BENKŐ, István
Graduated from the Eötvös Lorand University in Budapest in 1970 and works as civil servant. His family originates from Transylvania, from Háomszék County; in the 17th century lustrae they bore the title of primor nobilis, later they became reformed ministers and teachers. His historian brother piqued his interest towards the early history of Hungarians. He is the author of several essays and articles on the prehistory and history of Hungarians.

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Dr. Tibor Tóth (1929–1991)
- Discoverer of the Eastern Hungarians in Modern Times -
The name of Tibor Tóth is much more known in international anthropologist circles than in Hungary. This fact ascertains that “nobody is prophet in his own homeland”. The most important discovery of the 20th century can be connected with his name on the field of the research of the Eastern Hungarians. He was the first Hungarian researcher who had an opportunity to meet such an ethnic group which regarded itself to have Eastern Magyar origin, more than seven hundred years after the famous travel of the Hungarian Dominican monk, Friar Julian into the Magna Hungaria of the Volga-district (1235–36). The question can be raised: how could it happen that the sensational discovery of Tibor Tóth sunk into perfect oblivion?

Tibor Tóth prepared for defending his academic doctoral thesis in Moscow in the 1960s. He made more than three thousand measurements in different republics of the Soviet Union for his three volumed, still unpublished dissertations. He wanted to continue his work he had begun in Bashkiria, the measurement of the Kipchaks on the territory of the Kazakh Soviet Republic in the spring of 1964. Seitbek Nurhanov, the famous Kazakh linguist, who was born in the Torghay district, directed his attention to the Madiar tribe in Torghay. They went together to the Torghay district in 1965. Tibor Tóth made several anthropological measurements among the members of the Madiar tribe. Seitbek Nurhanov, who was working in the Linguistic Institute of the Kazakh Academy in Almaty for decades, in 2002, when he was already 72 years old, told the following to the historian Mihály Benkő about his memories, connected with the famous Hungarian anthropologist, Tibor Tóth:

"Tibor Tóth arrived in Alma Ata in December 1964. He wanted to make anthropological measurements among the Kazakh population around the city of the Kazakh Soviet Republic. Not long after his arrival he gave a lecture on the ethnogenesis of the Hungarians. He told us that he had found immediate anthropological parallels of the Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin among the Bashkirians. Having finished his lecture, he asked the public to give him written questions and promised to answer these questions immediately. There and then I put down two questions for him:

1 How do the people name themselves who are called by other nations as "Hungarian, Ungarn, Venger?"
What kind of contacts could your people have with the Madiars, living in the Torghay-basin?

I raised these questions, because I myself was born in a Kipchak clan of the Torghay-basin. In the years of 1950–51 I was a teacher at home and was teaching Russian language and literature to the Argyn-Madiar children.

Tibor Tóth answered my first question saying that the ethnic name of his people was Magyar at home. He told only the followings about the second question: "I'd like to ask that colleague who put this question to stay on here so that we could talk to each other."

I went to contact him after the session. He was very excited and asked me how many Argyn-Madiars might live in my homeland. I answered I couldn't give an exact number but their number should come to at least one thousand.

"Please, do not mention it to anyone! Now I have very little time, but if I am still alive, I come back next year."

Tibor Tóth really came back in the spring of 1965. He wanted to travel to Qosanay and Torghay immediately, but it did not go so quickly. There was some delay. A few days after his arrival I was summoned by the Chief of the Department of Cadre-Policy of the Kazakh Academy, who was a Colonel of the KGB's secret staff. He asked me: "Do you want to accompany a Hungarian into Qostanay?"

"Yes."

"Do you have any common research theme?"

"No, and if you put this question this way, I've already called off the journey."

"Don't worry, I only wanted to be better informed. I wish you good luck and good work!"

His attitude meant really good luck because the Qostanay-Torghay district was one of the most strictly closed territories of Kazakhstan for foreigners. By the way, foreign researchers were not allowed to visit the Kazakh Soviet Republic without the permission of the supreme Soviet authorities. However, Tibor Tóth prepared to defend his thesis for the Academic doctorate in Moscow. I have to say that the Chairman of the Kazakh Academy stood firmly behind us. He met the scientific secretary of the Academy in those days: "let us help our guest!"

In the end we could set out on 7 April. I remember, the plane could not take off on time because of bad weather conditions. We went to sleep at the airport of Alma Ata. We arrived into Qostanay next morning.

