



Contemporary Hungarian Rune-Writing

Ideological Linguistic Nationalism within a Homogenous Nation

Alexander Maxwell

Abstract. – This article analyzes Hungarian rune enthusiasts as a nationalist subculture. It gives a brief explanation of the Hungarian runes as a writing system, explaining different degrees of competency with which the script can be written. Rune-writing enthusiasts typically have a high level of education, and have organized a semisolarly journal, a bookstore, and a dense correspondence network. Interest in the runes is strongly associated with a revisionist cosmology. The ideological nature of this script community shows that nationalism emerges spontaneously, but the limited social basis of the movement suggests that ideology is insufficient for a mass national movement. [*Hungary, runes, nationalism, sociolinguistics, graffiti*]

Alexander Maxwell, Ph.D. in History at the University of Wisconsin Madison on 19th-century Slovak nationalism, Master's degree in Nationalism Studies at Central European University in Budapest. He has recently published "Literary Dialects in China and Slovakia" in the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*.

Rune-Writing Enthusiasts as a National Intelligentsia

The operation of nationalist intelligentsias in states unreceptive to their claims has been the subject of a tremendous literature. Particular national movements have been explored in innumerable case studies, the details of which in turn sharpen theoretical understanding. Miroslav Hroch (1985: 23), focusing on the nineteenth century, schematized the development such groups from "scholarly interest" to "mass national movement" in a famous state theory which continues to attract admirers among East-European specialists.¹ Ernst Gellner

(1983), even developed a generic "Ruritanian" national movement to discuss its historical development inside the Empire of Megalomania. Globalization has not done away with particularist nationalism, merely internationalized the arena in which nationalist symbols are contested (see especially Danforth 1995). This literature, however, starts from the assumption that minority and majority national cultures objectively differ, though this difference is routinely acknowledged to be socially and historically constructed.

Hungarian rune-writing enthusiasts are a self-selecting group with a distinct nationalist ideology emphasizing autochthony and antiquity. They promote a national myth through popular cultural products, propaganda tracts, and even a semisolarly journal. Their social composition resembles those of other modern nationalist movements; they even have their own diaspora in North America. Hungarian rune-writers invent traditions and imagine communities, and so would seem to form a nationalist intelligentsia. Yet their movement is directed against a state bearing the same name and claiming to speak for the same nation.

Hungarian rune enthusiasts also form a borderline case in the degree to which they form a linguistic minority. Hungarian rune-writers are universally familiar with the Latin orthography used by other Hungarians, and do not claim any linguistic distinctiveness. Books on Hungarian

¹ Magocsi 1989: 50; Kaiser 1994: 34; Johnson 2001.

rune-writing generally appear in the Latin alphabet, and while much is published about the runes, nothing is published in them. Nevertheless, rune-writers consciously cultivate linguistic skills. Historically, several language-cultivators have written books published in languages other than the object of adoration: for example, Joseph Jungmann, the famous Czech linguist, wrote his 1792 history of the Czech language and literature and 1809 Czech grammar in German.² Since standardized literary codifications, not spoken language, are the true object of nationalist contention,³ the conscious cultivation of a different Hungarian script deserves attention, even if the script-cultivators do not see themselves as linguistic separatists.

This article examines the Hungarian rune-writing subculture. It begins with an overview of this script, the *rovásírás* ("rune writing," from *ró*, "to carve"), a topic about which hardly anything has been written in English. The authors who promote this script promote what could be called a "revisionist" national cosmology incompatible with respectable Hungarian nationalism. Since interest in the runic script is highly correlated to revisionist ideological beliefs, I will also discuss the individuals espousing this national ideology and provide a brief sketch of their social and geographical distribution. Then I will discuss three contemporary specimens I encountered while living in Budapest. The conclusion situates the *rovásírás* subculture in the context of other national language-planning movements.

Before plunging into the analysis, perhaps it is worth stating what this essay overlooks. The reactionary politics of *rovásírás* enthusiasts could easily lead to a discussion of Hungarian right-wing politics generally, but I have restricted my attention to sources which discussed or employed rune-writing. The analysis also mentions analogous Turkish and Scandinavian rune cultures only in passing. Finally, I focus explicitly on contemporary rune-writing. Almost all the sources discussed here were less than ten years old at the time of writing; many come from online newspapers or webpages. This modern focus differentiates this paper from most scholarly literature on *rovásírás*,

which typically discusses the script's origins (e. g., Jensen 1935; Sebestén 1909; Németh 1971). This paper is primarily an analysis of a subculture, and its interests concern the present.

Rovásírás as a Writing System

Rovásírás is an alphabetic system of writing, several centuries old, of uncertain origin.⁴ Its historic use is strongly associated with the Seklers or *Székely*, a tribe of ethnic Hungarians living in the *Székelyföld*, in eastern Transylvania. *Rovásírás* letters can be written left-to-right, right-to-left, and also supports boustrophedon, i. e., text that runs back and forth down the page. Letters appear in mirror image depending on which way the script is read (*Rovásírás* shares these features with Scandinavian runes; see Düwel 1968: 8; Morris 1998: 69–74). Modern enthusiasts generally declare right-to-left the correct direction, though contemporary specimens of *rovásírás* run in both directions. Cajoling my word processor to print right-to-left proved beyond my abilities; sample *rovásírás* texts in the text of this essay run left-to-right.

Rovásírás has never been what Benedict Anderson (1991) has called a "national print language." To the best of my knowledge, no printer ever cut a typeface for Hungarian runes, nor has a book ever been printed in them. *Rovásírás* has no institutions serving as "authorities of prescription," to use Ulrich Ammon's (1987: 328) phrase: the linguistic division of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, for example, concerns itself only with the Latin alphabet. Hungarian state schools do not teach the runes, and Hungarian bureaucracies do not use them. No mass educational system has ever tried to make *rovásírás* the basis for mass literacy, though children attending Hungarian scouting camp in Canada learn to carve runic messages to each other (Siket, pers. comm., 2003). With the possible exception of children forced to attend Canadian summer camp, rune enthusiasts study voluntarily.

There are many variants of *rovásírás*. One popular instruction booklet, Klára Friedrich's

2 Other examples are easy to find. Ludovít Štúr, the Slovak national leader and language codifier, received his primary education in Czech and even worked as a Czech language teacher in his youth. István Széchenyi, the "greatest Magyar" who established Hungary's Academy of Sciences, also felt more comfortable in German than Hungarian.

3 See Anderson 1991: 48; Hobsbawm 1992: 54; Haugen 1966: 18–24; Geary 2002: 30 f.

4 Jensen (1935: 299) derives *rovásírás* from Siberian Turkish letters, with a few Greek and Glagolitic letters thrown in, noting C. L. Fábri's hypothesis that Hungarian runes derive from Indian Brāhmī characters. Németh (1971: 39 f.) writes "The inventor of the Hungarian script . . . was a learned man: to represent the sound *a* he took over the Greek 'a'; for the *e* the Glagolitic 'e'; for the *o* the Glagolitic 'o,'" showing that respectable Hungarian scholars, like amateur enthusiasts, derive national pride from the runes.

"Rovásírásgyakorlatok, nem csak gyerekeknek" [Runic Writing Workbook, not only for Children] (2000) gives two different standard alphabets: Adorján Magyar's, which collapses short {ü} and long {ű} into a single rune {Ŧ}; and Sándor Forrai's, who distinguishes short {Ŧ} and long {Ű}. Robert Szabados' alphabet, again slightly different, is reproduced below.

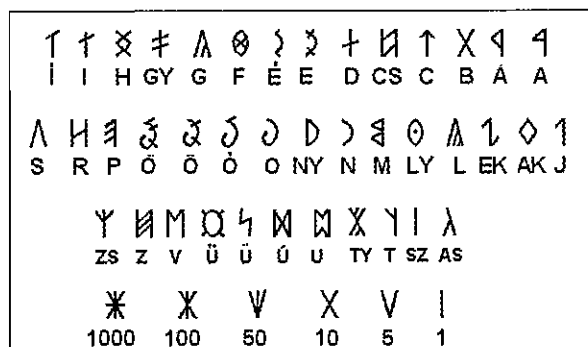


Fig. 1: Hun-Magyar-Szekely Rovásírás, a sample *rovásírás* alphabet (Szabados 1996).

