

## The Role of Sworn Brotherhoodship in Nomadic State Formation

*In the social relations of ancient steppe horsemen, kinship bonds played a defining role. However, there was an ancient customary law that allowed non-kin tribal leaders to enter into strong and long-term agreements with each other, that way the foreign, non-kin contracting parties could also become adopted siblings. Unfortunately, the study of Eurasian blood oaths is currently not a priority within the research, and over the past nearly one and a half centuries, only some papers or analyses have been published on this topic. There is no comprehensive monograph on the subject, although references to sworn brotherhood and alliances sometimes appear in studies concerning the steppe tribes and alliances.*

**Keywords:** *alliance, anda, Mongols, Hungarians, blood oath, constitution, customary law*

### 1. Introduction

The historical significance of blood oaths and sworn brotherhood has attracted the attention of Hungarian legal historians firstly, who recognized their importance in private and public law in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The legal scholars realized that the ancient, classical, and medieval sources documented the steppe blood oath as the most important public act. Using this form Scythians, Huns, and other horse people could be united. Hungarian scholars believed that special legal custom contained the basis contracts of states, whose specific provisions served as the first constitutions for the steppe peoples such as the Scythians, Huns, Hungarians, and the Mongols.<sup>1</sup> Hungarian jurists found out that the oaths outlined by the parties at the time of the blood oath constituted the earliest constitutions of steppe states. This view has been widely accepted by Hungarian legal historians. However, foreign scholars – especially those from Western Europe and North America – failed to recognize the public law role of blood oaths and thus have not sufficiently appreciated this practice. Recently, Finnish scholar *Kuosmanen* suggested that some form of confederation must have existed in the Hun Empire, shaping the status of the Alans, Goths, and other peoples, although a specialist working solely with Greek and Latin sources was unable to identify what it could have been.<sup>2</sup> *Kuosmanen*'s insight proved correct: a functioning confederative system indeed governed relations among steppe peoples, and it could

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1 Related literature: OBRUSÁNSZKY, Andaság és komaság.

2 Hungarian historians of law, who highlighted the significant of the blood contract in public law (*Ákos Timon, Imre Korbuly, József Illés, Bálint Hóman, György Bónis, Lajos Rácz, Emil Tallós, Zoltán József Tóth*).

have been the form of blood oath that unified peoples with a kin-based lifestyle – from ancient steppe horsemen.<sup>3</sup> This legal act can also be traced in Inner Asian regions, such as among the Turkic form *anta* and Mongolian *anda*<sup>4</sup>, represented the primary force in unifying peoples in the Middle Ages. *Genghis Khan*, and even his father, concluded blood oath with their most loyal friends in present-day Mongolia.<sup>5</sup> The sworn brotherhood, or blood oath – in which two or more individuals who are not relatives become kin through the merging of their blood and thereby accept each other as brothers – is considered by scholarly literature as a form of fictive kinship. The academic sources employ numerous terms to describe this practice, including ‘adoption as kin’, ‘blood oath’, ‘brotherly acceptance’, ‘blood siblings,’ and others. One of the oldest terms – ‘*atyafűség*’ (‘brotherhood’) – is mentioned by *István Werbőczy* in his legal collection *Tripartitum*, compiled in 1517.<sup>6</sup> I will refer to this expression as ‘blood oath’. This act primarily serves as a ritual through which unrelated individuals become kin. In ancient societies, kinship ties were pivotal for holding certain official positions. As Chinese chronicler *Sima Qian* mentioned in his account the ruler of the Huns conducted leadership alongside his brothers and relatives.

Both historical sources and folklore materials reflect that individuals without kinship ties could become brothers through the union of their blood and this bond was only broken by death. There are no written records pertaining to the precise origins of this process. By the time written sources mention this special brotherhood ritual, it had already developed well-defined rules. These rules were employed during the period of tribal organization to strengthen friendly relations among tribes and played an important role in state formation.

Such a significant agreement was likely preceded by serious negotiations, as adherence to the oath’s stipulations later became obligatory for all parties forming the alliance – namely, the elected ruler and the representatives of the tribes themselves. The actual text of the blood oath was traditionally transmitted orally from generations to generations. Later, mainly the foreign sources record the texts. We can find documents, that steppe people themselves documented these oaths as well. These texts generally contain similar elements: rights and obligations assigned to the contracting parties, as well as decisions regarding penalties or consequences for those who violated the agreement or betrayed others. Among the Eurasian blood oaths, perhaps the most extensively documented is the Hungarian version, which has been referenced by Hungarian jurists since the late Middle Ages. Due to that, I am using these samples for comparison with other oaths across the Eurasian steppe belt.

The Hungarian scholar, *Dániel Cornides* pioneered studies on this topic, he developed a study about the ancient religion of the Hungarians, wherein he mentioned the Hungarian blood oath. He compared it with the blood oath of the Scythians described in ancient sources.<sup>7</sup>

3 KUOSMANEN, The Nature of Nomadic Power.

4 The Eurasian nomadic peoples use the word *antlanda* to refer to the blood oath, which means friend. The first written mention of this term appears in records from the Turkic period and became widely adopted across Eurasia. On an Avar period belt inscription uncovered in Zamárdi, the word *ant* appears, translated by *János Harmatta* as oath. This and other Turkic inscriptions refute earlier claims by Chinese scholar *Wang Kuo-wei*, who argued that the *and* or *ant* word was derived from the Chinese language, meaning friend. The term also appears in 13<sup>th</sup>-century Mongolian sources as *anda*.

5 See the latest English translation: RACHEWILTZ, The Secret History of the Mongols 96.

6 *Tripartitum* (1517) Part I. title 66. dealt with the legal customs related to adoption as a sibling. <https://archive.org/details/werboczyillustr00werb/page/12/mode/2up>.

