilders of Ják have left their mark on churches and cathedrals of France.

The minstrel Adenes learned about the existence of this myth by accident. According to his life story, he was sitting at home and having nothing better to do he decided to go to Paris to pray in the church of St. Denis. Here he met and befriended a monk, who invited him into his chambers where he showed his new friend a manuscript, containing the story of *Berta de la Hongrie*. The story was so fascinating and the verses which contained it were so elevated and perfect that Adenes could not part with it. He stayed on at the monk's home from Friday to Tuesday to study the material. As it turns out the story started with the times of Charles Martel, on the day of St. John, when the roses bloom. As Martel was looking for an appropriate wife for his son he held council where it was decided that they will ask for the hand of Princess Berta of Hungary. The delegation left and returned with the most beautiful princess anyone has ever seen. Her golden locks, her dimpled cheeks, her slender body, also her kindness enchanted everyone. She was promptly known as Berta the Debonnaire.

The subject of this story follows the story line of Hungarian folk stories, especially the genre of the "Black Bride". King Floire and Queen Blancheflor of Hungary had only one child, a daughter, the beautiful Berta. This royal couple have spent some time in France in their youth to perfect their language skills and learned to love the French. So they sent their daughter without hesitation to become wife to the French King. Berta's mother gave to her personal service a lady whom she freed from servitude, her daughter, who was almost the perfect image of Berta in outer beauty and their male relative, to guard her daughter every minute of her life. This threesome plotted against Berta once in France and smuggled the servant girl into the King's wedding bed. The male servant took Berta into the middle of the forest to perish.

Berta's first and rather unwilling rescuer was a hermit in the woods who gave her a few crumbs of bread to eat and points her into the right direction to find the sheriff's house where she could find refuge. She found the house and the good hearted family took her in and cared for her as if she had been their own.

In the meanwhile the old wick's daughter concerned herself solely to amass her fortune. By doing this she did not care how many of the poor had to suffer. She was selfish and unkind, just the exact opposite of Berta. But she also gave two sons to the King so he forgave her shortcomings.

Finally rumors of Berta's misfortune reached Hungary and the Queen Mother set out to find out the truth about

these stories. As she arrived to France she immediately realized what happened and told the King that it is not her daughter who shares his life. An extended search began and the King finally found Berta himself on her way to mass.

He sent away the servant girl with plenty of treasures to live in style. He gave honors and titles to the two boys. After this the King lived happily ever after with Berta and the whole country benefited by her generosity and kindness. Berta bore a son to him who became known as Charlemagne. She died in 783.

Berta's mother too bore a little girl upon her return to Hungary whom she called Constance after the name of Berta's rescuer. This Constance eventually became Queen of Hungary.

Reading this story the following connections need to be noted:

1. Hungary existed and had a name before 783 A. D.
2. Hungary was a kingdom before 783
3. The minstrel's account talked about the kingdom of Hungary as the most cultured court in Europe
4. The source poem for *Adans li Rois* was a highly educated person with talents uncommon in France at that time.
5. It is believed that the story of Berta is the prototype of all Western European stories.
6. The psychological connections of this poem will not surface in the West before the 19th century
7. The story's ancient Magyar roots cannot be mistaken. The Black Bride's story can be found only in the neighborhood of the Carpathian Basin or where Magyars resided even for a time. One such story is the Italian story of *Belraggio e Bianchina*.^[3] The borrowers of the story did not realize that this is a solar myth dealing with the two aspects of the Moon. The Western European stories come from these roots.
8. The important symbolic content of the rose in this story is not to be searched in the architecture of the Cathedrals of Chartres, or the Notre Dame in Paris but in much more ancient times.

Some examples:

- a. Zsuzsanna Erdélyi's collection of ancient Magyar prayers talk constantly about "Virgin Mary, the white rose", The lily is a prominent symbol in these prayers. They also talk about cathedrals of roses, rose-priests saying mass, etc.
 - b. The "rosette" motif is an integral part of the oldest Hungarian architecture and this slowly found its way to the West too.
 - c. The reciprocal of rose which is *sár* means light in the Hungarian language as the word *virág* (flower) is *világ* (light) too. It plays also a very important role in the legends of the Hungarian princesses, such as St. Elizabeth who became wife of the Prince of Thuringia.
9. Princess Berta's and also her parents' name belongs into the B-R wordgroup which signals the presence of the ancient Avar-Magyar ethnic group. This ethnic groups features, hair color and texture appears as the features

of Princess Berta. The name of the entire family belongs also into the vocabulary of this ethnic group.[4]

The name of the King of Hungary translated into Hungarian is *Virág* (flower) and reminds us of another solar myth, *Virágos szíű Bálint* (the Flowery Bálint), a symbol of the Sun and whose Christianized version is “*the Flowery St. John*”. Berta’s story begins *on the day of St. John when the roses are in bloom*. The Queen’s name also means flower, a white flower which takes us also into the land of Creation’s white light which myths later became incorporated into the person of the Virgin Mary. We may suppose that no such names ever existed in the real world. But if we look at the legends of the Celts we find that their first Queen was called Virago which is none other than a version of the Magyar *Virág* (flower). We need to remember that the Celts’ history was intimately connected with the Carpathian Basin. In Berta’s story the name of the Avar ethnic group, the names of the King and Queen of Hungary all belong into the B-P-F-V/R wordgroup.