When examining Szabados' chart, note that Hungarian in the Latin alphabet treats six digraphs – {cs}, {gy}, {ly}, {ny}, {sz}, {ty} and {zs} – as single letters.

Rovásírás has two different symbols for the Latin {k}: {Ŧ} and {Ō}. Magyar (1996) suggests that at some point in the history of the Hungarian language, the sound /x/ ("kh") assimilated to /k/, and leaving two runes to represent one sound. *Rovásírás* literature has not preserved archaic spellings, yet contemporary *rovásírás* enthusiasts nevertheless strive to use both {Ŧ} and {Ō} in their alphabets. Some distribute usage according to position inside a given word, using {Ŧ} for final {-k} and {Ō} elsewhere. Others, including Szabados, distribute usage according to the vowel environment, writing {Ŧ} around back vowels, and {Ō} around front vowels.⁵ Szabados' alphabet, above, additionally has two symbols for {s} depending on the vowel environment, but this is highly unusual.

Rovásírás also has a system for numbers. Gyula Sebestén's 1909 "*Rovás és Rovásírás*" [sic], devotes a full seventy pages to the practice of runic counting. The runic number system resembles the Roman numerals in structure. The number 1378, for example, is $\text{X}\text{X}\text{X}\text{X}\text{V}\text{X}\text{X}\text{V}\text{I}\text{I}\text{I}$. {X} is a thousand, {X} is a hundred, and {V} is fifty.

5 The division between a, o, u (the "back vowels") and e, i, ő, ü (the "front vowels") is central to Hungarian phonology.

Ten, five, and one are identical to the Roman numerals.

Runes are designed to be carved into stone or wood, a laborious process explaining the simplicity and angular appearance of the letters. Like Scandinavian rune alphabets, Hungarian rune-writing employs several ligatures⁶ as shorthands. For example, the rune {X} (h) combines with vowels {Ŧ} {Ŧ} {Ŧ} {Ŧ} (a, e, i, o) to yield X X X X (ha, he, hi, ho). Ligatures may combine multiple letters: MN, for example, represents the three-rune combination MPN (*vár*, meaning "castle"). Use of ligatures is optional (Everson 1998). Gábor Heves (1999), discussing the use of ligatures, comments that authors have "quite [a] large freedom" deciding "in which case this is appropriate and does not confuse the reader." When *rovásírás* text is transcribed in the Latin alphabet, ligatures are denoted with square brackets.

Rovásírás also permits omission of the letter {Ŧ} (e), the most common vowel in the Hungarian language, as a labor-saving device. Transcriptions from *rovásírás* text conventionally replace omitted letters in superscript. Reading texts which employ {Ŧ} deletion can be tricky: one native speaker of Hungarian who assisted me with this project required several minutes to transform $\text{X}\text{Ŧ}\text{Ŧ}\text{Ŧ}$ into "gyet é[rt]"k ("I agree").

Additionally, *rovásírás* also contains several symbols known as the "bug symbols" which apparently lack any practical use. The bug symbols supposedly represent sound combinations that do not occur in the Hungarian language. For example, {X} and {X} respectively represent "tpru" and "trpus." Most contemporary *rovásírás* authors dispense with them. I have only observed one modern instance of their use: a webpage about Zoltán Pál,⁷ used {X} in place of {N} for Latin {r}, presumably from aesthetic motives (Arvisura 1998). Gábor Hosszú (1998a) nevertheless calls them "special characters of the Sekler-Hungarian rune writing" and an "inherent part of the Sekler-Hungarian Runic writing," and suggests that they

6 A ligature is a single symbol combining two letters. Though not a prominent feature of the modern Latin alphabet, many typefaces employ {fi} for {f} + {i}. Hebrew has the ligature {x} for {x} + {y}. The Arabic alphabet has several, most notably {y} for {y} + {l}, which, according to tradition, was declared a proper letter by the prophet Mohammad himself. Morris (1998: 74, 99) derives Scandinavian rune ligatures from Greek and Latin examples.

7 Pál, a mid-century Hungarian mystic whose visions included a description of Atlantis, preached about the society of the ancient Hungarians and inspired a theater movement.

might once have marked the beginning of sentences.⁸

The remaining discrepancies between *rovásírás* and the Latin-Hungarian alphabet concern phoneme length. Hungarian, as standardized in the Latin alphabet, distinguishes both vowels and consonants by length; *rovásírás* alphabet does not always maintain this distinction. Szabados does, but Magyar only distinguishes (a) and (e) by length, and conflates long and short (i), (o), (ö), (u), and (ü). The *rovásírás* cartographer who drew Fig. 3 (below) eccentrically rendered long vowels by repeating them: *Erdély* (Transylvania) appears as ǺNǺǺǺǺ (Erdeely). Finally, one contemporary *rovásírás* author, cited below, failed to distinguish long and short consonants, which the contemporary Latin-Hungarian alphabet denotes with double letters.

With the exception of the two symbols for Latin {k}, Hungarian texts in the Latin alphabet can theoretically be transliterated into *rovásírás* with a one-to-one correspondence. Hungary's 99% literacy rate (*World Bank* 2001) exists through the medium of the Latin alphabet; individuals who study *rovásírás* have already mastered Hungarian writing conventions in the Latin alphabet. Hungarians who study *rovásírás* encounter few new linguistic concepts: With the exception of the Latin letter {k}, the script can be mechanically transliterated. Of course, *rovásírás* aficionados can, if they chose, delete {Ǻ}, conflate long and short sounds, invent ligatures, use boustrophedon, or even devise a convention for use of the bug symbols. Nevertheless, a literate Hungarian can write functional *rovásírás* by memorizing the runic letters and transliterating.

Significantly, *rovásírás* enthusiasts hold no grudges against the Latin alphabet, which Hans Peter Willberg (1998: 49) has memorably described as "world type." Hosszú (pers. comm., 2002) writes that "current practical usage [in *rovásírás*] is almost nothing. But it is no problem, our Latin-based literacy is also very nice." Heves (1999) argues that the *rovásírás* letters "fulfill their function quite well," adding that runic writing "does not threaten the existing Latin-alphabet." Szabados (1996), seemingly the most ambitious *rovásírás* enthusiast, declares it the "intention of some Hungarian scientists and linguists to bring

back the Runic writing," but only as a curiosity to be taught "in heritage classes." Alfred Hamori (1996) praises the runes for their lack of diacritical marks, but he also believes (pers. comm., 2002) that using the Latin alphabet is "no longer a problem" and "has the benefit of being internationally understood." He even added, in response to my questions, "I don't think using runic writing would be a step in the right direction, except it's good to be familiar with it."

If not as a replacement for the Latin alphabet, what social function is *rovásírás* to serve? If writing is a technology for efficiently communicating information, why not use the most accessible standard? John Austin (1962), observing that not all language is phatic, developed the concept of "performative utterances," alternatively "speech acts," which depend on more than the literal meaning of the words spoken. Where Austin suggests that the meaning of speech depends on the social context and the speaker's intent, I suggest that writing in *rovásírás* is an "orthographic act," dependant on extra-linguistic factors. To understand the intentions of *rovásírás* enthusiasts, let us now turn to the beliefs articulated in *rovásírás* literature.

Rovásírás and Revisionist Hungarian Nationalism

Interest in *rovásírás* is highly correlated with a specific ideology of Hungarian history and culture, characterized by extravagant claims to Hungary's antiquity and glory, which I will call "revisionist." Mainstream scholarship, both inside and beyond Hungary, does not so much reject as ignore revisionism. Revisionists, in turn, explain the skepticism of mainstream scholars with conspiracy theories. This section will sketch the salient features of the revisionist narrative and explore tensions between revisionist views of Hungarian history and those of mainstream scholarship. A subsequent section discusses the social context of three specific *rovásírás* "orthographic acts" in relation to revisionist beliefs.