7 *Cornides Vindiciae Anonymi Belae regis notarii Budae 300.*

Subsequently, other comparative analyses appeared in Hungary – almost all employing the same research method: comparing the Hungarian blood oath with those of the Scythians and Parthians recorded by ancient writers, revealing significant similarities.<sup>8</sup>

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, *Arnold Ipolyi* referred to the blood oath as ‘blood sacrifice’ or ‘blood communion’.<sup>9</sup> In 1860, the author of the “*Egyetemes magyar encyclopaedia*”, wrote about foundational contract laws: “*However, at a time when writing had not yet been invented, and there was no knowledge of printing: the agreements between the head of state and the citizens were made orally. The head of state pledged to protect the rights of the nation without diminution and to defend against enemies, and following this solemn promise, the people again swore obedience and fidelity, which they sanctified with a certain emblem... Later, after the spread of Christianity, if a ruler died and a new leader was chosen by the people, or if, by founding laws, the successor to the deceased ruler inherited the throne, the act of coronation and the coronation oath served as symbols of renewal and confirmation of the original state contract. As human culture progressed and natural and state laws became clearer, the traditional oral state agreements were replaced by written agreements or gradually by written laws, giving rise to constitutions.*”<sup>10</sup>

Following this, *Gedeon Ladányi* expressed that the Hungarian state based on blood oath, when the seven separate tribes (or tribal alliances) elected a common leader. He emphasized the importance of this act by noting that the oath points they expressed contained laws that defined the mutual relationship between the ruler and the nobles. The author added that such a provision was unparalleled among the nations of Europe at that time.<sup>11</sup>

Research on blood oaths continued throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hungarian legal historians thoroughly examined the topic from both public law and historical perspectives, and *Károly Tagányi* included it among the subjects of legal customary practices. In his study, he highlighted that blood brotherhood and blood drinking played significant roles not only in private law but also in public law.<sup>12</sup> Hungarian legal scholars accepted that the blood oath might be an ancient steppe tradition, with numerous examples found in foreign historical chronicles. This view was supported by two prominent historians of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *György Györffy* and *Jenő Szűcs*.<sup>13</sup> Some Hungarian researchers believed that this ritual also formed the foundation of the medieval Hungarian constitution, elevating the formerly loose allied relations to a higher, state-level organization. According to this interpretation, the Hungarian state – or, as *Gyula Kristó* described it, the Hungarian nomadic state – was established in Scythia, and *Saint Stephen* only carried out a state reform in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century. Historian *Hóman* and ethnographer *Károly Katona* noted that it is likely that several blood oaths were contracted among the Hungarian tribes, but the most definitive, state-forming agreement was the Scythian one.<sup>14</sup> *Gyula László* emphasized the importance of the blood oath in state organization.<sup>15</sup> *István Pál Demény* ethnographer also

8 BÓNIS, Magyar jogtörténet I-II; RÁCZ, Hatalmi szimbolikánk nomád gyökereiből 305–306.

9 IPOLYI, Magyar Mythologia.

10 TÖRÖK, Egyetemes magyar encyclopaedia 770.

11 LADÁNYI, A magyar alkotmány története 1.

12 The chapters of the blood contract were analyzed by *Illés* and *Bónis*. OBRUSÁNSZKY, Sworn brotherhoodship in the Georgian chronicle 83, 89.

13 HÓMAN, Magyar történet; GYÖRFFY, Krónikáink és magyar őstörténet; SZŰCS, A magyar nemzeti tudat kialakulása.

14 HÓMAN, Magyar történet. KATONA, A magyar honfoglalás mondanaköre.

15 LÁSZLÓ, Régészeti tanulmányok.

presented ethnographical parallels demonstrating the continuity of the tradition in Hungarian examples. He analyzed the blood oath from an ethnographical perspective in his treatise on the legends of the Hungarian conquest.<sup>16</sup> Among legal experts, *Barna Mezey* stated that many trace the Hungarian historical constitution back to the blood oath; however, he himself did not conduct research on the topic.<sup>17</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some historians questioned whether this ritual took place, but from the perspective of subsequent public law understanding, this has little significance. Nevertheless, medieval Hungarian historical chronicles attest to the existence of the blood oath; historically, some organizing principle was necessary to govern the country and to select the rulers and leaders of dynasties, such as *Álmos*, *Árpád*, and other chieftains.

It is evident how meticulously Hungarian researchers have studied the tradition of the blood oath. The exploration of the ethnography and customary law of Central and Inner Asian people largely began in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, research on the Mongolian *anda* (friend in Mongolian language) was undertaken, which *Vladimirov* and later *Gongor* regarded as an important element of Mongolian tribal organization and establishment of a nomadic state.<sup>18</sup> *Vladimirov* was the first orientalist, who examined the social organization of Mongolian tribes and early states, mentioning the blood oath was a friendship alliance. The Russian researcher pointed out that blood oaths played a significant role in tribal and clan relationships, creating unity among small groups.<sup>19</sup> Almost the same time *Owen Lattimore* also referenced blood oaths as one of the social organizational institutions among nomadic peoples, considering this practice as an extension of kinship systems through voluntary choice.<sup>20</sup> In the 1970s, *Henry Serruys* addressed the marriage customs of steppe peoples in two publications, where he presented various forms of blood oaths as well. The researcher identified seven types of oath methods in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Mongolian legal code, the *Kalka Jirum*: skull-breaking, drawing blood from one's finger, walking between the carcass of a halved dog, tasting each other's blood together, digging a pole into the ground, holding a spear to the tongue or forehead, holding a sword to the head, or kissing the weapon.<sup>21</sup>

Some of these oath forms also appear in other early historical sources. Several have been preserved within modern Mongolian folk tradition. *Serruys* observed that each form of the oath involved a shared curse or declaration of what would happen to anyone who violated the pledge.<sup>22</sup> Japanese researcher *Fujico Isono* also studied Mongolian *anda* customs, examining Chinese records from the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries created during the Mongol period. Based on these, she concluded that the primary purpose of the blood oath was to establish military alliances.

During the 1970s, *D. Gongor* conducted the most comprehensive analysis of medieval Mongolian society, building upon *Vladimirov's* research. *Gongor* mainly worked with early and 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>-century Mongolian sources, and he identified *anda* as an important form of alliance among tribes. He briefly touched upon a special variation of the blood oath called *anda-kuda*, which involved the contracting parties strengthening their alliance through marriage. *D. Tsedev*,

16 DEMÉNY, *Hósi epika* 64–66.

17 MEZEY, *Magyar alkotmánytörténet*.

18 VLADIMIROV, *Obsestvennii strov mongolov* 61. GONGOR, *Halh tovchoon*.

19 VLADIMIROV, *Obsestvennii strov mongolov* 61.

20 LATTIMORE, *Nomads and Commissars* 508.

21 SERRUYS, *Oath in the Qalqa jirum* 131–141.

22 SERRUYS, *Oath in the Qalqa jirum* 131.

continuing *Gongor's* research, identified elements of ancient blood oaths in Mongolian heroic epics, although these primarily served to forge military alliances. The reason is the latest layers of Mongolian heroic epics date from the 15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> centuries, when a Mongolian state already existed; thus, there was no longer a need for state-organizing agreements, and the friendships formed at that time were mainly military. Since the Mongol tribes were in almost constant conflict during that period, the most important task for tribal leaders and princes was to forge military alliances to protect the realm. *Enkhsetseg* studied numerous written sources from Mongolian history between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and found examples of friendly agreements between tribal leaders and *Manchu* nobles. These agreements no longer relied solely on the traditional blood oath formula (*anda bololtsob*), but also employed a new term (*urag barilda* – adopting kinship). These two terms carry similar meanings, with *urag* (kinship) replacing the old *anda* (friend), although the nature of the ritual and the oath text remain consistent with ancient blood oath ceremonies. *Enkhsetseg* also refers to the antiquity of these agreements.<sup>23</sup>

In summary, it can be stated that among steppe peoples, the most common form of alliance was the blood oath, which regulated the functioning of the state and the relationships between tribal leaders and rulers. This practice was prevalent in the social relations of mounted nomadic horsemen. These agreements were made between two or more socially equal parties. Therefore, the blood oath was a legal institution that endured for many centuries, encompassing the selection and presentation of a suitable person, followed by their acceptance. The chosen individual then took an oath as a leader to honor the agreement.

