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Failed Effort to Revise Their Own Historical Narrative: The Case of 'Inscription on a Naxian-Style Sphynx Statue from Potaissa Deciphered as a Poem in Dactylic Meter' by Peter Z. Revesz

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ABSTRACT

In the 19th century, a Hungarian baron named Jósef Kémeny created a false inscription in a 'Proto-Hungarian' dialect supposed to have been found on a winged sphynx statuette, which was never actually seen as it only existed as a black-and-white drawing. The statuette was claimed to have been found in Potaissa (now known as Turda, Romania) dating back to the 3rd century AD, towards the end of the Roman occupation of Dacia. Several researchers in the 19th century had already proven the inscription to be a forgery. Despite this, the concept has been recently brought up again, with an article published in December 2023 by a Hungarian professor residing in the USA named Peter Z. Revesz from Nebraska University. Professor Revesz attempted to decipher the inscription, but the author of the current article has gathered evidence that the American researcher's efforts were fruitless.

Keywords: Statue of a Winged Sphynx, 3rd Century AD, Fake Inscription, 'Proto-Hungarian', Fake Dialect, Disinformation Disguised as Scientific Research.

The Magyars, who later became the Hungarians, are known to have arrived in Pannonia towards the end of the 9th century AD, specifically in the year 896. Upon their arrival, they encountered Romanians and Slavs who had been inhabitants of the region for a considerable period of time. The Romanians, along with their Daco-Illyrian ancestors, had been residing in the area for millennia, dating back to 6–5 millennia BC. They are believed to be direct descendants of the Neolithic population that migrated from Anatolia around 9000 years ago. Various forms of evidence, including archaeological findings, linguistic studies, historical records, and more recently, archaeogenetic research support and enhance the historical accounts.

Constantin C. Giurescu, in his well-known book *History of Romanians* (1937), explains that Hungarians settled in Atelkuz, known as Hungarian Etelköz, located in present-day Bugeac, after migrating from Central Asia to Eastern Europe. Giurescu also mentions that the Hungarians could not stay in Atelkuz for a long time as they were called upon for support in a war between Tsar Simeon of the Bulgars and the Byzantines in 894. The Hungarians allied with the Byzantines, defeated the Bulgars in three battles, and even occupied their capital. In retaliation, Simeon formed an alliance with the Pechenegs, enemies of the Hungarians, and together they attacked the Hungarian camp in Atelkuz. Due to a part of the Hungarian army being away on a northern expedition, Simeon and the Pechenegs easily defeated the remaining troops in the camp. Witnessing the devastation caused by the attack, many Hungarians died, others were taken prisoners, and a significant portion of their herds were lost. This led the Hungarians to abandon Atelkuz and seek a new place to settle.

In his work *Romänische Studien*, Roesler (1871) recounts a historical episode involving the Hungarians, where the attackers killed or captured women and children in Atelkuz. Archaeogenetic research conducted by Hungarian specialists indicates that the Hungarians were already mixed with the locals from the first generation, especially on the maternal line. Neparáczki et al. (2018) found that the Ugric genetic contribution to present-day

Hungarians is minimal, around 0–5%. Despite the 9th century Magyars subjugating the inhabitants of the Carpathian Basin, they made little impact on the genetic makeup of Slavic and Germanic populations. Various DNA studies support this conclusion.

Modern Hungarians display a small Asian genetic component, likely from the Conquerors, as revealed in recent mitogenome research. Hungarian attempts to distance themselves from their complex history have been futile, as evidenced by historical and genetic data Roesler's theory about Romanians forming south of the Danube and arriving in Transylvania in the 12th century has been debunked by archaeological, archaeogenetic and linguistic evidence. Romanian toponyms and hydronyms appear in ancient Hungarian documents and Hungarian language contains numerous borrowings from Romanian and Slavic languages.

Linguistic evidence, such as the origin of macro-hydronyms in Hungary, Transylvania, and Romania, suggests a Proto-Indo-European heritage, tracing back to the Thraco-Dacian populations (Rouard, 2022). These names are discussed in the *Etymological Dictionary of the Romanian Language* by Vinereanu (2023), indicating a long-standing population in Pannonia and Transylvania, contrary to Hungarian historical narratives.

Roesler's theory, suggesting that Romanians originated from south of the Danube and migrated to Transylvania in the late 12th century, is disputed by archaeological, archaeogenetic, and linguistic evidence. It is worth noting that Romanian place names are found in ancient Hungarian documents. Hungarian has many loanwords from old and modern Romanian, as well as from Slavic languages, with a small lexical overlap with Finno-Ugric languages. Linguistically, many river names in Hungary, Transylvania, Romania, and neighboring regions have Proto-Indo-European roots dating back to ancient times, as discussed in the recent *Etymological Dictionary of Romanian Language* by the author. These river names provide evidence of Thraco-Dacian presence in Pannonia and Transylvania, contradicting claims by Hungarian historians and politicians about the region being uninhabited.