Rune enthusiasts often justify interest in the script by appealing to Hungary's "heritage." Hosszú (1998b) describes the runes as a "special part of the Hungarian culture," and "part of the world's cultural heritage." Friedrich (2000: 3) calls *rovásírás* "our oldest and most valuable national treasure"; Attila Szekes, a Hungarian-American who only understands "a little bit of Hungarian," requested more material be translated into English: "I would be very interested in finding out more

⁸ The most exotic of all historical *rovásírás* inscriptions, a Constantinople graffiti known through the 1550 travel diary of Hans Dernschwam, employs ligatures, {Ǻ} deletion, and the bug symbol {Ǻ}, which Jensen (1935: 299) transliterates as "[im]?"

about my cultural heritage" (Heves 2000). Perhaps Szabados (1996) most eloquently captured the spirit of *rovásírás* enthusiasts: "The future of Hungary lies in its proud past!"

Extravagant claims concerning the putative antiquity of *rovásírás* characterize the revisionist version of Hungarian heritage. Different authors make various claims, but internal continuity is striking when comparing enthusiasts to mainstream scholars. Friedrich (2000) argues the runes are 6500 years old, i. e., as old as Sumerian. Magyar (1996) argues that

[t]he Hungarians are the only nation in Europe who had their own writing ... which had not been received from others before they accepted Christianity ... In this respect, the Hungarians may be viewed as linguistically more sophisticated than the Greeks and the Romans, who had no letters of their own. The Greeks received their letters from the Phoenicians and the Romans took theirs partly from the Greeks and partly from the Etruscans.

Csaba Varga (2001) takes this idea to its ultimate conclusion, describing the *rovásírás* as the origin of all human writing, including the nonalphabetic Chinese character system. Hosszú (1998b) contents himself with the comment that the runes date from "the oldest times," though he also feels that Chinese symbols are "similar" to Hungarian runes (1998a). Yves Kodratoff (2000), finally, attempts to decipher marks on Bronze Age archaeological finds on the assumption that the symbols are *rovás* ligatures.⁹

The putative antiquity of *rovásírás* may explain its frequent association with paganism. Heves (1999) tells us that "with the adoption of Christianity the runic writing became labeled as 'pagan,' it was outlawed and all texts had to be destroyed." Magyar (1996) blames the Catholic Austrians for the script's persecution: "the Austrian rulers did not look favorably at the 'pagan' Hungarian letters, [and] tried to outroot them." Hamori (1996) even points his finger at Saint Stephen, an iconic figure of Hungarian history, who allegedly "passed laws against [*rovásírás*] due to papal pressure," though the actual destruction

was caused by "the foreign priest" who "burned and destroyed them whenever they [sic] found them." Several Hungarians in the Canadian diaspora view these pagan associations favorably. The Hungarian Folk Dance Chamber Group of Ottawa distanced itself from Hungary's Christian present by denouncing "centuries of persecution by a foreign forced Christianization" (Dombi 1998). Jessie Brown, a Saskatchewan folk dancer of Hungarian origin, is even more explicit: "being a Pagan, I take great interest in Rovasiras" (Heves 2000). Indeed, Brown's vision of *rovásírás* culture unites pride in Hungarian national origins with a New Age version of "the mystical and the spiritual" (Brown, pers. comm., 2002).

Enthusiasts attempt to counteract defiling foreign influences and restore the ancient glory of Hungarian culture, in part, through linguistic purism. Angéla Molnos (2001), whose webpage is decorated with *rovásírás* inscriptions, suggests that several common Hungarian words, such as *néger* ("negro"), be replaced with more "Hungarian" equivalents, such as *fekete*, *feketeszínű* (literally, black, and blackskinned). Molnos attacks international words from English (*nonstop*, *nonszensz*), Russian (*nómenklatúra*), French (*nüanz*, *nívó*), Sanskrit (*nirvana*), and even technical terms coined from classical languages (*nimfománia*, *numizmatika*). The desire to purge Hungarian of foreign words, like the desire to attack "foreign Christianization," is obviously xenophobic, but Hungarians who accept or promote foreign influences are also a primary target.

Rovásírás enthusiasts often lament the "ignorance" of their countrymen, and what they see as the betrayal of Hungary. Hungarians in the north American diaspora are particularly bitter. One Canadian enthusiast, Charles Dombi (1998), accuses Hungarian academic institutions of complicity in an international anti-Hungarian conspiracy.

[W]e do not endorse the official historiographical version promoted by the currently ruling establishment in Hungary, by academic institutions and officially-recognized churches. This official version has been promoted in the past by foreign powers which have ruled over Hungary, with the objective of projecting an ideologically biased and inaccurate image of the Hungarians.

Sándor Forrai (1996), a *rovásírás* computer font designer whose webpage displays patriotic poems in runic script, similarly denounces nineteenth-century scholar Pál Hunfalvy for concluding that *rovásírás* finds were "forgeries." Forrai calls on Hungarians to

9 Given these claims, the actual age of the *rovásírás* is a touchy subject. I am not competent to evaluate medieval sources, but J. Németh (1971: 37), in the respected Hungarian journal *Acta Linguistica*, writes that "the first specimens of this writing begin to appear in the 15th century," and Hans Jensen's study of the world's writing systems (1935: 297) dates the inscriptions to the 16th century. Most of the artifacts described in Ferenc Fodor's (1996) "Surviving Relics of the Ancient Rovás" also fit this timeframe.

end the lies of the Bach-Age [1850–61], which served exclusively the interests of Austria: that the Magyars of Árpád were uneducated, illiterate nomads . . . They flooded the West with this and similar lies, they taught this in our schools from generation to generation.

Forrai ends by describing the Carpathian basin as a cradle of human literacy equal to Mesopotamia.

Even Kodratoff (2000), a French rune enthusiast who does not speak Hungarian, targets the Hungarian academic establishment:

The topic and even the existence of a runic-like writing originating from Hungary is often superbly ignored by the runologists, even when they discuss the possible origin of the runes. It seems that, worse, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences does not want to see the topic even discussed.

Kodratoff claims that only “a handful of faithful Hungarians” remain to “try to show the antiquity of their rovás writing.” Such claims are particularly striking since Kodratoff himself claims “no personal interest whatsoever in Hungary” (pers. comm., 2002).

The revisionist history popular among *rovásírás* enthusiasts differs considerably from the generally-accepted narrative of Hungarian origins. This incompatibility reflects a differing approach to historical truth: Ádám Varga, for example, rejects a critical sifting of evidence, insisting that the “true” history of *rovásírás* can only be found “in the heart.” While praising a *rovásírás* webpage (Heves 2000), Varga rejects Hungarian school narratives and proclaims his devotion to both *rovásírás* and revisionist national history:

... not only can the *rovásírás* be brought to the “true” light of day, but also the true Hungarian history, since in the recent past . . . many bad concepts and misinterpretations of our ancestral history have been perpetuated. They are taught in middle schools, high schools, and university classrooms, and in my heart I bear the memory of previous generations.

Bodroghy’s (1998) theory of cultural transmission similarly rejects teachers and schools in favor of shepherds.

The Árpád dynasty kings saw the ancient Hungarian religion and the rovás as a threat to the nation’s unity, and prosecuted its carriers. By the 17th century, all the memory of the rovás had gone, except in Transylvania, where the kings’ influence was far less. It was a big surprise to rediscover it in the “Land of the Székelys,” where the shepherds still used it.

Magyar (1996) also illustrates *rovásírás* enthusiasts’ contradictory attitude toward establish-

ed scholarship. Describing the work of Gyula Sebestén, author of a 1909 book on *rovásírás*, Magyar has “a simple Hungarian farmer” lead Sebestén to wisdom (1996):

He showed the scientist how the stick must be turned for reading or carving letters or numbers. . . . Gyula Sebestén then wrote a book about this, and by his work, the scientists of the world learned the solution of this puzzle from a simple Hungarian farmer. But they keep silent, just as they keep silent about the book of Gyula Sebestén, “*Rovás* and *Rovás Writing*.”

The skepticism of professional scholars, who lack true national knowledge, derives from malevolent intentions or national treason. Yet, scholarly unwillingness to accept the revisionist cosmology rankles.

Rovásírás enthusiasts extend their sense of grievance to modern Hungarian history, particularly the 1919 treaty of Trianon, which cost Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory and most of its national minorities.¹⁰ Trianon is generally a black memory in Hungary, but *rovásírás* enthusiasts are obsessive even by Hungarian standards. Consider how Szabados (1996) leaped from a discussion of a pre-Christian medallion found in Transylvania, supposedly bearing a *rovásírás* inscription, to the treaty of Trianon:

More scientific research is needed to support the belief of many scholars that the medallion originated from Magyars who were possibly living in the area thousands of years prior to Árpád and the A.D. 896 Hungarian settlement of the Balkans, which included the **largely dismembered (In Trianon) territory of present day Hungary!** [*sic*, bold face in original text]

Two other informants, in response to questions about *rovásírás*, mentioned Trianon without prompting (Hamori, pers. comm., 2002; Hosszú, pers. comm., 2002).