## 2. Forms of blood oaths in historical sources

As mentioned earlier, descriptions of steppe blood oaths can be found in ancient sources. One of the earliest accounts was written by the Greek historian *Herodotus* in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. In his fourth book described how the Scythians formed alliances. The author briefly summarized the elements involved in the oath-taking process: the oath-takers would puncture themselves with an arrow or cut a small wound with a dagger on their bodies and then pour their flowing blood into a large clay bowl, into which they had also poured wine. The liquids were then mixed together. The bowl was then dipped in a sword, arrow, battle axe, and spear, after oath recited, then drank the mixture of blood and wine together.<sup>24</sup> Not only does an external description exist, but also Scythian representations of this ceremony. Artifacts from Scythian kurgans in Eastern Europe depict scenes related to blood oaths: among them is a scene showing two men drinking from a shared cup, likely symbolizing the sealing of a friendship pact. Another depiction portrays two men turning their backs to each other, prepared for battle. Some interpret this as representing men who have sworn a blood oath and trust each other fully, which is why they turn their backs. Following *Herodotus*, other ancient authors also described this ancient ceremonial act. *Pomponius Mela* and *Solinus* recorded accounts of the Scythians' blood oath. *Tacitus* additionally documented the contractual ceremonies of the *Saka*, who were of Scythian origin.<sup>25</sup> *Lucian*, another ancient author, reported an ordinary *Saka man*, *Tokaris* about how, with whom, and in what manner the Scythians do blood oath agreements. This account is significant because it

23 ENKHTSETSEG, Mongolchuudin undesniy eb negdliyn asudal 105.

24 HERODOTUS, Greek-Persian Wars, Book IV. 70.

25 OBRUSANSZKY, Andaság és komaság.

provides confidential information on how the Scythians themselves viewed this practice.<sup>26</sup> The act of blood oath was known not only in the Black Sea region but also among the steppe peoples of Inner Asia. *Sima Qian* compiled his historical work, *Shi Ji*, in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, which mentions the blood oath custom practiced by the *Wusun* in their treaty with the Chinese against the Huns: “Fearing Hun attacks, the *Wusun* sent envoys with horses as gifts to the Han court and entered into a brotherly alliance.”<sup>27</sup> Later the *Han Shu* chronicle also describes how the Huns engaged in blood oaths. According to it, the Huns and the Chinese ascended a hill on the left bank of a certain *Nü-wei-shui* river, where they slaughtered a gray horse. The Hunnic leader, the *Shanyu*, cut himself with his sword, and poured his blood into a cup made from the skull of a *Yuezhi* nobleman,<sup>28</sup> mixing it with liquor. They drank the blood-infused liquor, thus sealing a blood oath.<sup>29</sup> The two parties agreed to extradite thieves and return stolen objects and further pledged not to deceive each other or to fight. The agreement was concluded with a threat that anyone breaking the pact would face divine retribution. Another account mentions that “*the Hu cut bones, and the Yue cut their arms*”, indicating the existence of a blood oath.<sup>30</sup> The *Han Shu* also states that when the two peoples living west of the Chinese – the *Xianling* and the *Qiang* – ended their hostilities, they sealed their new alliance with a blood oath: “*The Xianling and Qiang ceased hostilities, exchanged hostages, and entered into a sworn alliance.*”<sup>31</sup> Around 220 AD, the *Han* dynasty collapsed, and various Chinese and non-Chinese kingdoms were established in the territories of present Northern and Central China. This period is known as the Sixteen Kingdoms of the Five Barbarians. Several oath texts similar to the texts above, which indicate that this ancient custom was well known to the Huns and their successors. The next Chinese chronicle or the *Wei-shu*, for example, mentions that the leader of the *Zhuangzhuang*, *So-lun*, and *Yao Hing* concluded a friendship treaty.<sup>32</sup>

In any case, later examples prove that the people who followed the Huns knew and used this custom to strengthen friendship. The *Ashina* clan, of Hun origin, who founded the Turkic

26 But first I will tell you how we make friends; not while drinking, as you do, nor when someone is our friend or neighbor in our youth. But when we see a good man who is capable of great deeds, we all rush to him; and what you do at weddings, we consider it right to do for the sake of friends, following them a lot and doing everything so that we do not lose friendship and do not seem contemptible. And when we have chosen someone as a friend, there follows the covenant and the greatest oath, that we will certainly live with each other, and if necessary, die for each other. And so we do; for as soon as we cut our fingers and drip the blood into a cup and dip the tips of our swords in it, we both drink from it at the same time; nothing can separate us from then on. But it is only permissible to enter such a covenant with three at most; because we consider someone who has many friends to be similar to a common harlot, and we think that their friendship is not serious. TÉLFY, *Magyarok őstörténete* 106–107. For now this also: the Scythians hold nothing greater than friendship, and there is nothing for which a Scythian would be more proud than to work together and share hair with a friendly man; and there is no greater disgrace among us than to be thought of as having betrayed friendship. TÉLFY, *Magyarok őstörténete* 104.

27 WATSON, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*. *Wusun* lived at the western border of the *Xiongnu* (Hun) Empire, probably in the territory of *Xinjiang* Province, China and some parts of present *Kazakhstan*.

28 Probably it is about the *Yuezhi* people, who were mentioned as *Rongzhi* as well. The bowl made of human skull is written by another Chinese chronicles, as “*Records of the Grand Historian and Book of Han*”.

29 *Twenty-four histories*, *Book of Han* 94.

