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## ABŪ HĀMID IN HUNGARY<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The article deals with three years of Arab traveler's, Abū Hāmid al-Ġarnāḩī's, life in Hungary. This famous Arab traveler had spent three years between 1150 and 1153 living in medieval kingdom of Hungary. His most important information is on Muslims who lived in Hungary, especially around Pest and for us the most interesting data is that they had lived in Srem. He provides pieces of information on their origin, life, religious deeds, etc. Abū Hāmid is also valuable source on Hungaro-Byzantine relations and war in 1150's. He gives very specific perceptions on life in Hungary, being an awkward, but nevertheless attention-grabbing source for economic history and everyday life in medieval Hungary.

**Keywords:** Abū Hāmid, Hungary, Arab traveler, medieval history

Historical\* science is already well met with Abū Hāmid, the Arab traveler from the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century. There are several edition of his work. The first serious one is the one published in Spanish. Editor and translator of that edition is Cesár E. Dubler, and the title is *Abū Hāmid el Granadino y su relación de viaje por tierras eurasiaticas*.<sup>2</sup> The next edition is Soviet. Two Soviet scientists Bolyshakov and Mongayt had translated Abū

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<sup>1</sup> The work represents more detailed version of the paper which was under the title *Abu Hamid's travel through Hungary* presented on the *Writing Central Eastern Europe* international conference, held under the patronage of Boguslaw Sonik, Deputy to the European Parliament, in Krakow, at the Jagellonian University and its Institute of history, in Collegium Novum, 11-12. June 2010. Unfortunately, the organizers had never contacted the participants regarding the proceedings of this congress, so we had decided to research deeper into this topic and to present the result in a new, more detailed article.

\* The paper is a result of researches in two scientific projects. One, *Војвођански простор у контексту европске историје* (Area of Vojvodina in the European History Context) financed by the Ministry of science of the Republic of Serbia under number 177002. And the second one is financed by Secretary of Science and Technological Development of the Provincial Government of Vojvodina, *Средњовековна насеља на тлу Војводине. Историјски процеси и догађаји* (Medieval Settlements in Vojvodina. Historical Events and Processes) number 114-451-2216/2011.

<sup>2</sup> *Abū Hāmid el Granadino y su relación de viaje por tierras eurasiáticas*. Textó árabe, traducción e interpretación por Cesár E. Dubler, Madrid, 1953 (=Dubler)

Hāmid's travel through Central and Eastern Europe and in 1971 published it in Moscow.<sup>3</sup> Some fifteen years later in Hungary itself one edition of this work is published. Basically, it is the translation from Russian into Hungarian with some new data in notes and bibliography.<sup>4</sup> These are full translations of his work. It is worth mentioning that only Dubler's edition has an Arabic text too. That edition is the best and will be most used also in this work.

Some partial information on Abū Hāmid's travel through medieval Hungary was published in German by prominent Czech (in that time Czechoslovakian) Ivan Hrbek.<sup>5</sup> As this paper is presented in Poland it is important to stress a work of one of the greatest Polish orientalist Tadeusz Lewicki about Muslims in Hungary in the light of Abū Hāmid's work.<sup>6</sup> Since the work of this Arab traveler is very important for the history of modern Serbia, especially Srem, the interest in Abū Hāmid's notes were and still are present in Serbian historiography. The first one who has critically observed the data provided by Abū Hāmid is eminent Serbian and one of the greatest medieval historians in modern Serbia and of course ex-Yugoslavia academician professor Jovanka Kalić. She wrote an article on Abū Hāmid's information about Southern Hungary in the half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> In modern times Boris Stojkovski has again turned the spot on this Arab traveler as an important source for the history of Southern Hungary, the Hungary's relations with Byzantium, and above all, a source on Muslims in medieval Realm of Saint Stephen.<sup>8</sup>

So, what is than the interest in again studying Abū Hāmid? His work is for sure full of interesting data and provides a lot of information about Hungary in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century. He is also the most important source in medieval Hungary's Muslim population, its origin, position in Hungarian society, etc. Some data in the earlier editions and comments on his work, as well as in the literature, are somewhat inaccurate or just insufficient. For that reason I have decided to analyze once more information given to us by this Arab source, and compile his observations on Hungary in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century.