Even the “Institute For Hungarian Studies” echoes this anti-intellectual current. The charter of this revisionist organization expresses the desire “to help standardize new Hungarian words covering subjects specific to our century” and to “promote awareness of the evidence of Hungarian origins within the Carpathian basin.” The institute publishes a journal with the format of a scholarly publication. Nevertheless, the October 1996 issue, devoted to *rovásírás*, proclaimed the motto “while scholars debate, people live, remember and preserve.”

10 Fig. 3 depicts the borders of contemporary Hungary inside the borders of pre-Trianon Hungary.

The established Hungarian academy, for its part, rarely deigns to refute revisionist claims: the Hungarian academy denies that ethnic Hungarians lived in the Carpathian basin in antiquity, that Hungarian runes are the origin of all human writing, or that Hungarian runes are related to Chinese characters. On the other hand, Kodratoff demonstrates that revisionism can spread beyond Hungarian nationalist circles, though Kodratoff's thought contains several revisionist elements.

Describing *rovásírás* artifacts as "popular culture," distinguishable from the Hungarian academy's "high culture," would be mistaken. Even if differentiating between low and high culture were unproblematic, the *rovásírás* subculture denies the legitimacy of the hegemonic academy: it views itself as the "true" Hungarian scholarship. That *rovásírás* lore does not compete with the Hungarian academy on equal terms is irrelevant: The conflict is not between low and high culture, but between two incompatible versions of high culture.

Social Networks of *rovásírás* Enthusiasts

Interpreting Hungarian rune-enthusiasts as a nationalist movement suggests a social analysis of this movement's members. *Rovásírás* institutions exist, but they are small: more insight comes from studying the social networks of enthusiasts. Individuals who show dedication to revisionist Hungarian culture by writing a book, webpage, or pamphlet could be described as political entrepreneurs, selling a certain ideological package; but this paper will refer to them as "agitators." By contrast, the branches of the network consist of "dabblers," people who purchase or otherwise consume the agitators' cultural products. Individuals, of course, may blur the line between dabbler and agitator. Both dabblers and agitators are important to the *rovásírás* movement: all movements need both leaders and followers. Dabblers, however, are more difficult to study, because their participation is passive by definition: people who read *rovásírás* webpages and purchase *rovásírás* books do not expose as much of their thought or social status. This section will examine agitators first, and then try to examine dabblers by examining the branches of *rovásírás* networks.

Rovásírás agitators form an intelligentsia. This word is justified not only in the sense that they espouse a nationalist ideology but also because they boast a high educational standard. Several teach at universities: Hosszú is an electrical engineer at Budapest's Technical University, Molnos is

a psychologist, and Kodratoff, the non-Hungarian enthusiast, teaches informatics in Paris. Elemer Nagy and Erdelyi Tibor, judging by their email addresses, are chemists at the University of Szeged. Karoly Lázár is a professional translator; Charles Dombi (pers. comm., 2002) teaches languages for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in Ottawa. Dávid Tisch (2000), whose homepage contains *rovásírás* inscriptions as well as a sample alphabet, is a mathematics student.

These educational achievements, note, do not contradict the antiacademic strand of *rovásírás* revisionism. Even those *rovásírás* agitators who are professional academics participate in Hungarian revisionism as amateurs. No *rovásírás* agitators are professional linguists, archaeologists, or historians; engineers and computer experts outnumber language teachers two to one. The typical *rovásírás* agitator was trained in physical sciences, and has an amateur interest in linguistics, archaeology, and history. Agitators even proclaim amateur status: Tomory (1996) reports that *rovásírás* inscriptions in Pincehely were "collected by the amateur linguist-archaeologist, who was also the town's pharmacist."

A handful of nationalist stores in Budapest sell *rovásírás* products, but the Budapest "Fehérlófia nemzeti könyvesbolt" (National Bookstore) appears to be the primary venue for revisionist literature. Indeed, its fame has spread to North America: Susan Tomory (pers. comm., 2002), writing from Wisconsin, recommended it to me as a place "to find source materials" on Hungarian history. Fehérlófia explicitly proclaims revisionist politics: An anti-Trianon "Justice for Hungary!" poster overlooks the cash register. Watercolors of nineteenth-century Hungarian warriors hang on the ceiling, their names written in both *rovás* and Latin letters. As well as the inevitable anti-Trianon books (sample title: *Trianont Ledöntjük. A magyar fájdalom versei*. "We'll break down Trianon. Poems of the Hungarian Pain"), Fehérlófia also sells Hungarian fiction, folkloric books, war memoirs, and Anti-Semetic tracts. In contrast to the Canadian diaspora's interest in paganism, Fehérlófia's books proclaim an extremist Christianity: The work "*Zsidó volt-e Jézus?*" (Was Jesus a Jew?) (Röck 2001) argues that Jesus was Sumerian, and that the ancient Sumerians were ethnically related to Hungarians.

Fehérlófia sells many *rovásírás* products, including a workbook, histories of the script, and postcards explaining the runes. Fehérlófia promotes revisionist culture through a variety of commercial products, including *rovásírás* postcards,

belt-buckles in the shape of pre-Trianon Hungary, and T-shirts. T-shirts with *rovásírás* inscriptions are sold only seasonally, from “march until fall,” and though the shopkeeper refused to estimate monthly sales, he claimed the shirts provoked “great interest.”

I will use two sources to examine the network of *rovásírás* enthusiasts: contributors to *Rovásírás újság* (Rune-writing Newspaper), a listserv; and visitors to Gábor Heves' webpage, “A magyar *rovásírás*” (The Hungarian Runic Writing), which has a guestbook (Heves 1999). These two sources overlap very little; Brown is the only person I could confirm from both groups. Nevertheless, Brown is not the only point of connection between them. Consider that Csaba Varga used *Rovásírás újság* (2001, no. 354)¹¹ to request the email address of Zoltán Fűr. Fűr, author of a *rovásírás* title and thus an agitator, composed the longest single entry to Heves' guestbook; an entry which, moreover, refers to Hosszú's homepage. Fűr never contributed to *Rovásírás újság*, but he demonstrably knows of its existence and is presumably known to its contributors. Heves' webpage (1999) also explains how to subscribe to *Rovásírás újság*. These two sources, therefore, do not form two distinct networks, but provide instead information about different sections of a single network.

Hungarian academics interested in *rovásírás*, significantly, are not connected to the *rovásírás* network. None of the seven contributors to Klára Sándor's 1992 edited volume “*Rovásírás a kárpát-mendencében*” (Rune-Writing in the Carpathian Basin) posted entries to *Rovásírás újság* or wrote comments in Heves' guestbook. This is not true among other linguistic sources on the internet: For example, Mendelelist, devoted to Yiddish, attracts postings from both academics and amateur enthusiasts.

Rovásírás újság is the brainchild of Gábor Hosszú, an agitator who has written several webpages on Hungarian runes. In 2001, Hosszú contributed roughly 40% of total entries to *Rovásírás újság*.¹² Nevertheless, most entries come from

dabblers contributing one or two messages a year. Typical postings include links to *rovásírás* or Hungarian-themed webpages and announcements concerning *rovásírás* software.

In examining dabblers vis-à-vis agitators, I focused on possible ideological discrepancies. However, dabblers' postings on *Rovásírás újság* articulate the revisionist ideology. Measured by reader response, one particularly successful posting was David Csaba's denunciation of English loanwords, including “energy drink,” which sparked two follow-up postings (*Rovásírás újság* 2001, nos. 381–383): dabblers thus show an interest in language purism. Another common theme is the so-called “Turanian” thesis, which posits an ancient Central Asian civilization from which the Etruscans, Turks, Mongols, and Hungarians descend. *Rovásírás újság* (2000, no. 289) discussed the Mongolian script and its possible relationship to Hungarian runes, and even inspired a contribution from a Turkish rune enthusiast. Doquzoğuz Tañrıqan, the only contributor who did not post in Hungarian, encouraged Hungarians to examine a webpage on Turkish runes (*Rovásírás újság* 2002, no. 389).¹³

Visitors to Heves' webpage also articulated revisionist views. Sipi wondered whether the direction of rune-writing show that *rovásírás* is “related to the Chinese or Japanese systems of writing? (I think so).” Other Hungarian respondents made their dissatisfaction with Hungary's borders clear by described their country of origin as *Nagy Magyarország* (Great Hungary), *Csonkamagyarország* (Rump Hungary), and *mi kis országunk* (our small country).¹⁴ Criticism and

were not so overwhelming, but he still was the top contributor: 14 out of 81 postings (17%), excluding spam. Some postings to *Rovásírás újság* have more than one contributor, and these figures should be treated as approximations.