30 CSORNAL, *Négy égtájon barbár csillag ragyog*. *Huainanzi* scroll 11.

31 CSORNAL, *Négy égtájon barbár csillag ragyog* 289.

32 *Twenty-four histories*, *Book of Wei* 103.

state, also knew the customs of sworn friendship. On the western side of the runic inscription of the Turkic-era *Begrei stele* found in *Tuva*, the word *anta* is found, which refers to a blood contract. The inscription published by *Malov* contains the following text: “*I have parted from my own relatives in a foreign land, and from my countless friends. I have parted from you, my good companions.*”<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, no contemporary record of the oath of the European Huns has survived, but we find this form of friendship among one of the Huns’ descendants, the Avars. Archaeologists found a runic inscription on a belt buckle found in an Avar cemetery near *Zamárdi*, the inscription of which was deciphered by *János Harmatta*. According to this, the inscription on the belt is as follows: “*Fulfill the oath, increase your friend, food, and booty!*”<sup>34</sup> This sentence concisely summarizes the obligations of the parties to the blood covenant. *Menander Protector*, also made a brief note about the special oath of the Avars. The contemporaries of the Avars, the *Lombard Paulus Diaconus*, and the *Eastern Roman Theophanes* note that the Avars and the Lombards entered into an ‘eternal’ alliance with each other, which perhaps involved concluding a blood covenant.<sup>35</sup> *Theophanes* even though he knew that all this was put in writing.<sup>36</sup> All three data prove the existence of blood contracts among the Avars (Uar-Huns), who were called Huns. The Bulgarians who migrated to the sub-Danubian region were familiar with blood contracts, as evidenced by the inscription of *Khan Krum*, who ruled at the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In his inscription from *Madara*, he mentions the *Khanar* dignitary, whose task was to let the blood of the contracting party’s flow. Two Chinese dynastic sources, the *Jiu Tang-shu* and the *Xin Tang-shu*, also report on the *Uyghurs*, one of the descendants of the Huns in Inner Asia, who joined the *Tokuz-Oguz* alliance system. They were also familiar with the blood treaty. According to one source, the *Uyghurs* concluded a military alliance with the Chinese in the usual steppe manner. In 762, the *Tang* ruler and *Tengli Khan* made a brotherly oath,<sup>37</sup> and in 765 the *Xin Tang-shu* described the entire ceremony, a typical nomadic brotherhood ceremony.<sup>38</sup> *Jacques Gernet* notes that toward the end of the *Tang* Dynasty, various nomad-origin military leaders and rebels against the dynasty commonly adopted brotherhood bonds. The French sinologist adds: “*This type of oath involved more obligations than kinship by blood.*”<sup>39</sup> In the dynastic chronicle of Inner Asia, the *Liao-shi*, which records the history of the *Khitan* rulers following the *Uighurs*, several brotherhood ceremonies are also documented. In the year of 905, it states that two friends exchanged their robes and horses and agreed to become brothers.<sup>40</sup> In 983 another ceremony is mentioned where the ruler and one of his friends exchanged bows, arrows, saddles, and horses –

33 MALOV, *Yenisenskaya pismennosti* 31, row 7–8. We can find word *anta* two times in the text.

34 HARMATTA, *A Zamárdi avar nagyszíjvég rovásírásos és szogd feliratai* 107.

35 SZÁDECZKY-KARDOSS, *Az avar történelem forrásai* 47.

36 SZÁDECZKY-KARDOSS, *Az avar történelem forrásai* 33–34.

37 MACKERRAS, *The Uighur empire* 72.

38 “*Then Zu-Yi took his wine and asked Governor-General Ho to conclude the agreement and drink to it. Zu-Yi said: <Long live the Tang emperor! Long live the Uyghur Khagan! Let the generals and ministers of the two countries also have a similar greeting. If anyone violates this agreement, let him be killed and his entire clan massacred!> When the barbarian chief minister, Mo-tu mo-ho ta-kan, Tun and others heard this, their courage went away, and when the wine reached them, they immediately said: <We swear an oath to Your Grace without change>.*” MACKERRAS, *The Uighur empire* 81.

39 GERNET, *A History of Chinese civilization* 213.

40 LIAO-SI, *The history of the Chinese Society Liao* 239.

key equipment of nomadic warriors.<sup>41</sup> *Abaoji*, the Khitan ruler and founder of the Liao Empire, took an oath of sworn brotherhood with *Li Keyong*, the leader of the Sha-tuo Turks serving on the Chinese border guard, in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>42</sup> In the 13<sup>th</sup>-century work “*The Secret History of the Mongols*”, the rituals of blood contracts, or *anda*, are also described. *Temüjin*, later known as *Genghis Khan*, entered sworn friendships with many individuals. As a child, he formed an alliance with *Jamuka*, which was reaffirmed multiple times. According to “*The Secret History of the Mongols*”, one notable instance involved the exchange of gifts. Another well-documented alliance was with the ruler of the Kereit. After the kidnapping of his wife, *Temüjin* visited his father’s former sworn brother, *Tooril Khan*, bringing him as a gift the sable robe received as a wedding present and requesting the renewal of their blood oath. *Tooril* pledged not only to recover his wife but also to reunite *Temüjin*’s scattered people, and he fulfilled this promise.<sup>43</sup> Historically, *Temüjin*’s father, *Jisugei*, had similarly helped the deposed *Tooril*, illustrating the mutual support of sworn brothers. *Kereit Khan*’s oath has survived in poetic form, as follows:

*“For the black sable cloak,  
Your unruly people have dispersed,  
I will swiftly gather them.  
For the beautiful sable cloak,  
Your people have fled,  
With all my heart, I will bring them together.”*<sup>44</sup>

Later, *Temüjin* also formed similar alliances with his son, *Sengum*. After he rose to power as *Genghis Khan* with the support of his friends and allies, he entered brotherhood with several tribal leaders. Although the Mongol chronicle does not record these agreements individually, the Great Khan often refers to military leaders as *anda*, which suggests that he previously established sworn brotherhoods with them. Contemporary sources confirm that Mongol rulers not only formed such alliances within Inner Asia but also with leaders of other nations. The Georgian chronicle *Kartlis Tskhovreba* records that Mongol rulers entered into blood contracts with members of the Georgian *Bagratid* dynasty on several occasions.<sup>45</sup>

According to the records of “*The Secret History of the Mongols*”, this type of agreement was widely known within Inner Asia. Not only *Genghis Khan*, but also the tribes fighting against him, united their forces through such bonds, and even formed alliances. At the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the tribes opposing the Mongols gathered, forged brotherhood, and elected *Jamuka*, who had been unfaithful to *Genghis Khan*, as their leader. The Mongol chronicle reports: “*They cut a stallion and a mare’s throat, and sealed the alliance with an oath.*” Furthermore, another coalition was formed against the rising power of the Mongols. The Naiman, Merkit, Dorben, Tatar, and Oirat tribes allied to create a coalition against *Genghis Khan*. They also chose a common ruler.