At the beginning Abū Hāmid should be presented with his short biography. His complete name is Abū 'Abd Allāh Abū Hāmid Muhammad bin 'Abd ar-Rahīm bin Sulaymān bin ar-Rabī' al-Māzinī, al-Qaysī, al-Andalusī, al-Ġarnāṭī, al-Uqlīšī ibn Tamīm al-Qayrawānī. In historiography he is better known as Abū Hāmid, Abū Hāmid al-Ġarnāṭī, or Abū Hāmid al-Andalusī. He was born in Granada (from which he derives the *nisba* al-

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<sup>3</sup> Путешествие Абу Хамида ал-Гарнати в Восточную и Центральную Европу (1131-1153 гг.). Публикация О.Г.Большакова и А.Л.Монгайта. Москва, 1971 (=Путешествие)

<sup>4</sup> *Abu-Hāmid al-Ġarnāṭī utazása kelet-és közep-Európában 1131-1153, közzétette* O. G. Bolsakov és A. L. Mongajt, Budapest, 1985 (=Abu-Hāmid).

<sup>5</sup> Ivan Hrbek, *Ein arabischer Bericht über Ungarn*, Acta Orientalia. A Magyar tudományos akadémia orientalisztikai közleményei, V/3, Budapest, 1955, 206-230.

<sup>6</sup> Tadeusz Lewicki, *Węgry i muzułmanie węgierscy w świetle relacji podróżnika arabskiego Abū Hāmid al-Andalusiego*, Rocznik Orientalistyczny, XIII, Warszawa, 1938, 106-122.

<sup>7</sup> Јованка Калић, *Подаци Абу Хамида о приликама у Јужној Угарској средином XII века*, Зборник за историју Матице српске, 4, Нови Сад, 1971, 25-36.

<sup>8</sup> Борис Стојковски, *Подручје данашње Војводине у огледалу једног средњовековног арапског извора*, Извори о историји и култури Војводине. Зборник радова, Нови Сад, 2009, 27-28; id. *Правни положај муслимана у средњовековној Угарској*, Зборник Правног факултета у Новом Саду XLIV/1, Нови Сад, 2010, 175-176 (=Б. Стојковски, *Правни положај*).

Ġarnāṭī), in Andalusia (that is why he is often called Abū Hāmid al-Andalusī). The year of his birth is 473 A. H. or 1080-81 A. D. He had maybe lived for some time in the city of Uclés, from which he probably derived the *nisba* al-Uqlīṣī. Already in the year 500 A.H, i. e. In 1106-07 he left the Iberian peninsula and never returned back to his native country. For some time he had lived in Morocco, Northern Africa, and in 511. A. H. which is around 1117-1118 A. D. he went to Alexandria where he had studied Islamic science. In Egypt he had met a very prominent scholar, grand vizir Yahyā b. Hubayr. To this man he dedicated his work *Al-mu'rib 'an ba'd 'ayā'ib al-Maġrib*. The work is later changed by the author itself. This is his second work, the first one, *Tufhat*, will not be considered this time, since the second one is more important to us and to this presentation. During the third decade of 12<sup>th</sup>, or second decade of the sixth century after Hijra, he lived in Saxin on Volga, in the country of the Bulgarians. In the year 545 (1150-51 A. D) he had went to Hungary, where he stayed for the next three years. He also visited Mecca, Persia, and left to modern Iraq. He lived in Baghdad, Aleppo, Mosul, and died in the year 565 A. H. i. e. 1169-1170 A. D.<sup>9</sup>