13 Tañrıqan sought to derive Hungarian runes from Turkish runes: “Gokturk writings which have been found in Central Asia called Orhun writings should have been taken into account ... it would be very helpful to look at Gokturks and Shkits instead of ‘Indo-European’ languages.” Tañrıqan posted to *Rovásírás újság* in English, but a list member translated his comment into Hungarian. His webpage is in Turkish. The Turanian hypothesis, incidentally, also influenced the books published Fehérlófia: László Kállay's “Magyar Könyv” (“Hungarian Book”) described its date of publication as 1361 of the “Turan peoples book printing year.” I do not know how to translate this date into the Julian calendar.

14 The names *Pannonia*, *Hunnia*, and *Magyarhon* were also represented. Additionally, four Hungarian-language respondents described their location with the English word “Hungary,” and another seven with “hu,” Hungary's internet domain.

11 *Rovásírás újság* is cited in this article from its old web server, <http://nimrud.eet.bme.hu/rovas>. This server is now defunct and the texts cited in this paper exist only in the author's personal collection. However, the list is now offered at a new server: [WWW document] URL. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/rovas/>. To read the archive, one must join the group by sending an email to rovas-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

12 *Rovásírás újság* first appeared on February 2, 1999. In 2000–2001, an average of twelve messages appeared each a month, excluding spam. In 2000, Hosszú's contributions

hate mail are conspicuously absent, though Heves may have removed them.

Rovásírás újság appears in Hungarian, but since Heves' page includes information in English, his guestbook attracted much admiration from several Hungarians in the American diaspora. Steven Miksey, for example, thanked Heves for "the effort to preserve our Nations [sic] history and treasure." Brown declared her "love and respect for the people and culture that I am descended from and related to." A Hungarian living in New York claimed that he and some friends had learned *rovásírás* from the webpage, thus casting Heves in the role of national enlightener. He praised Heves' work "for Magyardom [*magyarságer*]."

Stephen Paulovitch, writing in the guestbook of a *rovásírás* homepage (Heves 2000), gives a uniquely Hungarian-American version the "parochial fetishization of national history" (Tismaneanu 1998: 92). John Kelleher has spoken of "the there's-always-an-Irishman-at-the-bottom-of-it-doing-the-real-work approach to American history" (see Schlesinger 1991); Paulovitch similarly posits ubiquitous Hungarians.

... "we" are taught that the Norwegians only reached Nova Scotia ... ah, but no further. Bull! A Magyar sailed with Eric the Red, spelled "Turrik" ... Torok? [Török, a common Hungarian surname] Also, these same Runes have been found up in Wisconsin and Minnesota. My goodness, the first US reg't to engage in fighting at the battle of Gettysburg was the 54th NYvolInfReg't, command by Col. Istvan Kovacs ... *az igaz!* [it's true!] The first words of the battle could well have been Magyar. My point? Magyars have been around for a very long time ... and their presence has been ignored (Heves 2000).

This reference to Minnesota surely refers to the Kensington Rune Stone, a famous hoax of Scandinavian runology. Paulovitch thus links Hungarian amateur runology to its Scandinavian counterpart.¹⁵

Heves' guestbook, unlike *Rovásírás újság*, asks contributors to state their location, allowing an estimate of the *rovásírás* network's geographical extent. Of 192 respondents, 139 (72%) come from the modern Republic of Hungary, and at least 47 (24%) from Budapest. Budapest is probably even more central than Fig. 2 suggests: of the 44

respondents listed on the map as "other Hungary," 14 revealed no city of origin. Some probably hail from Budapest. Another 25 respondents (13%) live in Anglophone countries.

The lack of *rovásírás* enthusiasts in Transylvania contrasts strikingly with the imagined homeland of the ancient Hungarian culture. Consider Fig. 3, adopted from an agitator's map depicting *rovásírás* archaeological finds: Only three of these finds (numbers 5, 6, and 7) lie within the borders of modern Hungary. The clump of sources in the east of the map depicts the *Székelyföld*. Returning to Fig. 2, note that only five (2%) visitors to Heves' homepage come from former Hungarian lands lost after the treaty of Trianon; and only two (1%) come from the *Székelyföld*.

The contrast between Figures 2 and 3 suggests a discrepancy between the geographical origin of *rovásírás* heritage, as enthusiasts imagine it, and the actual social network of enthusiasts. Such a discrepancy, while noteworthy, is theoretically unproblematic: As Dan Ben-Amos (1983) has suggested, the European "urbane literati, who conceived the idea of folklore," attributed to it the quality of

rurality. The countryside and the open space of wilderness was folklore's proper breeding ground. Man's close contact with nature in villages and hunting bands was considered the ultimate source of his myth and poetry.

Figures 2 and 3 support both of Ben-Amos' claims: *Rovásírás* enthusiasts live in the cities of the modern Republic of Hungary, specifically in Budapest, but nevertheless attribute their heritage to rural Transylvania.

The institutions and social networks of *rovásírás* enthusiasts support a coherent national ideology, shared by dabblers and agitators alike. Indeed, ideology defines the movement. Even enthusiasts working in higher education reject the Hungarian academy, presumably since the revisionist cosmology conflicts with accepted historical narratives. Despite the mythic origins of the script in rural Transylvania, this culture has its centers in urban areas, particularly Budapest. Nevertheless, its social network has branches on every continent. *Rovásírás* revisionism, in conclusion, constitutes "Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World" (cf. Danforth 1995).

Rovásírás Usage in the Twenty-First Century

The strong ideological meanings of the script transform it into a symbol of a specific nationalist

15 For information on the Kensington hoax, see Blegen 1968. Fred Hámori, another *rovásírás* enthusiast, has also claimed the Kensington rune stone as Hungarian, see "A Hungarian in American before Columbus," WWW document. URL <<http://www2.4dcomm.com/millenia/teiferic.htm>>

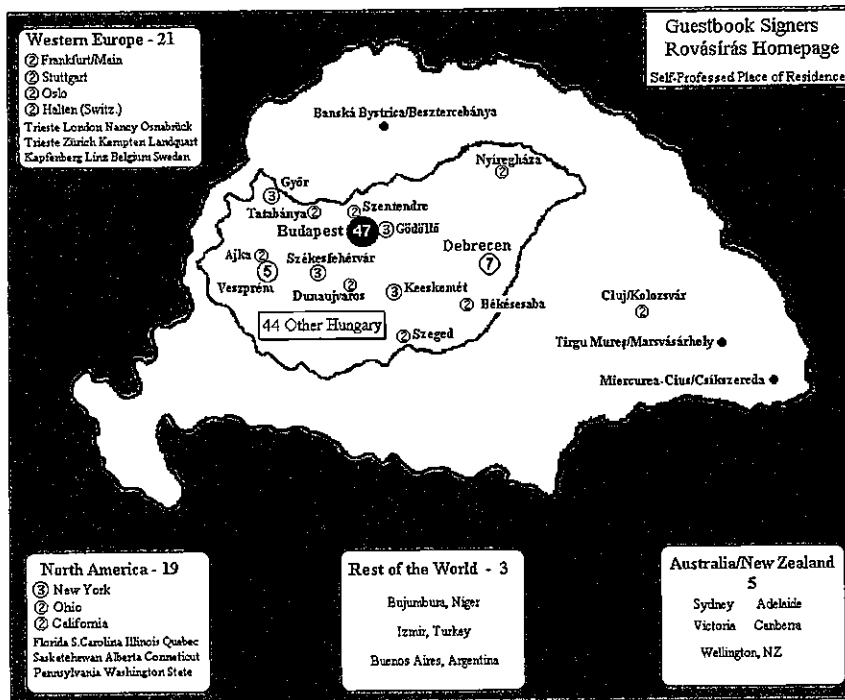


Fig. 2: Guestbook signers: rovásírás homepage (from Heves 2000).