The successors of the European Huns, the Hungarians, also concluded blood oaths. The first such oath occurred when they set out from Scythia to reclaim their ancestor, King *Attila*’s,

41 LIAO-SI, *The history of the Chinese Society* Liao 261.

42 MOTE, *The Imperial China* 62.

43 RACHEWILTZ, *The Secret History of the Mongols* 96.

44 RACHEWILTZ, *The Secret History of the Mongols* 116.

45 OBRUSANSZKY, *Andaság és komaság*.

land. Not only does “*Gesta Hungarorum*” describe this single blood oath, but it also records that upon leaving Scythia, *Árpád* was later reaffirmed in his princely office.<sup>46</sup> In this account two acts of blood brotherhood were recorded, indicating that such alliances were a very common formula at that time.<sup>47</sup> This tradition is further supported by a foreign source attesting to a similar blood oath made by the Hungarians. The 10<sup>th</sup>-century letter of Archbishop *Theotmar* of Salzburg to Pope *John IX* laments that they were accused of having contracted a pagan-style oath: “*It has been alleged that the Slavs accused us of violating the Catholic faith by making a pagan oath – swearing on dogs, wolves, and other impious gods – and establishing peace in such manner...*”<sup>48</sup> This statement is particularly significant because it confirms that, at that time, the practice of blood brotherhood was indeed known among the Hungarians. Later it spread over the Cumans. Joinville documented a ceremony between the Byzantines and the Cumans: “*The Cumans poured water diluted with wine into a large silver vessel, making a wound on themselves and adding their own blood; the same was done by the Byzantine emperor and his court officials for the purpose of agreement, after which both parties mutually drank from the blood, and the Cumans swore that they would henceforth live in blood brotherhood with the Byzantines.*”<sup>49</sup> Joinville also adds that the dog they stabbed with a sword and cut into pieces, symbolizing that those who violate such an agreement shall perish in such manner. Not only did a foreign chronicler record this peculiar way of swearing, but Hungarian chroniclers also described it. After the Mongol invasion, King *Béla IV* contracted such an agreement with the Cuman aristocrats. It is likely that this custom was still well known at the Hungarian royal court at that time.<sup>50</sup>

From the above list, it is evident how widespread and persistent the custom of blood brotherhood was among steppe horsemen from the ancient times.

It’s interesting that Hungarian legal historians have conducted thorough research on the legal nature of blood vows, yet few have dealt with the oath points recorded in the Hungarian historical source, the “*Gesta Hungarorum*”. Nearly, no researcher has compared the Hungarian oath points with those from the Eurasian steppes.

While we can never know exactly what was said or what transpired during these ceremonies, there is no doubt that such oaths existed, as they were common among Eurasian steppe horse peoples. These groups also established similar rights and duties for the parties in their treaties. To the best of my knowledge, no prior research has systematically compared the Hungarian blood brotherhood points with those recorded in Eastern and Asian chronicles or folklore. This is the first scholarly attempt to explore whether other peoples also adopted similar oath practices. In this paper, I aim to demonstrate that not only the act itself but also the oath points exhibit many similarities. Let me present the extract from the “*Gesta Hungarorum*”.

46 ANONYMUS, *Gesta Hungarorum* 5.

47 ANONYMUS, *Gesta Hungarorum* 10.

48 GYÖRFFY, *A magyarok elődeiről és a honfoglalásról* 220.

49 OBRUSÁNSZKY, *Andaság és komaság*.

50 GYÖRFFY, *A magyarok elődeiről és a honfoglalásról* 200. King *Béla IV*’s envoys reported about the oaths of the Cumans (around 1247–1248).

### 3. Election and suitability

This point asserts that tribal leaders, guided by a common will, elected *Álmos* and his successors as princes. They also declared that henceforth, the ruler would always be chosen from *Álmos*'s progeny. This implies that the Hungarian tribes elected their leaders democratically through voting, and the throne was not automatically inherited. *István Csekey* interpreted the Hungarian succession law as a combination of inheritance and election. Specifically, he understood *Anonymus*'s points to mean: “*The right to acquire supreme authority was based on descent from the bloodline of Árpád, and the method of selection was through election; thus, both inheritance and election jointly applied.*”<sup>51</sup> *Győrffy* considers the motif of election as a tradition rooted in ancient customs.<sup>52</sup> *József Illés* states that the act of election appears not only in *Anonymus*'s writings but also in the Zagreb and Nagyvárad chronicles. He believes that *Anonymus* was drawing from a longstanding tradition.<sup>53</sup> The anonymous author explicitly states that the purpose of the alliance was to conquer new territory, and the blood oath established the framework for responsible governance, providing the legal basis for removing a leader who acted against the community. Unfortunately, ancient chronicles do not mention how states were established through blood alliances. That is why data from “*The Secret History of the Mongols*” is invaluable, as it describes the election process: how *Temüjin*, later known as *Genghis Khan*, was elected as ruler.<sup>54</sup>

Legal historians have established that our ancestors, during state formation, likely adopted provisions like those found in blood agreements. These principles are reflected in later public laws, contracts, and legal traditions, indicating a mindset consistent with blood brotherhood. This marked a transition from temporary, alliance-based arrangements to a permanent, close cooperation characteristic of eastern, steppe-type states. According to *Illés*, the points of the oath were essential constitutional provisions among the Hungarians. He regarded the blood pact as a distinctive Hungarian trait, which is understandable given that, in 1907, early internal Asian historical sources – necessary to prove that such agreements existed not only among Hungarians but also in other parts of the Eurasian steppes – were not yet available. Moreover, he explained that the entire tradition originated from the pure institution of election, which likely dates to tribal assemblies – called *eje* in Mongol chronicles – meaning agreement, symbolizing that important decisions required consensus among tribal leaders.<sup>55</sup>

Only one significant detail remains regarding the account of the Hungarian royal succession, namely the ritual of raising *Álmos* on a shield. While many interpret this practice as having Byzantine origins, its true provenance may be more accurately traced to Inner Asian steppe civilizations. According to Chinese historical records, members of a maternal lineage coalition allied with the Huns – specifically, the *Tabgach* – elected their ruler through a particular method: seven men seated on a circular felt chose their leader. *Boodberg* posits that the election of a leader on felt, and the use of the number seven represent ancient Inner Asian customs, which persisted among Turkic peoples and continued through the Mongol period.<sup>56</sup> Only one significant detail

51 CSEKEY, A magyar trónöröklési jog.

52 GYÖRFFY, Krónikáink és magyar őstörténet 127.

53 ILLÉS, A magyar társadalom és államszervezet a honfoglaláskor 52.

54 RACHEWILTZ, *The Secret History of the Mongols* 123–124.

55 GONGOR, *Halh tovchoon*.

56 BOODBERG, Selected paper of Peter A. Boodberg 308. The renowned sinologist analyzed Inner Asian electoral practices in accordance with *Tabgach* rites.

remains regarding the account of the Hungarian royal succession, namely the ritual of raising *Álmos* on a shield. While many interpret this practice as having Byzantine origins, its true provenance may be more accurately traced to Inner Asian steppe civilizations.