The mentioned three years in Hungary are the ones that occupy us. The country of Hungary Abū Hāmid calls انقورية (Unqūriyya) and the inhabitants باشغرد (Bāšġird). That name was used earlier by the Arab writers during the middle ages to signify Hungarians mixing them with Bashkir population in Asia. Probably it has some connection with their old homeland, *Magna Hungaria*.<sup>10</sup> At the first paragraph dedicated to Hungary, our Arab traveler mentions that there are 78 cities, each and every one with a lot of forests, villages, gardens.<sup>11</sup> In his other writing *Tufhat al-albāb*, in its Copenhagen version, Abū Hāmid mentions 70 cities in Hungary. Tadeusz Lewicki's opinion was that these 78 cities are the capitals of the counties. But, Otto from Freising also wrote about 70 counties, and it is more likely that in the original work the number was also 70.<sup>12</sup> Speaking of Otto from Freising, in his work on Freidrich Barbarossa this German chronicler mentioned that in Hungary there are no cities, and that the objects of inhabitation in mid-12<sup>th</sup> century in Hungary are miserable. From his and German point of view, he was probably right, but in the eyes of a Muslim traveller it was vice versa. That is why Abū Hāmid is an interesting source.<sup>13</sup> But an interesting thing is that Hungary is depicted in England in later middle ages also as a rich and glorious country. Medieval chronicles and ballads, as for example *The Squire of Low Degree*, refer with awe and wonder to the powerful *King of Hungary* and to that land of promise, flowing with milk and honey, the Hungarian realm.<sup>14</sup>

Next observations of Abū Hāmid are dedicated to Muslims in Hungary. In the words of Nora Berend the history of Muslims in Hungary and their settlements is full of

<sup>9</sup> Dubler, 123-131; J. Калић, op. cit, 25-26; *Abu-Hāmid*, 11-16.

<sup>10</sup> Dubler, 26-27, 64-65; *Abu-Hāmid*, 135-136.

<sup>11</sup> Dubler, 26-27, 64-65.

<sup>12</sup> *Abu-Hāmid*, 139 cf. footnote 129. for more bibliographical units on this dispute.

<sup>13</sup> Ottonis et Rahewini, *Gesta Friderici I Imp*, MGH, Scriptores rerum germanicarum in usum scholarum. Rec. G. Eaitz, Hannoverae et Lipsiae, 1912, 48-52; J. Калић, op. cit, 25-26.

<sup>14</sup> Gál, Stephen, *Hungary and the Anglo-Saxon World*. Budapest, 1947, an internet version of the book is used from the following address <http://mek.oszk.hu/02000/02096>, book digitalized in 2006 and accessed on June 10<sup>th</sup> 2010.

uncertainties.<sup>15</sup> The time of their arrival and their origin is still a subject of dispute. There are opinions that the Hungarian Muslims arrived from Khazar Empire.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, some scholars claim that their origin is Volga Bulgaria. That was the first thesis actually, brought out by Réthy László, the first author that all the way back in 1880 wrote about Muslims in medieval Hungary.<sup>17</sup> Also there is an opinion that these Muslims are actually of Turkestan origin, and that they had arrived from Byzantine Empire. Under the crown of Hungary they fell down when king Ladislas conquered Srem.<sup>18</sup> Also, there is a hypothesis that they came with Hungarians in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century, especially during the reign of prince Taksony, who died in 970. The chronicle from the reign of king Bela III, written by famous Anonymous (P. mester), provides information that these Muslims settled around Pest.<sup>19</sup>

Later on we shall discuss their legal position and place in society. Probably the most interesting data on the Hungary's Muslim population is about a man who became one of the king's closest allies. One, as the sources claim, *Sarrasin*, known under the name Mezső became palatine on the court of king Ladislas. We know that he got baptized later.<sup>20</sup>

The hero of this work Abū Hāmid says that in Hungary, during his visit, two groups of Muslims can be differed. The first ones are from Maghrib, and the second group is from Khwarezm. Maghribians openly practiced Islam and were most probably soldiers, while the Khwarezmians were near king's court, formally Christian, but in secret they remained faithful to the religion of Muhammad.<sup>21</sup> He also speaks of thousands of them, but according to some accounts the population of Muslims in Hungary was between two and 15000.<sup>22</sup> These Khwarezmian Muslims can be also a Kaliz population. This merchant population lived in Khazar Empire, and could have come to Hungary from Khwarezm.<sup>23</sup> These people could be Χαλιζοι about which Byzantine historian Ioannes Cinnamos (John Cinnam) wrote about while discussing wars between Byzantium and Hungary at the time of Manuel I Comnenus. They lived in Srem, i. e. in nowadays northern Serbia. They were

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<sup>15</sup> Nora Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims and 'Pagans' in Medieval Hungary, c. 1000-c. 1300*, Cambridge, 2001, 64.