We had a letter to the Party Secretary of the Qostanay District, so we could consult our working plan with him. There was thaw and flood in the Torghay-basin that time, so we could not approach our destination by car. Finally, we flew a small U2 plane to Torghay. We spent the first night at the local Party Secretary, the second night at my family, and then we travelled also by plane further on to the vicinity of Sagha, the central locality beside the Sarykopa Lakes. There Tibor Tóth summoned a small meeting for the local people and informed them about the purpose of his journey. He measured hundred and eighty people from the Madiar tribe at the Sarykopa. He noted down their height, the measure of their heads, the width of their face, their noses, the cutting and the colour of their eyes, the colour and density of their hair. He drew my attention to the fact that some of the place names and personal names found there do exist in Hungary too. For example: Ségeti and Tomay. There is a town, named Ség, and a village, named Badacsony-tomaj on the northern bank of Lake Balaton in Hungary. We visited the tomb covered by tileroof of a very famous Madiar personality in the Madiar
cemetery. We asked the local mullah to preach at his grave. Alas, we could take photos neither of the characteristic cemetery, surrounded by a ditch against grassing animals, nor about the people assembling there. Namely, Tibor Tóth did not get permission to take photos on his journey. We finished the research at Közbel in the Torghay-district. We were told by local authorities that they would send a plane for us to Qostanay if we wish to come back next year. We also measured Kipchaks in the Torghay-district. There were some Madiars in their tribal federation too. Afterwards we travelled to Qostanay. A few Madiars were living there from the clan of Mirzhakip Dulatov in the vicinity of the town. A relative of Dulatov asked us not to measure his son, who was studying at the University of Agriculture in Alma Ata, least we should call the attention for the authorities on him. However, Tóth Tibor flew to Alma Ata in vain next year. We got no permission to fly to the Qostanay-Torghay-district. Later I got into an unpleasant situation. Maybe one of the reasons of this refusal was due to our Dulatov family in Qostanay. Naturally all this did not depend on the Kazakh Academy of Sciences. They did their best. For example, they sent somebody to collect material to the Irtish-river, to the Western Siberian frontier of Kazakhstan. There was a Madiar Aksakal living there, who could trace the history of his clan back to forty generations.

Tibor Tóth had come to the conclusion that the Madiar tribe of the Argyn tribe federation has about 180 families and 900-950 members. The members of the Madiar Tribe intermarry with other Argyn tribes and with the Kipchaks. They are herdsmen. Their native language is the Kazakh language. They all know the name of the head of their clans; they can lead back their family trees to 10-12 generations. They belong to the South-Siberian race anthropologically. Their characteristics remind of the research series of the Small Horde and the Central Horde in this respect. Tibor Tóth published his discovery in scientific journals both in Budapest (1) and in Almaty. It was also published in a popular form by Tamás Aczél Kovádh in the daily paper named Magyar Nemzet in 1967 and in 1968.

Later he intended of going back to the Sarykopa-district with an expedition set up from Hungarian ethnographers, archaeologists, linguists. One of our largest daily papers, the Magyar Nemzet published two articles about the discovery of Tibor Tóth in those years. However, the dream of Tibor Tóth, the large Hungarian expedition to the Madiars of Torghay did not come materialise. He got to that territory only by chance, because it was not accessible to foreigners at all. As he did not get permission to take photos on his first journey, he could not get any irrefutable proof about his important discovery, which was unique in Hungarian respect. His discovery fell into oblivion at home, because of envy, indifference and lack of comprehension. Tibor Tóth died as a disillusioned and disenchanted man in 1991 – just in the same year when the independence of the Kazakh Republic was declared, and all administrative hindrances of the unprejudiced archaeological, ethnographic, historical researches in Kazakh land were swept away.

As I told at the beginning of my article, Tibor Tóth is almost completely forgotten in Hungary. But he is very well remembered on the Kazakh land, both in scientific circles and also among the Madiars of the Torghay district, in the middle of the Sarykopa swamps, where the Hungarian scientist made his discovery. Professor Orazak Ismagulov, who made anthropological measurement together with Tibor Tóth in the vicinity of Alma Ata in 1964, in 2002 said this when he was
answering the following question: Why did not continue Tibor Tóth his researches among the Madiars of the Torghay-basin?"

He got only by chance into the Torghay basin in 1965. No foreigners were granted permission to go there, neither before Tibor Tóth, nor after him in Tsarist and Soviet times. Tibor Tóth was really lucky, the administrative machine "was caught napping" in his case. But he came back in vain in 1966, the 'clerical error' had been corrected by then..."

Professor John Harmatta, Member of the Hungarian Scientific Academy told once the following:

"— It is extremely difficult to find the Eastern Magyars. It can happen only by chance. In the age of Friar Julian, the fact that they preserved the Hungarian mother tongue made their identification somewhat easier, but our former common language had already disappeared among them." In our history, the lucky chance was that Tibor Tóth met the Kazakh linguist Sejitbek Nurkhanov in Alma Ata. Thanks to the fact that the Argyn-Magyars of the Sarykopa preserved their ethnic name in the course of many centuries, the identification of the Eastern Hungarians became easier. Tibor Tóth hoped that his discovery would be appreciated in his homeland and he could return into the scene with a large expedition which would have also ethnographist, linguist members to collect profound material which proves or disproves the connection of the Argyn-Madiars with the Magyars of Hungary. However, he could never return to the Sarykopa, neither alone, nor with any group of scientists. He got no permission from Moscow. When he worked among the Argyn-Magyars on the Sarykopa, he was on the proper place, but in the wrong time...