*Károly Tagányi* pointed out that all historical and contemporary legal customs suggest that the Hungarian blood oath or blood alliance could only have occurred in a context where *Álmos* himself participated in mutual bloodletting and blood-drinking. The leaders, based on this bilateral contract, voluntarily pledged allegiance as sworn blood brothers.<sup>57</sup> This form of agreement obligated all parties – both rulers and nobles – to adhere to their oath. The principle of election combined with hereditary succession was embedded within the royal succession law of the *Árpád* dynasty. The throne was hereditary – belonging to members of the *Árpád* house – and was connected to the family, based on seniority or suitability, as determined by election following consecration. This process involved tribal chieftains and national leaders through nomination (*praesentatio*) and election by free soldiers or later nobility, often by *acclamatio* – popular acclaim – and through the king's oath-taking. *Zlinszky* affirms that: “*The transfer of power (translatio imperii) from a ruler freely appointed and accepted by the armed people in an ordered manner can be recognized in this.*”<sup>58</sup>

The principle of *idoneitas* (candidate) played an important role in the accession to the throne. It was widely regarded as a significant element of public law, although some scholars have regarded it solely as a Christian principle. However, most sources related to eastern and steppe peoples reveal that this was also a customary practice among Eurasian nomadic animal-herding cultures. A famous story from Chinese chronicles illustrates this, in which an heir to the throne proves his suitability for rulership.

The great ruler of the Huns, *Tou man*, designated his son *Mao dun* (*Baatar*) as his successor (*shanyu*). However, for the sake of another wife, he changed his decision and ordered the execution of his mature son *Mao dun*. The boy narrowly escaped the danger, subsequently organized his own army, and ultimately killed his father, thereby taking control over the Huns and demonstrating his fitness for leadership.<sup>59</sup> Mongol chronicles embed this story within their historical narratives, recounting that *Genghis Khan*, for example, designated his third son *Ogedei* as his successor because he was considered the most skilled in state organization.<sup>60</sup> In Hungarian historical chronicles, there are several examples illustrating that the princes of the realm prioritized the principle of competence, always seeking to have the most capable ruler lead the Hungarians. Moreover, these examples date from periods when Christianity had not yet exerted such influence that it could have been used as a criterion for royal selection. It is unlikely that, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, a country recently converted to Christianity – yet still characterized by old traditions – would have based such crucial decisions on foreign cultural influences, especially when facing external threats.<sup>61</sup> It is more plausible that the principle was not explicitly Christian but rooted in ancient tradition, possibly derived from agreements contained within the blood contract. It was probably this customary practice, rather than Christian principles, that led *Péter Orseolo*, who disliked the Hungarians, to be deposed. Instead, *Aba Sámuel* – who was in marital alliance with the *Árpád* dynasty – was chosen as king. When *Aba Sámuel* also proved unsuitable, the

57 TAGÁNYI, A hazai élő jogszokások gyűjtéséről.

58 TAGÁNYI, A hazai élő jogszokások gyűjtéséről.

59 SIMA QIAN, Records of the Grand Historian 110.

60 See the Mongolian chronicle from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which summarise the History of the Moingols: Altan tobchi 206.

61 KULCSÁR, Krónikáink magyarul. Pozsonyi krónika 56–57.

realm's princes, after further consultation, invited *Vazul's* sons to the throne. Even in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, the elected successor of King *András*, *Salamon*, who had been designated as heir, was expelled on the same grounds as two previous unsuitable kings. Instead, "at the wish of the Hungarians", *Géza* was chosen as king. After *Géza's* death, *László* was also elected by consensus, even though the crowned King *Salamon* was still alive. This indicates that the power of collective election outweighed the legitimacy of the crowned king. As a result, *Géza* and *László* were not considered illegitimate rulers. Later, we also observe that the chronicles did not interpret the deposition of kings and the election of new rulers as a *coup* because these decisions were likely made by the realm's princes collectively. This demonstrates that the princes of the country were not necessarily attached to a specific ruler but sought a suitable monarch whenever needed. For this reason, within the *Turul* clan, they consistently chose a worthy candidate for the throne.

#### 4. The common distribution of shared loot

The second point of the Hungarian blood oath concerned the allocation of jointly acquired possessions. This was a significant aspect because the Hungarian tribes, originating from Scythia, aimed to reclaim the lands of King *Attila*. According to the "*Chronicon Pictum*", the ruler of the European Huns, *Attila*, could also distribute the spoils and negotiate new campaigns in Thuringia. This is supported by the fact that local German traditions mention a council site near Augsburg, in Mering.<sup>62</sup> *Anonymus's* chronicle states that *Álmos's* ancestors possessed and, through campaigns, regained lands and peoples, which he considered as shared spoils among the leaders, with each receiving a portion. According to that historical source, the division was carried out at the 'ser assembly'. *Bónis* suggests that the distribution was likely based on ranks and the order of accession,<sup>63</sup> considering the 'ser assembly' to be a 13<sup>th</sup>-century invention. *József Illés* contends that *Anonymus* sensed that such legislation must have existed and was aware that its foundations had been laid by the *Árpád* dynasty at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. There may be debate whether an actual 'ser' assembly took place, but it is certain from eastern sources that since the time of the Asian Huns, frequent assemblies convened to discuss domestic and foreign

62 *Gunzenlee*, from the camp site near Mering, is mentioned in the medieval epic *Biterolf and Dietleib*, which was most likely composed in connection with the *Nibelungenlied*. The historical background of this legend is the conquest of the Burgundians by King *Attila* in 436. The work mentions that King *Attila* decided to take revenge on King *Gunther* and *Hagen of Burgundy*. Accordingly, in 435, the Hunnic ruler set out from the Pannonian Plain with his army towards the Burgundian capital, Worms. It is said that he encamped near *Gunzenlee* and stayed there overnight (*Biterolf and Dietleib* epic, section 5745). On the return journey, he also camped there again after successfully defeating the Burgundians at Worms (*Biterolf and Dietleib* epic, line 12825). It cannot be historically confirmed whether King *Attila* indeed spent the night at *Gunzenlee*, as the epic survives only in a 16th-century copy; however, it is certain that *Gunzenlee* has been an important camp site for Germanic tribes since the early Middle Ages. The name of the place means 'hill near water', indicating its excellent location. From the Merovingian period (430–750) through the 13<sup>th</sup> century, royal assemblies were held in the vicinity of Mering. At that time, there was no dedicated building for the diet; rather, open fields were generally used for such purposes. The identification of *Gunzenlee* with the field near Mering is also likely because high-ranking individuals were buried in a Barrow from the Hallstatt D period in a nearby area during the early Middle Ages. The territory was a royal estate, with a prime location along the Lech River. Fieldwork conducted on June 20, 2024, in Mering was led by *Johannes Kieweg*, a local historian, and *Dieter Bordon*, from the Mering archive and son of the director.