<sup>16</sup> Pauler Gyula, *A magyar nemzet története az Árpád királyok alatt*, I. kötet, Budapest, 1893; 166; Charles D'Eszlary, *Les Musulmans Hongrois du Moyen Age (VIIe-XIV s)*, Revue de l'Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes, 19, Tunisie, 1956, 376-378; Czeglédi Károly, *Az Árpád-kori mohamedánokról és neveikről*, Nyelvtudomány értesítő 70, Budapest, 1970, 254-259.

<sup>17</sup> Réthy László, *Magyar pénzverő izmaeliták és Bessarábia*, Arad, 1880, 13, 16; György Székely, *Les contacts entre Hongrois et Musulmans aux IXe-XIIe siècles*, The Muslim East. Studies in Honour of Julius Germanus, ed. Káldy-Nagy Gyula, Budapest, 1974, 53-74.

<sup>18</sup> Karácsonyi János, *Kik voltak s mikor jöttek hazánkba a böszörmények vagy izmaeliták*, Értekezések a történeti tudományok köréből, 23, Budapest, 1913, 484-498.

<sup>19</sup> *Anonymi Belae Regis notarii de Gestis Hungarorum*, *Scriptores rerum Hungaricum I*, ed. Emericus Szentpétery, Budapest, 1937, 115-116; Jerney János, *A magyarországi izmaelitákról*, közreadja Czeglédi Károly, Budapest, 1971, 106-107.

<sup>20</sup> Бура Харди, *Страница на положају палатина средњовековне Угарске*, Peti interdisciplinarni simpozijum "Susret kultura" Zbornik radova, knjiga 2, Novi Sad, 2010, 917.

<sup>21</sup> Dubler, 65.

<sup>22</sup> N. Berend, op. cit, 67.

<sup>23</sup> N. Berend, op. cit, 66.

consisting troops that went in 1150 to help Hungarians against Byzantine army. They can even be shi'a Muslims as Cinnamos describes their religion as the same as the Persian religion.<sup>24</sup> This topic needs deeper investigation, as Persians can be, at Cinnamos' work also a name for Turks.<sup>25</sup> The emperor Manuel I Comnenus in his letter to Henry II Plantagenet in November 1176, describing the horrible Byzantine defeat at Mirocephalon, says that *Persians* defeated Byzantines.<sup>26</sup> So, it can be common name used here also for Mohammedans of Hungary. The origin of these Muslims of Srem is still a subject of discussion in science. In this place we shall not go into details, only we shall mention that there are opinions that Kalizes are Maghribians, and that Khwarezmians, who openly practice Islamic religion are similar to Petchenegues.<sup>27</sup>

Some other Muslims were also noticed by Abū Hāmid in Hungary. He speaks of the conflict between Hungary and the Empire during which the Hungarian king went deep to the Byzantine Balkan territory. Those captives are Turkmens (Turks) captured by king Geza II (Kazali in Abū Hāmid's version) in conflict with Byzantium. According to Byzantine sources Cinnamos and Niceta Choniates the vast number of prisoners was taken in Byzantine territory in 1151 during a conflict between Geza II and Manuel Comnenus.<sup>28</sup> One of these prisoners talked with Abū Hāmid. He said to him that they serve in Byzantine army for money. He had no idea that there are Muslims in Hungary, and Abū Hāmid told him that king allows them to practice Islam, and that Muslims live relatively freely in the kingdom of Hungary.<sup>29</sup> This last information is very interesting. Laws considering Muslims were very strict towards them since the age of kings Koloman and Ladislas. First laws were published in 1092, where to Muslims, is prohibited to, after being baptized, practice their old religion.<sup>30</sup> Koloman's laws were even more severe. Muslims were forced to eat pork, had to marry only Christians, etc.<sup>31</sup> The aim of this laws was the assimilation and conversion of the Muslims. There were several individual cases of baptism and conversion to Christianity. A wider process of conversion is also testified by the sources. This can be a reason for such lack of knowledge about their religion

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<sup>24</sup> Czeglédi K, op. cit, 257-258; Византијски извори за историју народа Југославије, том IV, Београд, 1971. (reprint 2007), 30-32, 86. (=ВИНЈ); cf. map at N. Berend, op. cit, 59.