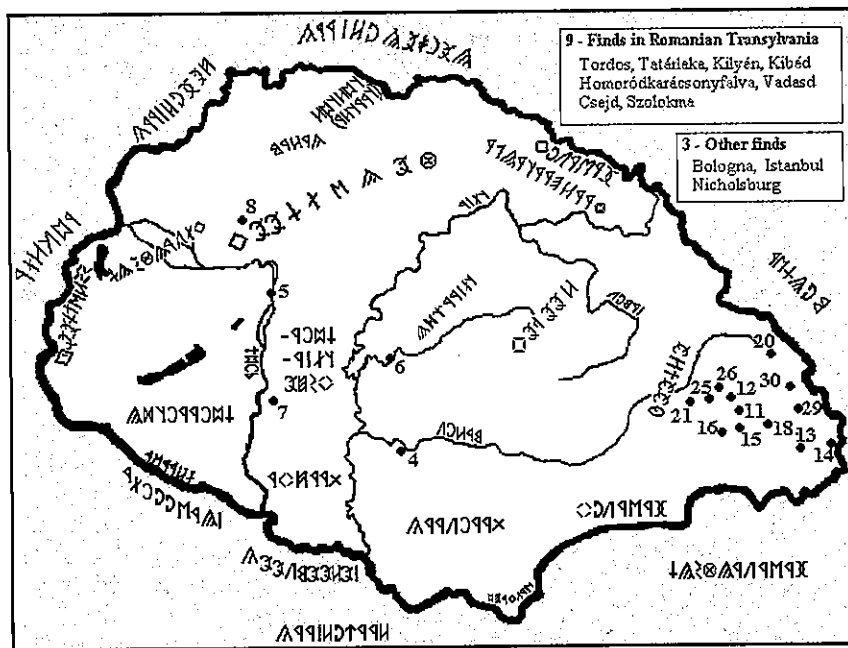


Fig. 3: Main locations of rovásírás finds (based on Kucsera 1997).

myth proclaiming the antiquity and glory of the Hungarian people. Hungarian runes are not cultivated as a vehicle for literacy, but as a patriotic “orthographic act.” To test this hypothesis, consider a series of rovásírás texts in actual use. During two years’ residency in Budapest, I encountered three specimens of rovásírás by chance. After I

began researching this article, of course, I encountered many more: who seeks, finds.

My first specimen comes from the *Mesterségek Ünnepe* (officially translated as the “Festival of Trades and Crafts”), which I attended on August 20, 2001. During the festival, the grounds of Buda castle hosted live music, folk dancing, food stalls,

and various handcraft stands.¹⁶ The main entrance boasted a *székélykapu*, a “traditional” wooden gate common in Transylvania. The *székélykapu* bore the inscription ʃAʃĸ Pʃʃ Bĸĸ P BʃʃPʃN! (*Isten add megy a Magyar!*, God, bless the Magyar!, the first words of the Hungarian national anthem). The second specimen graces the cover of a tape cassette I purchased in Duna Plaza, a modern shopping mall. The New Age band Lux decorated their album “Ethnosphaera” with the words BʃʃPʃN Bĸĸ (*Magyar zene*, Hungarian music) next to the same phrase in the Latin alphabet. Both of these “folkloric” specimens were written right-to-left. Neither used ligatures, neither deleted ĸ. The *székélykapu* text included a double letter, which was written twice. Neither text contained a {k}. Both specimens, in other words, could have been mechanically transliterated by a *rovásírás* novice.

Both specimens have primarily decorative functions; both created folkloric cultural associations. The *székélykapu* inscription was carved into wood, supposedly the original medium for *rovásírás* inscriptions; the Lux cassette includes a picture of a stag, an animal of symbolic national importance. These specimens, however, adapt the putative “ancient tradition” to a contemporary context: a cassette tape, like the *rovásírás* post-cards in Fehérlőfia, is a modern cultural artifact. The Hungarian national anthem, furthermore, dates from 1823, well after the putative golden age of *rovásírás*. Historical accuracy is, of course, irrelevant to the experience of authenticity: as demonstrated in Trevor-Roper’s famous essay on the English invention of the Scottish kilt (1992), traditions can be invented. The *székélykapu* lent an atmosphere of a timeless national tradition to the Festival of Trades and Crafts, and thus fulfilled its function.

The next *rovásírás* specimens differ significantly from the other two, both in content and technical sophistication. In Hungary’s national library, the “Országos Széchényi Könyvtár,” on a toilet paper dispenser in a seventh floor men’s restroom, I observed three *rovásírás* graffiti.¹⁷ Judging by the handwriting, they were written by two different authors. Both made extensive use of ligatures and {ĸ} deletion. The longest of the three (Fig. 4) used

several ligatures that do not occur in Hosszú’s *rovásírás* freeware, including a single character for *nem* (no/not) arguably forming an ideograph. Note also that the rune {λ} appears in mirror image in ligatures for [vö] and [ös] (both in the first line), suggesting that the author is familiar with boustrophedon. The orthographic sophistication of this text inspired me to reproduce it by hand, thus Fig. 4 runs from right-to-left. The difference between the two [it] ligatures (in the first and last lines) reflects a discrepancy in the hand-scrawled graffiti.

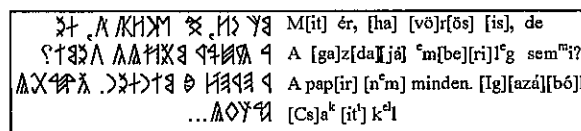


Fig. 4: *Rovásírás* graffiti in National Széchényi Library, Budapest, 2001.

The graffiti (Fig. 4) means: “What good is a red [degree of distinction] if the person owning it is a giant nothing? The paper is not everything, in truth, it matters only here [in the library].”¹⁸

The two other *rovásírás* graffiti responded to an English inscription: “pornchicks RULE!” The author of Fig. 4, in the same sophisticated, ligature-employing handwriting, commented “this is the only comment worth anything, the others are weak.” The second *rovásírás* author, with different handwriting, responded “I agree” (ʃ ĸNĸ; ʃgyeʃ é[rt]ĸk, discussed above.)

These graffiti differ from the folkloric specimens not only in their technical sophistication but in their content: at first glance, nothing about them seems particularly folkloric, cultural, or Hungarian. Hungary’s national library is itself a symbol of Hungary’s cultural heritage, yet Fig. 4, mocking as it does the value of a distinguished degree, apparently rejects scholarly values, particularly in conjunction with admiration for pornographic actresses. Indeed, a Latin-alphabet graffiti in the same bathroom stall, “*Élenez a könyvtárhoz méltó megjegyzések!*” (Long live comments worthy of the library!), shows more apparent appreciation of the library’s symbolic value.

Yet the tension between mainstream scholars and the *rovásírás* subculture suggests that this rejection of book learning is instead a rejection of Hungary’s academic institutions: do the graffiti’s sophisticated ligatures and {ĸ} deletion not stake a

16 One of the folkcraft booths sold books on *rovásírás*, but I did not count this as one of my “three instances”: conscious propagation differs from usage.

17 When I noticed these graffiti, I did not have any photographic equipment with me and I copied these graffiti into a notebook. By 11 February 2002, the graffiti had been removed.

18 For this and other translations, I am indebted to the wit of Petra Hajdu, PNG.

certain claim to erudition? By displaying advanced knowledge of *rovásírás*, the author implicitly poses as the guardian of a national tradition more genuine than of Hungarian universities. The runes, therefore, form an integral part of the graffiti's meaning: the same sentence in the Latin alphabet would not evoke revisionist claims.

Modern Hungarian rune-writing thus acquires meaning from the script itself. With the exception of the pro-pornography messages, which may have been meant ironically, nationalist connotations dominate the specimens of *rovásírás* I encountered. In the officially-recognized *Mesterségek Ünnepe*, Hungarian revisionism coexists peacefully with more moderate visions of Hungarian culture and history, and the script serves as folkloric decoration. Ideological meanings cannot be ignored in the bathroom graffiti, however: conflict between the revisionist and academic cosmologies proved essential to decoding the text.