A recent article titled '*Inscription on a Naxian-Style Sphynx Statue from Potaissa Deciphered as a Poem in Dactylic Meter*' by Peter Z. Revesz (2023), a professor at Nebraska University, was published in the journal *Mediterranean Archeology and Archaeometry*. The focus of the article is on decoding the inscription found on a winged sphinx statue with a female head, similar to the one from Naxos, discovered in Potaissa (present-day Turda, Romania) during Roman times. Legend has it that the statue was found in the 19th century by József Kemény, although no one has physically seen the statue, only a drawing showing a statue with the alleged inscription. The story began when the Leipzig newspaper *Illustrierte Zeitung* published the inscription and drawing in February 1847. The whereabouts of the statue with the inscription remain unknown. Jósef Kemény was known as a forger, leading some to believe that the statue was lost during the War of Independence and has never been recovered. Research by British historian Martyn Rady revealed that some of Kemény's documents were forgeries, while other recent studies have confirmed the authenticity of some and labeled others as false. The article "*The Forgeries of Baron József Kemény*" by Rady (1993) delves into the details of Kemény's forgeries. Some of his fake artifacts have been studied academically, including an inscription on a nonexistent statue that claimed the existence of the 'Proto-Magyars/Proto-Hungarians' in Potaissa in 270 AD, which has been debunked. Many researchers have concluded that the sphinx statue is indeed a fabrication, disregarding the story propagated by Kemény.

Levente Nagy, currently a professor at ELTE University in Budapest, specializing in Romance Studies, has expressed concerns regarding a particular inscription discussed by Professor Revesz. According to Nagy, József Kemény, a renowned forger of the nineteenth century, poses a significant issue when it comes to authenticity. In an interview conducted in January 2024 and published on the Hungarian *website* 24.hu, Nagy emphasized that if a source is solely attributed to Kemény and exists only in his copies, it is highly likely to be a forgery, stating "Here is the secret, because József Kemény was the greatest forger of the nineteenth century. If there is a source that we only know from him, which has survived only in his copy, it is 99.9% certain that it is a forgery." He also mentioned that despite some reputable scholars supporting the authenticity of the statue, they failed to thoroughly investigate its origins. Nagy criticized the overemphasis on foreign journals, suggesting that national publications should not be undervalued. He doubted whether the same research would have been accepted in Hungarian journals focusing on history, archaeology, or linguistics. The scientific integrity displayed by Professor Levente Nagy is commendable, raising questions about the knowledge possessed by the American professor of Hungarian descent.

Let's go back and discuss the details of this inscription. According to Revesz, it consists of 19 letters and is written in an ancient Greek alphabet that had not been used in Greece for hundreds of years. However, the alphabet is similar to the Etruscan or other ancient Mediterranean alphabets. If the inscription from Potaissa is from AD 270, why was a different alphabet used instead of the classical Greek or Roman one, since it was in a Roman province? The author presents complex connections that are not to be discussed here. The article is recommended for understanding the mindset of those promoting fake ideas.

The text must be read from right to left for Professor Revesz's interpretation to make sense. The original inscription reads: N A Λ Σ P A Σ E P E I Θ I T A M I A M I, but read from right to left it is: I M A I M A T I Θ I E P E ΣA P Σ Λ A N. The letters are in the classical Greek alphabet, not the way they appear on the statue.

The author of the article breaks down the inscription into five parts: *im*[*e*] 'behold', *imat* 'worship', ith 'here', *hiere* 'holy' *arslan* 'lion' which in Hungarian sounds like 'Íme ímádd: itt hires oroszlán', translating to 'Lo, behold, worship: here is the holy lion'.

Revesz demonstrates that the supposed 'Proto-Hungarian' term ΙΕΡΕΣ can be linked to Greek *ἱερός*/hierós 'holy', without explicitly stating that it would be a borrowing from Old Greek in 'Proto-Hungarian', although this is implied. It would be difficult for the two forms to be identical in meaning and almost identical in form if they did not have a common origin. There is no similar term to the Greek *ἱερός* with roughly the same meaning in any known language from which 'Proto-Hungarian' could have borrowed it. Revesz also points out that the modern Hungarian term *hires* is considered to have an unknown origin, but he connects it to the supposed form from the 'Proto-Hungarian dialect'. The suggestion is that the so-called Proto-Hungarian form has the same origin as the one in modern Hungarian, despite the fact that in modern Hungarian it means 'famous', not 'holy'. While the meaning could have evolved over time, it remains unclear how the term made its way into modern Hungarian, hinting only that the 'Proto-Hungarians' may have inhabited Potaissa until the Middle Ages Hungarians arrived there in the 12th century, according to Roesler's theory. The 'Romanized' Dacians, who were more numerous than the putative 'Proto-Hungarians', supposedly crossed the Danube River with the emperor Aurelianus' retreat at around the same time the 'Proto-Hungarians' were creating the well-known statue. However, the word in question could not have been borrowed into Hungarian from medieval Greek, given the notable differences in meaning.

The Hungarian term for 'saint' is *szent*, thought to be borrowed from the Latin *sanctus*, but more likely taken from the Romanian *sânt* 'holy'. Hungarian interactions with Greek culture during the Middle Ages were scarce, despite some initial attempts to Christianize the Hungarian population in the Byzantine rite. This presents a logical inconsistency in Revesz's interpretation, suggesting that the Hungarians arriving in the 9th century adopted this word from those in the 3rd century. The possibility of a forgery is raised, as there are details that seem to have been overlooked. Even though we cannot definitively label it as fake, this particular detail is undoubtedly perplexing.

Therefore researchers around the world may continue to view the forged hoax by Baron Kemeny, a well-known 19th century forger, as solid proof, despite modern Hungarian scholars, as noted by Professor Nagy, refusing to believe in its credibility at all.

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