<sup>25</sup> ВИНЈ, passim.

<sup>26</sup> A. A. Vasiliev, *Manuel Comnenus and Henry Plantagenet*, Byzantinische Zeitschrift, 29, Leipzig, 1930, 237-240; Donald M. Nicol, *Byzantium and England*, Balkan Studies, 193.

<sup>27</sup> Ј. Калић, op. cit, 33-34; I. Hrbek, op. cit, 216, 219-223.

<sup>28</sup> ВИНЈ, 39-44, 124-126; it is the only year between 1151. and 1155. when Hungarian king went deep to the Byzantine lands, cf. Јованка Калић, *Рашки велики жупан Урош II*, Зборник радова Византолошког института, 12, Београд, 1970, 29, cf. footnote 38; *Abu-Hāmid*, 141.

<sup>29</sup> Dubler, 31-32; 68-69.

<sup>30</sup> *Corpus Iuris Hungarici*, Budapest 1896, 52-53; Jerney J, нав. дело, 107-108; Karácsonyi J, op. cit, 484; English version: *The laws of the medieval kingdom of Hungary 1000-1301*, 29; Б. Стојковски, *Правни положај*, 173-174, Serbian translation with comments.

<sup>31</sup> About the laws of king Koloman cf. Závodsky L, op. cit, 83-84; articles taken from: *Corpus Iuris Hungarici*, 108-111; cf. also Jerney J, op. cit, 108-109; Karácsonyi J, op. cit, 484; English version can be found in *The laws of the medieval kingdom of Hungary 1000-1301*, 57. Serbian, on the other hand, alongside comments, bibliography and Latin original is published at Б. Стојковски, *Правни положај*, 174-175.

amongst Muslim population of medieval Hungary in the time that Abū Hāmid had visited them.<sup>32</sup>

The continuing passages of *Mu'rib* take us to another group of observations provided by Abū Hāmid. Those are the ones considering judicial position of Muslims in Hungary and their everyday life. When describing Muslims in Srem, Abū Hāmid says that he had to teach some of them to speak Arabic. They did not know of the Friday prayer (*juma*) but also if *hutba*, the preaching after the prayer. He quoted Prophet Muhammad's command on the Friday prayer *the hajj of the poor* he said. He also regulated some judicial things and some customs. As a devoted Muslim he forbade the Mohammedans of Hungary to drink wine, as *hazardness to the heart*. He allowed them to have slave concubines as well as four legitimate wives as it is according to their temper.<sup>33</sup> It is obvious that they did not know a lot about their faith. Abū Hāmid had taught them about law of inheritance amongst Muslims.<sup>34</sup> Muslims accepted this. There is no clear evidence that he interfered in the judicial process amongst Muslims, but it is well-known that he had good education in law.<sup>35</sup> We do not know, and we can only guess, that Muslim priests, similar to rabbis, were judges in the matters of people of their faith.<sup>36</sup>

The economy of Hungary is also in the centerfold of Abū Hāmid's attention. He even gives interesting remarks about prices in Hungary. The prices provided by this Arab traveler are of course given in dinars, the Arabian currency of the time. Twenty rams could be bought for a dinar, lambs and goats, thirty for one dinar, while 500 measures of honey were also valued a dinar. Abū Hāmid also had bought a slave girl. Her price was ten dinars, which he found very cheap. She was beautiful, her parents were alive. She was black haired, white skinned, gorgeous 15 year old girl.<sup>37</sup> We should not be astonished by his reaction on the slave girl's price. E. g. during the age of Ummayyad dynasty in Arabian caliphate 600 dinars was the average price for a slave-girl that can sing, dance or has some other skills.<sup>38</sup> So for Abū Hāmid this price of only ten dinars for a girl is almost like he got her for free.