63 BÓNIS, Magyar jogtörténet I–II, 15.

policy and to decide on military campaigns. It is highly probable that similar assemblies were held during the conquest of the homeland, where everyone involved in the campaign received their share of the spoils. Similar distributions are documented in Mongol sources, where *Genghis Khan* also rewarded his soldiers. In fact, the Mongol blood oath itself includes rules for dividing shared spoils. “*The Secret History of the Mongols*” describes this: “*Those who helped establish the state with him and fought with him, he made commanders of the armies.*”<sup>64</sup> There is early evidence regarding the functioning of tribal councils and later national assemblies. It can be argued that such a system existed among the Huns<sup>65</sup> and the peoples that followed, including the Hungarian tribes. Based on eastern analogies and the opinions of Hungarian legal scholars, we can suggest that this was indeed part of the Hungarian blood oath.

## 5. Leaders who elected Álmos, should not be excluded from the council of leaders

This point addresses the status and protections afforded to the nobles who elected the ruler, explicitly stating that official positions are hereditary. It also emphasizes that these nobles and their successors are protected by law, thereby ensuring the continuity of office and authority. This principle of shared rule – alternating between hereditary succession and election – was already noted by *Sima Qian* in relation to the organization of the Asian Huns’ statehood.

In fact, both *Illés* and *Hóman* regard most of the blood oath points, including this one, as late additions from the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century. Given the incomplete sources and insufficient ethnographic analogies, this issue cannot be definitively resolved in either direction. It is true, however, that in nomadic states, officials were only deprived of their power if they proved unfit or failed to report on their duties to the ruler or did not appear at the national assembly.

The point that states the ruler and those who elected him govern jointly is particularly significant because it excluded the possibility that the ruler could govern alone and accumulate absolute power. Both foreign and domestic scholars agree that the Eurasian steppe states represented one of the most democratic political systems of their time within their social framework. It is possible that a similar point existed among the Hungarians, as the events of the 11<sup>th</sup> century demonstrate that Hungarian noblemen opposed the king when he governed on behalf of foreigners. However, a comprehensive understanding of this would require more evidence.

Unfortunately, very limited data is available regarding who contracted these blood oaths and how many individuals were involved. For the Asian Huns, it is known that, alongside the Shanyu, there was a Council of 24 advisors called *Da Chen*, according to Chinese sources. *Omelyan Pritsak* translated this term as ‘great men’, suggesting that these advisors may have been the highest officials assisting the ruler in governance or providing counsel at imperial assemblies. The council of 24 is mentioned not only in eastern and Asian Hun sources but also in the *Nibelungenlied*, which preserves memories of the Huns and refers to such officials. As ranks were hereditary, officials were only dismissed if found unfit or if they failed in their

64 RACHEWILTZ, *The Secret History of the Mongols* 224.

65 According to the *Sima Qian*, the Huns held three major assemblies annually – during the New Year, Spring, and Autumn. A later chronicle reveals that anyone who failed to appear at these assemblies was deprived of their office. Similarly, the “*Chronicon Pictum*” includes a provision stating that insurgents and those who resisted were stripped of their noble status. See: SIMA QIAN, *Records of the Grand Historian* (Shi Ji 110).

duties, such as neglecting to attend the annual state assembly. The point stating that the prince and the elected nobles govern jointly is particularly significant, as it explicitly excludes the possibility of a ruler governing alone and gaining absolute power.

## 6. The sanctions for breaching the blood oath

This point was not only present among eastern nomadic peoples but virtually in every state, as treason or sacrilege has always been regarded as a mortal sin everywhere. According to Illés, the last two points merely serve as the legal sanctification of the entire agreement.<sup>66</sup> In the Hungarian context, the symbolic act of splitting a dog was a punishment symbolizing that the offender would perish by death. It is highly likely that this point was included in the Hungarian blood oath points, as it was necessary to regulate what should happen to rebellious subjects. A similar custom can be observed among the Cumans, who, at the time of the oath, would cut a dog in half, thus indicating the punishment for oath-breakers. The Mongol chronicle recounts how two officials swore allegiance to *Genghis Khan*: “If we should rebel against your command, separate us from our property, our families, and our chosen wives. Cast our fallen black heads onto the bare ground.”<sup>67</sup> In “*The Secret History of the Mongols*”, numerous examples of oath-breaking are recorded. For instance, *Tooril Khan*, responding to *Temüjin (Genghis Khan)*’s election, warned: “Congratulate my and your alliance, and do not break your promise, do not tear your sash or your belt!”<sup>68</sup> This served as a warning to the contracting parties to uphold their oath.

## 7. Whoever violates the agreement should be cursed forever

The last two points specify what actions should be taken if a signatory breaches the agreement. While some analysts believe these are late additions, it is not impossible that some form of oath or stipulation already existed at the time of the agreement, as it was necessary to regulate the relationship between the ruler and the noble electors. *Tagányi* emphasizes that the essence of the blood oath was that every participant took part, and its points applied to everyone. This is crucial because it meant that not only traitorous nobles could be punished, but the ruler himself could also be held accountable. In the Hungarian context, the symbolic act of splitting a dog was a punishment symbolizing that the offender would perish by death. It is highly likely that this point was included in the Hungarian blood oath points, as it was necessary to regulate what should happen to rebellious subjects. A similar custom can be observed among the Cumans, who, at the time of the oath, would cut a dog in half, thus indicating the punishment for oath-breakers.<sup>69</sup>

Not only in Hungarian history but also since the time of the Asian Huns do we find instances where nobles could unite against the ruler. The “*Qian-Han Shu*” (“*The History of the Former Han*”) records that *Woyanqudi shanyu* (60–58 BCE) planned to submit to the *Han* dynasty. The Chinese note that his rebellious ministers killed him before the agreement could be finalized.

“*The Secret History of the Mongols*” mentioned numerous examples of oath-breaking are recorded. For instance, *Jamuka*, *Genghis Khan*’s childhood friend and rival, repeatedly betrayed

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66 ILLÉS, A magyar társadalom és államszervezet a honfoglaláskor 55.

67 RACHEWILTZ, *The Secret History of the Mongols* 123.

68 RACHEWILTZ, *The Secret History of the Mongols* 178.

69 OBRUSÁNSZKY, *Andaság és komaság*.

him because he also wished to rule. When he was captured and brought before *Genghis Khan*, his punishment for his treachery was death. However, the great Mongol khan ordered that he die in such a way that no blood would be shed, emphasizing the symbolic nature of the oath and its associated punishments. Due to the strict, all-encompassing regulations, some researchers suggest that the Eurasian steppe state was among the most democratic political systems of its time. *Bónis* explained the fifth point by suggesting that the leaders did not need to fear royal excess, as *Álmos*'s family was believed to be sent by the divine, composed of heroic figures. While the wording sounds idealized, the historical reality shows that similar provisions existed already in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, as noted above, and such points had been present since antiquity among the Inner Asian peoples, providing a basis for holding rulers accountable for their actions. *Zétényi* believes that the curse formula could have also implied losing the throne, yet it granted the populace the right to oppose unjust rule without repercussions. Together with *Tallós*, he argued that this oath point is connected to the resistance clause of the *Golden Bull* (1294), which allowed the nation to resist a ruler who violated its provisions. This point is an important component of the democratic thought characteristic of the Eurasian steppes, and it appears at the end of virtually every such treaty, stipulating what should happen to those who violate the agreement. The Hungarian curse formula implies divine punishment for the wrongdoer. Those struck by this divine curse were probably expelled from the community, which effectively meant that anyone could kill the offender without consequences.

