

## THE HUNGARIAN BILLOG AND ITS PARALLEL WITH PAIZI

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*Abstract: There is a unique object, the billog, which was used in the field of determining jurisdiction by early Hungarian kingdom. Its origins are obscure, even to researchers, some of whom – because of certain formal aspects – underline Byzantine or Western European parallels. According to my view, however, the word billog is of Turkic origins, meaning “mark”. There isn't any information about the role the billog played during the nomadic period of Hungarian history since parallels of Eastern culture are needed for comparative analysis. In written Hungarian law, we have samples, though researchers have no idea about the billog's function due to lack of more complete documentation. According to my view, it had an Eastern nomadic origin, with Hungarian tribes assimilating it into their civilization. With further research, we can find parallels between the billog and nomadic use of the paizi, since they had a similar size, form and function. For Inner Asian tribes, the paizi had an important role in communication and diplomacy.*

*Key words: Hungarian billog, Inner Asia, Turk.*

There was unique object, the billog in the early administration of the early Hungarian kingdom, which was used on the field of jurisdiction. The origin of billog is obscure among the researchers. Some Hungarian researchers- because of certain formal similarities- underline its Byzantine or Western-European parallel.

We have some archaeological findings of this field. For the first time two billogs from the time of Andras I. (1046-1060) had been found. King Salamon's billog was found in Szentes, but later disappeared, only its drawing can be found at the local museum. There is one religious billog from Veszprém city, and another from the XII century, named Lazar's billog. We can declare, that the known billogs had been made from some kinds of metals, e.g. copper, bronze. They are circle shaped, 6 cm in diameter. There is a little hook in the upper part, which they could put a string in. This object can be carried by hanging round the neck. We can see the sender of it, so in the royal billog we can find the portrait of the king, and those of the saints on the religious billogs. The institution of the royal jurisdictional envoys, or billotus began research at the end of the XIX century. The research of the object has begun at the end of XIX century. But it was only in the 1930-s, that Emil Jakubovich found connection between the object of the billog and the institution of the billotus: he stated that the billog had a tight connection with the billotus. That had worked in the age of Arpad-dynasty (Jakubovich 1933: 57). The ancient Hungarian laws of the XI century recorded the role and functions of the billog. We can see it in the activities of two great king, Laslo the Saint and Kalman I<sup>1</sup>. According to the research of Imre Hajnik, the institution of the judge went back

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<sup>1</sup> Laslo the Saint (1077-1095), Kalman (1096-1116).

to a nomadic origin. In the Hungarian nomadic states the tribal judges were the horka and karha. Their works changed by the centralised king judge, of which important elements were the billotus (the judge of the king). The judge of the king or the billotus according to the Hungarian laws, was the first grade judge for the countryside. They judge above people living in the castle, or free status people. His supremacy didn't extend to the royal courtiers and those people besides the royal country. The billotus could judge mainly in criminal cases. In that time the literacy hadn't been spread over the Hungarian kingdom, that's why in the countryside the judge summoned witnesses by an ancient object accepted by everybody. The billotus showed up the billog proving the legal authority from the king. According to my view, the eastern origin of the billog is proved where the word came from into the Hungarian language. The meaning of that word is of Turkish origin, meaning "mark"<sup>2</sup>. The shape of the belge or bilge can be found in Turkish languages according to the Clauson's or Doerfer dictionaries. The word billog can be found in the Mongolian language as "belge". We can find the belge in the Modern Mongolian language, too, meaning symbol, sign.

### *The billog in the Hungarian historical sources*

In the early laws created by Saint Stephan, we can't find any references connected with billog. The first written source dates back to by the second half of the XI century. In that time the king's judge or billotus used the billog to summon witnesses to the court. The original function of the billotus is obscure, too. Probably, they belonged to the king's court or they might be king's envoy, because later they tightly connected with kings. We know, that King Andras I. wanted to restore the tradition of the Saint Stephan administration system. According to the archaeological findings and the historical sources he used billog. It is likely to the using of that object was taken from the Stephan's administration. The Hungarian Bernat Kumorovitz thought, that the billotus worked at the time of Saint Stephan (Kumorovitz 1993: 17). So does György Györffy, who thinks that the origin of the system of the billog originates from the time of Saint Stephan (Györffy 1984: 184).

But we don't know, what kind of role the billog had before the Hungarian Christian kingdom, at the time of nomadic tribal state. In this research we can use Eastern parallel to get to know it.