He gives some details on their life together. One day he brought some honey with wax and said to her to clean the honey and separate it from wax. Then he went out, talked to some people in front of the house, and when he returned to the house he saw that she had done her job excellently. They had a son together, but he died. Abū Hāmid then released the girl, gave her name Maryam, and she left. He was afraid to take her back to Saxin, because of other slave women, who were also mothers (*umm-al-walad*) which

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<sup>32</sup> N. Berend, op. cit, 237; Б. Стојковски, *Правни положај*, 175.

<sup>33</sup> Dubler, 66-67, 69-70; Б. Стојковски, *Правни положај*, 175..

<sup>34</sup> Dubler, 67; *Abu-Hāmid*, 56; Б. Стојковски, *Правни положај*, 177.

<sup>35</sup> I. Hrbek, op. cit, 116.

<sup>36</sup> Rabbi was known also as *iudex Iudeorum* and judged in the matters of Hungarian Jews. There is no evidence that either Abū Hāmid or any other Muslim priest did this. N. Berend, op. cit, 94-95.

<sup>37</sup> Dubler, 67.

<sup>38</sup> Roberto S. Lopez, *East and West in the early Middle Ages: Economic Relations*, Relazioni: X congresso Internazionale di Scienze Storiche Roma 4-11 settembre 1955, Volume III, Storia del Medioevo, Firenze, 1955, 145.

Maryam wasn't, since her son had died. He was afraid how other women would treat the girl.<sup>39</sup>

Abū Hāmid al-Ġarnāfi's work is an interesting source for mid-12<sup>th</sup> century Hungary. He is the most important source for researching Muslim population in Srem. Also, he puts a light on the war between Byzantine Empire and Hungary. As being from another cultural and civilization background his remarks on economy in medieval Hungary are also worth of attention. He was devoted Muslim, even when in Hungary he lived, or at least gave his best to do so, according to the customs of his native country, as well as, the canons of Muslim religion. We saw him teaching and preaching to the Muslims of Srem, giving them education in Islamic customs, sheri'ah law, and even basis of their religion. He was not too much interested in anybody except Muslims, but his data are very interesting, giving new live information on any part of the world to which he had paid his visits. He also belonged to a very different culture, and his data should and could be regarded to with special care, because it shows also a perception of Central Europe in the eyes of a member of 12<sup>th</sup> century Islamic society.

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<sup>39</sup> Dubler, 67-68; *Путешествие*, 76. cf. footnote 124.

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## АБУ ХАМИД У УГАРСКОЈ

### Резиме

Абу Хамид ал-Гарнати је арапски путописац који је читаве три године, од 1150-1153, боравио и живео у Угарској. Његово путовање је веома вредан историјски извор за све земље које је посетио, а за нас има ванредно важан значај. Наиме, један део угарских муслимана које је он посетио живели су око Пеште, али је један прилично велики део био настањен на територији Срема.

Према Абу Хамиду, ови муслимани потичу делом из Магреба, а делом Хорезма. Упознаје и муслимане који су ратовали на страни Византије против Угарске. Његови подаци о јужноугарским мухамеданцима могу се упоредити са онима које даје Јован Кинам о чувеним Халисијама. Поред података о њиховом пореклу, он нас обавештава о њиховој слабој упућености у ислам, незнање арапског језика, као и непознавање молитве петком. Свему томе их он подучава, као и наследном праву и другим муслиманским обичајима и нормама.

Дело Абу Хамида је вишеструко важан извор. Даје податке о муслиманима у Срему у средњем веку, као и о угарско-византијским односима. Сем тога, има неколико опсервација о економији земље, а знамо и неке његове детаље из свакодневног живота. Абу Хамид даје податке о ценама неких производа, а доноси и анегдоте везане за његов живот са робињом коју је купио у Угарској. Даје и врло позитивне коментаре о градовима и развијености угарске државе у време краља Гезе II у чије време се и бавио у Угарској.

Подаци које даје Абу Хамид су специфични, али врло вредни. Његова сазнања и опажања у комбинацији са другим изворима дају много јаснију слику дешавања на тлу јужне Угарске у времену у коме је овде боравио. За неке детаље из живота сремских, и уопште угарских, муслимана, његово дело је једини извор, стога и највредније.

**Кључне речи:** Абу Хамид, Угарска, Арапски путописац, историја средњег века