10. Last, but not least Berta’s kindness set her apart from the Western models and her goodness, honesty, her clean soul all radiate the spirituality of the Hungarians which resurfaces again and again in the legends of the Magyar princesses who appeared on the thrones of the West as Queens, and many of them became revered saints of the Roman Catholic Church.

11. Adene compares Berta to the pink flowers of a fruit tree or the wild rose. The wild rose was part of the Avar defense system which they planted around their castles; wherever they settled they kept up this custom. The remnants of these rose fences can still be seen both in France and Hungary. This rose defence system gave rise to the well known story of Sleeping Beauty.

12. The legend tells us that Hungary’s princess Constance eventually became queen of Hungary.

13. Berta became the mother of Charlemagne.

According to Berta’s legend, the Hungarian Kingship was already well established in the 700’s and was a model to the Western European royal households, as the story of Scotland’s Margart and the life story of St. Elizabeth of Thuringia were also in their respective new homes. In order to be so Hungary had to have a stable society and well established laws, culture. The fact that the Hungarian Constance became eventually the Queen of Hungary, as mentioned in this legend tells us about the elevated concepts of equality between the sexes in Hungary. This in turn leads us back to the ancient times of language development, for the word for wife is *feleség* in Magyar[5] which means: “My half”.

The Hungarian-French connection before the arrival of the Árpád’s may shed light upon the quick demise of the Avars. Their plunder by Charlemagne may not have been carried out through honest battle, but it was probably carried out under the guise of a visit to “relatives”. The several wagons full of Avar gold and precious articles left the Hungarian border undisturbed. The Hungarian Holy Crown must have been taken at this time also, probably quoting dynastic connections, since Charlemagne was crowned and buried with it. The Avar wealth was the base of Charlemagne’s and the Catholic Church’s worldly success.

The story of Charlemagne’s coronation carries also the tell-tale signs of a stolen tradition. The Hungarian Holy Crown’s mythology states that only a person whom God has chosen can place this crown on his head. In fact, the Crown flies independently onto the head of the chosen King. During Charlemagne’s coronation a bishop of the Roman Catholic Church was sneaking up to him and placed the crown upon his head, as if it happened according to tradition. But God cannot be fooled... Neither the tradition, nor the Holy Crown, nor God’s blessing was upon his reign.

Hungarian political slogans of the near past tell us to “march toward Europe”. At this point I have to remind

ourselves that Hungary and her Kingdom was Europe. Geographically it lies in the center of Europe. A unified central government was already in place there before the year 1000 AD. The unification of Germany and Italy for example came about only 800 years later. But more importantly Hungary's heart and spirit gives life and power to renew – to Europe and the World.

I do hope that a Hungarian researcher will make some effort to research the legend of the Hungarian Princess Berta, and all the other Western European legends. With the help of Mr. Gábor Farkas, Librarian of the Eötvös Lóránd Tudomány Egyetem I was able to find only one work on this subject, written by Ilona Király's book titled Szent Márton, Budapest, 1929.

This legend of 1240 calls Berta "debonnair". Later legends connect her with the pagan Berchta. She is also connected with the figure of the gold spinning maiden, also a well known figure of Hungarian folk tales.

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The Pallas Nagy Lexicon

Some of this Lexicon's statements concerning Berta may be of interest:

a. 2. Paragraph: "**...or she was the daughter of some Hungarian King....**"

b. the 1st paragraph mentions Kent. I have to remind ourselves that the river-names of Kent have preserved the most ancient layer of the Magyar language.[6]

c. The meaning of the mentioned Berchta, Perahta Old-High-German names have retained the ancient Avar-Magyar meaning of light, which apparently was still known by the adopting cultures.

Berta

(Old-High-German: Berchta, Perahta = radiant). This is the name of several more or less mythical women of the Middle Ages. Some of these are:

1. B., St. Edithberga, daughter of the French King Charibert and Ingoberga who became the wife of Ethelbert, King of Kent in 560. She converted the King and their subjects to Christianity for which the Church made her a saint. Her memorial day is July 4.

2. B. (Bertrada, Berthe au grand pied, the big-footed B., the spinning B.). Within the Charlemagne legends she is the daughter of Charibert, count of Laon, or some Hungarian King. She is the wife of Pipin the Little. During her travels to France her companion gave her over to servants she bribed in order to kill her, and married her own daughter to Pipin. The King discovers the real Berta during a hunt and marries her. Charlemagne was born of this union. This is what the legend tells us, which also reminds us of the pagan Berchta with the swan, or goose feet. In French and Burgundian churches the stone statue of Peine Pédaucue (a. m. Regina pedi aucoe). Several poems remember her too. The sayings: Al tempo que B. filava, Die Zeit ist hin, wo B. spann, Ce n' est plus le temps ou Berthe filait, lament the fall of the Golden Age. See: Simrock B., Die Spinnerin (Frankf. 1855) and Bertha 5. in the above quoted Lexicon.

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1827 Budapest, Budavári Palota F-building

[1] A Mentor Book 451-ME2117

[2] Erdélyi, Zsuzsanna *Hegyet hágék lőtőt lépék, archaikus népi imádságok* (translation: I Climbed Mountains and Walked the Meadows, Archaic Folk Prayers.) Magvető publ. Second ed. 1976

[3] Magyar, Adorján *Az ősműveltség* (translation: The Ancient Culture) page 585

[4] Magyar, Adorján *Az ősműveltség*, (translation: The Ancient Culture) Avar chapter.

[5] Magyar is the language of Hungarians, their country is Magyarország (Magyar country) in their own language. (S.T.)

[6] See Susan Tomory A New View of the Arthurian Legends