The "Vernacular Academy" and Typographical Nationalism

How does the *rovásírás* movement compare to linguistic nationalism elsewhere in Europe? Several movements promoting a specific language have developed into full-fledged nationalist movements: The Czech and Slovak national movements, for example, both began with the cultivation of Slavic literature at the end of the eighteenth century and ended forming nation-states at the end of the twentieth (Hroch 1985). Yet this hardly seems a model for *rovásírás* culture: a Hungarian state already exists.

Rovásírás contest Hungarian national discourses from within. Domestic struggles within a nation can also take national and linguistic form: Serbs may choose either Cyrillic or Latin letters; Norwegian, famously, has multiple alphabets, with different political forces supporting one or another script (Haugen 1966); and Germans have even debated the merits of the Roman type and black letter (aka "Gothic letters") in the Reichstag (Bain and Shaw 1998; Wehde 2000). Yet these disagreements concern state sponsorship of one or another official standard alphabet for use in schools and administration: *rovásírás* enthusiasts apparently reject the Hungarian state *in toto*. Susanne Wehde (2000: 252 f.) has suggested that "nation and people not only be considered as a language community, but also as a script community," whose "typographical culture" forms the subject of analysis.

Like Serbian Cyrillic or German black letter, *rovásírás* typographical culture finds itself in binary opposition to the Latin alphabet. Hungarian runes are highly ideological, even by the standard set by other languages with several scripts. Cyrillic is the default script used in Serbia; use of Latin letters indicates a conscious commitment to cosmopolitanism. In contemporary German, black letter is also popular in folkloric or heritage related contexts. Heavy metal fans, both in Germany and worldwide, also use black letter. Yet black letter scripts also appeal to German revisionists and hyper-nationalists, despite having been denounced by Hitler as "Jewish letters" (Willberg 1998: 48; Schwemer-Scheddin 1998: 63). These multiple and ambiguous national meanings reflect much wider use: black letter dominated German publishing as recently as the nineteenth century. Yvonne Schwemer-Scheddin (1998: 66) has dismissed modern German black letter as "ghettoized" in comparison to the Latin alphabet, since it "lacks a connection to current sociopolitical reality." However, this critique seems even more applicable to *rovásírás*.

A script can sustain a pure ideological meaning only if restricted to ideological contexts: general use would inevitably dilute ideological associations. That *rovásírás* enthusiasts do not aspire to replace the Latin alphabet, therefore, is highly significant. The subculture restricts itself to self-selecting enthusiasts: by limiting its scope, it maintains its ideological purity. *Rovásírás* is much more ghettoized than German black letter, yet boasts a more coherent sociopolitical meaning: revisionist nationalism.

Some scholars might hesitate to classify such a cultural phenomenon as "nationalism," believing that the desire for one's own state is the "core doctrine" of nationalism (Smith 1983: 21). Breuille (1993: 5) even suggests that "identifying and describing certain sorts of national consciousness ... should not be confused with nationalism." Nevertheless, Hungarian rune enthusiasts they deploy nationalist arguments and terminology "as practical category, as classificatory scheme, as cognitive frame," to use Brubaker's reformulation of nationalism (1996: 16; see also Porter 1996: 1472). Any definition of "nationalism" which excludes Hungarian rune enthusiasts is probably too narrow.

Nevertheless, Yulian Konstantinov's (1997: 36) concept of a "vernacular academy" may clarify the status of the *rovásírás* movement without provoking endless arguments about what the word "nationalism" should denote. Konstantinov devel-

oped this term to discuss the Pomaks, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims living under hostile Bulgarian administration, who are obsessed "by a passionate search for 'proofs' which are better than those of the official academy" in "reaction against nation-state monopoly over identity-affairs." Konstantinov (1997: 37) also tells us that "the main sources of 'proofs' are artifacts, documents and books which have . . . been found (while repairing the mosque in the village)." *Rovásírás* enthusiasts resemble Konstantinov's Pomaks: they show the same obsession with "proofs," and the same hostility toward the existing state academy. Though *rovásírás* inscriptions never appear in mosques, Ferenc Fodor's (1996) list of *rovásírás* artifacts includes ten specimens discovered in churches.¹⁹

Opposing all these parallels between the Pomaks and *rovásírás* enthusiasts lies a decisive contrast: Pomaks have a different ethnonym vis-à-vis the Bulgarians. Their culture is more "viable" in the Gellnerian sense, since the ethnonym and *rovásírás* enthusiasts consider themselves to share the same national category with other Hungarians. Non-revisionist Hungarians may be unawakened and ignorant, or "human zeros," or traitors to Hungary's true national interest, yet remain Hungarians.

The concept of a "vernacular academy" captures the antistate motives of the *rovásírás* movement without implying hidden desires for independence. Konstantinov coined the term to describe a group whose cultural distinctiveness vis-à-vis their state is unproblematic, though they share a spoken language with the dominant group in their state. The term "vernacular academy," however, can describe any group contesting the validity of official state pronouncements. Perhaps the difference between Hungarian rune enthusiasts and the embryonic nineteenth-century Slovak and Romanian national movements lies in their potential for expansion: *Rovásírás* enthusiasts, by accepting the Latin alphabet, acquiesce in their marginalization. Nineteenth-century Slovak and Romanian language enthusiasts tried to expand their script to an illiterate peasantry, even if the peasants proved unwilling to accept the nationalist myths.

The *rovásírás* vernacular academy thus sheds light on the ambiguous role ideology plays in linguistic nationalism. Whether from feelings of

cultural inferiority, or some variety of collective paranoia, the motives of Hungarian rune enthusiasts must be sought in the beliefs of enthusiasts. Theoretical literature on nationalism, however, tends to emphasize material causes. The great Marxist scholars of nationalism, for example, derived nineteenth-century nationalism from the social consequences of industrialization (Hobsbawm 1992; Anderson 1991). Vladimir Tismaneanu (1998: 83), comparing the "messianic, self-indulging fantasies" of the *rovásírás* type in several post-socialist societies, suggests "the main difficulties of the transition" explain their emergence. Gellner (1983: 124) even declared that nationalists' "precise doctrines are hardly worth analyzing."

Yet if, as Gellner argued, "nationalism has no grip" between groups that share "access to education or to a viable high culture . . . because there is no cultural differentiation," (1983: 95, 89, 97), how can the *rovásírás* vernacular academy have come into being? Electrical engineers, computer scientists, chemists, psychologists, and so forth have access to the same education and viable high culture as other Hungarians. Clearly, the journals, consumer products, and cultural institutions based around *rovásírás* constitute a self-induced "cultural differentiation." Nor can one fully explain the *rovásírás* culture through social class. *Rovásírás* enthusiasts are mostly urban, college-educated Hungarians, but neither characteristic is causal: urban, educated Hungarians most typically support the Liberal-left Alliance of Free Democrats (the SZDSZ, see Bozóki 1999: 110). Revisionist Hungarians presumably vote for the far-right Hungarian Truth and Life Party (MIÉP). Revisionist Hungarians share a self-glorifying ideology devised to meet psychological needs.

[W]hen all other sources of self-pride and collective identity have vanished, the past becomes a principle of legitimation, myths are resurrected to justify . . . historical primordality, cultural preeminence, and superior claims to territorial domination (Tismaneanu 1998: 92).

Tismaneanu's reading of the nationalist motives may have its faults, but psychological profiling is clearly the right path.

The self-limiting aspirations of the *rovásírás* movement, however, suggest that ideology is not sufficient on its own to transform a vernacular academy to a mass national movement. The *rovásírás* vernacular academy, in its present form, is not "viable" in the sense that independent states were founded on Czech or Slovak high culture. Nor do *rovásírás* enthusiasts aspire to make the

19 The church finds are in Bonyha, Bögöz, Dálnok, Gelence, Homoródkarácsonyfalva, Közep-ajta, Nagykáson, Pomáz, Szentmihály, and Szekelyderzs. According to Dűvel (1968: 4), Swedish runic inscriptions are also regularly discovered in churches.

runes the basis of Hungarian literacy or state administration; indeed, many participants are not even Hungarian citizens. Thus the *rovásírás* vernacular academy, though permeated by political claims, will probably remain mostly cultural and intellectual, not political.