Among Hungarian kings Laslo the Saint and Kalman's laws circumstantially deal with this institution. In the second half of the XI century they saved the rights of the billotus, because a lot of people resisted them and didn't appear in front of the local judge. They wanted take their own matter to the king's personal court. The works of the billotus had been obstructed by the comes<sup>3</sup> and the local nobles who refused to recognise the authorities of billotus, a lower ranked judge in their own affairs and in their people's. In that time a new process began: instead of the central royal judge the local matters had been solved locally. The head of the administration,

<sup>2</sup> Hungarian Etimological Dictionary. Billog word

<sup>3</sup> He was the head of the local administration in the Hungarian Kingdom.

the comes gradually took the judge tasks from the billotus, thought their works depended from the comes.

The nobles insisted to go straight to the personal judge of the king, inspite of the frequent punishments. The third act of Laslo is about that situation: "If somebody despises the billog of the judge and doesn't go to the trial, for the first time the punishment will be 5 pensa, second time will be the same, but if the third time he doesn't appear in front of the judge, he will be a loser, his hair would be cut and he would be sold."<sup>4</sup>

Inspite of the hard punishment, the act hadn't been so efficient, so King Laslo changed it at the synodus of 1092 as it follows: if somebody doesn't want to appear in front of the local judge, he may go to the king's court, as the loser of the matter.<sup>5</sup>

At the time of King Kalman the rights of the billotus was changed: they restricted only the poor nobles, the servants of the king, and some free people. In the case of other people the comes and the billotus had to judge together (Bálint 1935: 313).

The rights of the billotus was restricted in the beginning of the XIII century, they got rights only in the matters of crimlnl affairs, together with the comes (see CHJ 2000).

The institution of the billotus gradually displaced from practises of the state judge, but remained in countryside. After the Turkish occupation, the using of the billog is reborn (Kumorovitz 1993: 20). Some village used it until the modern ages.

The Hungarian historians have two theory connecting the origin of the billog. We have records of using of the billog from the second half of the XI century in the written Hungarian laws, from that time we have a sample of that. In the lack of documents the Hungarian scientists have no idea about the original function of the billog. There are no any kinds of similar objects in the surrounding countries. The scientists, e.g Emil Jakobovich tries to orginate it from the Western European royal seals, because of some formal similarites (Jakubovich 1933: 70). Zsuzsa Lovag proves that the billog has a Byzantine origin and from there it had spread over Europe (Lovag 1990: 198). According to her discipline, the billog was not used independently, but they put in a document. Andras Kubinyi summarized the outcome of the Hungarian researchers. He stated that they hadn't find such kind of object of which function would be similar to the billog not in Europe nor in the surrounding countries..

According to my view the billog has a Eurasian nomadic origin, where the Hungarian tribes brought their own civilisation from. If we research we can find their parallel among the nomadic states. The billog and the paizi have the similar size, form and function. Among the Inner Asian tribes a similarly functioned object

<sup>4</sup> Laslo's IIIrd act. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Laslo's act. I. 42. in: Corpus Jris Hungarici (further: CJH).

was widespread: it is the paizi. It has a very important role in the communication and diplomacy among tribes. The scattered living nomads in the vast steppes needed an effective information system so that the news could reach the distant territories. The tribe leader had numerous envoys who went on a special mission. They used a circle shaped wooden or metal object, which was certified to envoy himself. The first appearance of that object had occurred in the Xiongnu Empire (Nyambuu 1992: 70). That time the nomads used a very developed communication system. The historian G. Sukhbaatar proved that using the paizi had been continuous from the Xiongnu to the Mongolian empire.

We hardly can find an exact description of the paizi in the late antiquity, but we have more sources from the Tang-dynasty. That's why some historians think that it has a Chinese origin. We have quite a lot of samples from the Liao dynasty. The name of the paizi itself originates from that time. From the Mongolian age there are a lot of information about the paizi, or gerege. That was used in the civil and military administration and the diplomatic relations as well. The Mongolian khagans restricted those who have a right to issue and use paizi. The envoy of the khagan can get a supply and a change horse from the relay stations without any payment. They need to show up the paizi to prove their authority. As the literacy spread among Mongolian tribes instead of the paizi they began to use written documents. We can observe that process in the Hungarian Kingdom. That happens in the XIII century. From that time for the Hungarians the billog meant as the "tamga" for animals.

We have a document concerning the using of billog or paizi in the Khazar State. The Chronicle of Theophanes recorded a rank connecting with Khazars in the VIII century. There was a *belgiči* or *bälgači* governmental rank among them. According to Peter B. Golden's view it originates from the turcic or Uighur "belgü" words, which equalled with the Hungarian billog (Golden 1980: 166). The author recorded that probably there was a special rank among them, as later the *tamyači* in the Mongolian Empire. Golden so refers to the connection of the billog and the Inner Asian communication system.

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