From these points, the clauses of the agreement outlined the rights and duties of the tribal leaders and confederation leaders. Those entering the contract solemnly pledged, often orally, the reasons for the alliance and their commitments. Historically, such oral contracts were sealed with blood, with the participants drinking each other's blood to sanctify the oath. At the end of the oath, a curse formula stipulated that the violator of the alliance should perish.

## 8. Obligations of the contracting parties

Based on available evidence, let us consider what the blood-sealed oath meant for the signatories. "*The Secret History of the Mongols*", written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, explains that the *andas* involved mutual tasks: to defeat their common enemy, recover stolen goods, and share the spoils. Elsewhere, it states that sworn brother *anda* loved each other so much that they would not betray each other during their lifetime, protecting one another's lives. The Scythian physician *Tokaris* regarded this friendship contract as the closest bond between two individuals.

The oral contract provided social protection for the signatories and their descendants, which may explain its popularity in the past and why this form of alliance has persisted in modern times. Those who contracted the oath also undertook the responsibility that, upon the death of their sworn friends, they would raise and care for orphaned children as their own. This type of care also helped *Temujin* (*Genghis Khan*) in uniting the tribes. For example, when the Tatars poisoned the future Mongol ruler's father, the allies abandoned the orphaned boy, leaving *Temujin* without support from his brothers and mother. To restore his father's former power, the boy entered into friendship agreements: first, *Boorchu* joined him, and together they reclaimed stolen horses; later, when his wife was kidnapped, he went to his father's sworn brother, *Tooril Khan*, to seek help, reminding him of the ancient alliance they had once established. At this point, the powerful steppes ruler, *Tooril Khan* of the Kereits, renewed the blood pact with *Temujin*, confirming it with the same oath as his father, *Yisugei*. He promised to regain the boy's people and restore him to the throne, as his own father, *Yisugei*, had done before him. "*The Secret His-*

*tory of the Mongols*” also mentions that when *Tooril Khan* was deposed and forced into hiding by his brothers, *Yisugei Bator* helped him reclaim his throne, and he in turn supported *Temujin*.<sup>70</sup> After jointly defeating the Merkites and restoring his wife, many tribes also joined *Temujin*’s cause. Some even proposed gathering a council to select a supreme ruler, which in 1189 resulted in *Temujin* being proclaimed khan, taking the name *Genghis Khan*. At this assembly, the new ruler rewarded his friends and granted them official positions.

The next major event occurred in 1206, when *Temujin* was again elevated by his allies to act as the unifying khan of the Mongol peoples – their Great Khan. According to Mongol historical records, this office was held by 80 *anda*, or sworn brothers, whom *Temujin* had formed friendships with during the prolonged civil war. After establishing the empire, he rewarded these tribal leaders with state offices. Beyond military alliances, social care was also vital. The Mongols maintained a strong tradition of caring for orphans. For example, in Chapter 171 of “*The Secret History of the Mongols*”, *Kuyildar-sechen*, one of *Genghis Khan*’s sworn brothers, requested that if he fell in battle, his friend would raise his children: “*I want to fight before the anda. Later, when my orphaned sons need a guardian, the anda shall care for them.*” The Mongol sources also show that within families, multiple blood oaths were sometimes contracted. A good example is *Genghis* himself, who not only made sworn brotherhood with his father, *Yisugei*, but also with his father’s son, *Sengum*, called *anda* in the Mongol records. This likely strengthened the existing friendship bond. Additionally, it was customary during the Mongol period for sworn friends to strengthen their bonds through marriage, a practice that provided a double guarantee that the parties would not betray each other. External and internal sources mention a complex alliance system involving a combination of blood brotherhood and marriage.

This relationship is referred to with the Mongol term *anda-kuda*, which established multiple, close bonds between the contracting parties. There are relatively few sources describing this type of alliance; from the early period of the Scythian and Hun eras, almost nothing has survived, and Hungarian chronicles do not mention such relationships either. Most references come from the Mongol period, specifically during the late 12<sup>th</sup>-century unification wars and the *Yuan* Dynasty (1271–1368). Mongol and Chinese sources mention the *anda-kuda* relationship but do not explain the origins of the dual alliance. *Genghis Khan* entered a blood oath with the leader of the *Onggirat*, *Terge Emel*, which was strengthened with a marriage alliance. *Genghis Khan* renewed the former alliance between his father and *Tooril (Ong) Khan* of the *Kereit*, intending to solidify this connection through marriage. He requested the hand of *Ong Khan*’s daughter, *Chaur-beki*, for his eldest son *Jochi*, and offered his own daughter, *Kojinbeki*, to *Sengum*, *Ong Khan*’s son. However, the *Kereit* leaders rejected this proposal, and the relationship among the former allies deteriorated. In the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, during his campaigns to unify the empire, *Genghis Khan* formed an alliance with the *Ongut* leader *Alakus Tegin*, who acquired the right to marry within the Golden Clan. The Great Khan established an *anda-kuda* relationship with the leader of the *Ongut*. There are also reports that the place where the blood oath was made was called *Anda City*. *Rashid-al-Din* notes that *Genghis Khan* also formed a similar alliance with *Qutuqa Beki*, the ruler of the Western Mongol *Oirats*. *Rashid-al-Din* further records that *Genghis Khan*’s youngest son, *Tolui*, and *Jadai Noyan* entered an *anda* contract, agreeing to marry within each other’s tribes. During the *Yuan* Dynasty, many administrative leaders and high officials commemorated their privileges by establishing *anda-kuda* relationships with the royal family, the Golden Clan.

70 RACHEWILTZ, *The Secret History of the Mongols* 96.

From the above list, it is evident how widespread and long-standing the custom of blood brotherhood was among steppe horse people across time and space. Friendship treaties were sometimes established for private reasons, sometimes for public purposes. Nevertheless, some Hungarian historians do not consider the study of the act of blood brotherhood as significant in the formation of the state. The examples above show that this custom was not only used to strengthen friendships but also employed by many peoples' leaders to establish the steppe horseman empires.

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