References Cited

- Ammon, Ulrich**
1987 44. Language – Variety/Standard Variety – Dialect. In: U. Ammon, N. Dittmar, K. J. Mattheier (eds.), *Sociolinguistics – Soziolinguistik*. Vol. 1; pp. 316–335. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Anderson, Benedict**
1991 *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso. [1983]
- Arvisura**
1998 *Mi az Arvisura?* <<http://www.freeweb.hu/arvisura/arvisura.htm>>
- Austin, John Langshaw**
1962 *How to Do Things with Words*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Bain, Peter, and Paul Shaw (eds.)**
1998 *Blackletter. Type and National Identity*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Ben-Amos, Dan**
1983 The Idea of Folklore. An Essay. In: I. Ben-Ami and J. Dan (eds.), *Studies in Aggadah and Jewish Folklore*; pp. 11–17. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press. (Folklore Research Center Studies, 7)
- Blegen, Theodore**
1968 *The Kensington Rune Stone. New Light on an Old Riddle*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society.
- Bodrogy, Gabor**
1998 *The Hungarian Rovas (Hungarian Palaeography)*. <<http://users.tpg.com.au/etr/rovas/hurov.html>> [When quoting from this source, I fixed some minor grammatical errors.]
- Bozóki, András**
1999 Democracy in Hungary, 1990–97. In: M. Kaldor and I. Vejvoda (eds.), *Democratization in Central and Eastern Europe*; pp. 105–120. London: Pinter.
- Breuilly, John**
1993 *Nationalism and the State*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [2nd ed., first published in 1982]
- Brubaker, Rogers**
1996 *Nationalism Reframed*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Danforth, Loring**
1995 *The Macedonian Conflict. Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dombi, Charles**
1998 *Hungarian Culture and History*. Homepage of the Hungarian Folkdance Chamber Group of Ottawa. <<http://hunmagyar.org>> [Notably the link “Hungarian History”]
- Düwel, Klaus**
1968 *Runenkunde*. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung.
- Everson, Michael**
1998 Draft Proposal to Encode Old Hungarian in Plane 1 of ISO/IEC 10646–2. <<http://wwwold.dkuug.dk/JTC1/SC2/WG2/docs/n1686/n1686.htm>>
- Fehértófia nemzeti könyvesbolt*
2002 Homepage at <<http://www.fehertofia.hu/fooldal.htm>>
- Fodor, Ferenc**
1996 Surviving Relics of the Ancient Rovás. *The Journal of the Institute for Hungarian Studies*. (Reproduction of Fodor’s “Table of Contents.”) <<http://www.acronet.net/magyar/english/96–10/fodor.htm>>
- Forrai, Sándor**
1996 Article in *Magyar Fórum*, 6 June 1996. Quoted from “The Székely-Hungarian Rovás Script” [*A székely-magyar rovásírás*]. <<http://users.tpg.com.au/etr/rovas/inf/rovasE.html>>
- Friedrich, Klára**
2000 *Rovásírásgyakorlatok, nem csak gyerekeknek*. Budapest: Magyar Ház.
- Fűr, Zoltán**
1999 *A magyar rovásírás ABC-s könyve*. Budapest: Püski.
- Geary, Patrick**
2002 *The Myth of Nations. The Medieval Origin of Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gellner, Ernest**
1983 *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hamori, Alfred**
1996 *Hungarian Letters and Writing*. <<http://www2.4dcomm.com/millenia/alphabet.htm>>
- Haugen, Einar**
1966 *Language Conflict and Language Planning. The Case of Modern Norwegian*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Heves, Gábor**
1999 *The Hungarian Runic Writing*. <<http://fang.fa.gau.hu/heves/runic.html>>
2000 *Vendégekönny* [Guestbook]. <<http://fang.fa.gau.hu/heves/guest/guestbook.html>>
- Hobsbawm, Eric J.**
1992 *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hosszú, Gábor**
1998a *The Bug Symbols in the Sekler-Hungarian Rune Writing*. <http://nimrud.eet.bme.hu/rovas/papers/bug_sym/bug_sym.htm>
1998b *The Hungarian Rune Writing*. <<http://nimrud.eet.bme.hu/rovas/papers/paper4/paper4.htm>>
- Hroch, Miroslav**
1985 *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe. A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jensen, Hans**
1935 *Die Schrift in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*. Hamburg: J. J. Augustin.

Johnson, Lonnie

2001 Eastern Europe. In: A. Motyl (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Nationalism*. Vol 1; pp. 165–196. San Diego: Academic Press.

Kaiser, Robert

1994 *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kodratoff, Yves

2000 A Cold Opinion on the *rovás* (or Magyar "Runes"). <<http://www.teaser.fr/~lfontaine/nmh/rovas/rovas.htm>>

Konstantinov, Yulian

1997 Strategies for Sustaining a Vulnerable Identity. The Case of the Bulgarian Pomaks. In: H. Poulton (ed.), *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State*; pp. 33–53. London: Hurst and Co.

Kucsera, György

1997 "Rovas" Inforum Invest Web-Art Műhely. <<http://www.inforum.hu/rovas/>> [An English translation of this page is available at <<http://users.tpg.com.au/etr/rovas/inf/rovasE.html>>. This page itself lists no author, but Gabor Bodroghy attributes it to a "group of authors" and thanks Kucsera by name.]

Magocsi, Paul Robert

1989 The Ukrainian National Revival. A New Analytical Framework. *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 16/1–2: 45–62.

Magyar, Adorján

1996 The Ancient Magyar Rovás. *Journal of the Institute of Hungarian Studies*. <<http://www.acronet.net/~magyar/english/96-10/magyarad.htm>>

Molnos, Angéla

2001 *Honlap a Magyar Nyelvért. "A Magyarító közzeveske"*. <<http://fox.klte.hu/~keresofi/mke/n.htm>>

Morris, Richard

1998 *Runic and Mediterranean Epigraphy*. Gylling: Odense University Press.

Németh, J.

1971 The Runiform Inscriptions from Nagy-Szent-Miklós and the Runiform Scripts of Eastern Europe. *Acta Linguistica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 21: 1–52.

Porter, Brian

1996 The Social Nation and Its Futures. English Liberalism and Polish Nationalism in Late 19th Century Warsaw. *American Historical Review* 104/5: 1470–92.

Röck, Gyula

2001 *Zsidó volt-e Jézus?* Budapest: Anahita-Ninti.

Sándor, Klára

1992 *Rovásírás a kárpát-mendencében*. Szeged: Magyar Őstörténeti könyvtár.

Sebestén, Gyula

1909 *Rovás és Rovásírás*. Budapest: Magyar Néprajzi Társaság Kiadása.

Schlesinger, Arthur

1991 *The Disuniting of America*. New York: Norton.

Schwemer-Scheddin, Yvonne

1998 Broken Images. In: P. Bain and P. Shaw (eds.); pp. 50–67.

Smith, Anthony

1983 *Theories of Nationalism*. New York: Holmes and Meier. [2nd ed.]

Szabados, Robert

1996 Ancient Hungarian Rovás/Runic Writing. <<http://www.interlog.com/~photodsk/magyar/rovas/rovaseng.html>>

Tisch, Dávid

2000 "Cserkészzet" and "Magamról". <<http://people.inf.elte.hu/tisch>>

Tismaneanu, Vladimir

1998 *Fantasies of Salvation. Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Tomory, Susan

1996 Székely-Magyar Rovás. *The Journal of the Institute for Hungarian Studies*. Vol. 93/1. [Summary of an article by Dezso Csillany] <<http://www.acronet.net/~magyar/english/96-10/cstillany.htm>>

Trevor-Roper, Hugh

1992 The Invention of Tradition. The Highland Tradition of Scotland. In: E. J. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*; pp. 15–41. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Varga, Csaba

2001 *Jel Jel Jel avagy az ABC 30.000 éves története*. Budapest: Fríg könyvkiadó.

Wehde, Susanne

2000 *Typographische Kultur. Eine zeichentheoretische und kulturgeschichtliche Studie zur Typographie und ihrer Entwicklung*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.

Willberg, Hans Peter

1998 Fraktur and Nationalism. In: P. Bain and P. Shaw (eds.); pp. 40–49.

World Bank

2001 *The Little Data Book*. Washington: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.