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Reception and source value
Stages of the career of Bálint Hóman in the light of archival
documents

The main theses of the dissertation

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Aims of the dissertation

In the decades since the end of socialism, Bálint Hóman has attracted the attention of only a few historians, unlike Miklós Horthy, István Bethlen, Gyula Gömbös or Kuno Klebelsberg. This fact was not substantially changed by the reburial of Hóman in 2011 or the attempt at his academic rehabilitation. The retrial in 2015 and the subsequent sculpture erection plan in Székesfehérvár seem to banish him from the field of scientific research into the world of memory policy debates. Gábor Ujváry's Hóman studies point to many important moments in his career, but because of his writings are apologetic in nature, they do not seem to explain the ambivalences between the different stages of the career of Hóman. In connection with these ambivalences urged Mária Kovács M. a more thorough research in order to understand better the “personal character” of Hóman. To get to know this “personal character” that defines each stage of the career of Hóman, the mapping of his family background is the first step.

Much of the literature about Bálint Hóman is extremely limited concerning the origins and family background of the historian-politician.

In most cases, he is described as a descendant of an upper-middle-class intellectual family of German origin, already Hungarianized by the first half of the 19th century, whose career choice was basically determined by the example and influence of his father, the “internationally renowned classical philologist” Ottó Hóman, and his kinship with Ignác Darányi.

This static picture, frequently sketched and going back to Hóman himself, despite the debates concerning the reception of Hóman have not prompted anyone to set about a systematic exploration of the background and social network of the Hóman and Darányi families.

Due to its obscure, misinterpreted family background, the literature considers Hóman to be a representative of the Christian, conservative, historical elite, whose marked critique of liberalism and selective anti-Semitism is difficult to explain even in the light of the losing war, revolutions and Trianon shock.

Based on the Hóman and Darányi legacy, the present dissertation accordingly aims at revealing the true family background of Bálint Hóman, with the hope that the results of such research will help explain the apparent contradictions that can be observed in the various phases of Hóman's life and career.

From 1903 to 1932, Hóman worked in and managed public collections for almost thirty years, so he spent almost two-thirds of his active life managing the scientific work of collection managers. As a result, it seemed justified to examine the activities of its cultural policy in relation to public collections.

The organisation and functioning of the Hungarian National Collection University (Országos Magyar Gyűjteményegyetem), established by Kuno Klebelsberg by Act XIX/1922, and of the Hungarian National Museum, as brought to life by Act VIII/1934 according to the conception of Bálint Hóman, have already been explored in several studies. Based on the texts of the acts themselves, and the official statements by Klebelsberg and Hóman, these studies, however, treated the history of the two important cultural and scientific organisations in a fairly didactic way, leaving the real circumstances in obscurity.

In the opinion of Gábor Ujváry, for example, Bálint Hóman as the appointed successor of Kuno Klebelsberg, was the permanent vice-president of the Collection University and actually the leader who, following his appointment as minister, followed the cultural policy of his predecessor in many respects.

Based not only on the documents of the institutions concerned, but also on semi-official and private correspondence which permit the reconstruction of personal networks, the present paper aims to offer a more nuanced assessment of Klebelsberg's plans for the restructuring of the public collections of Budapest, and of the divergent professional ideas of Bálint Hóman.

A more thorough examination of the professional and human relationship between Bálint Hóman and Tibor Gerevich seemed all the more justified, as Gerevich's diverse professional activity also occupies art historians, but the real nature of the relationship between the two and its significant cultural policy implications remain obscured in the studies of art historians or Gábor Ujváry on the subject. Based on my research, it seems that the nature of this relationship also led to the appointment of Dénes Csánky as the director general of the Museum of Fine Arts, which is one of the little researched topics of Bálint Hóman's cultural policy.

This is all the more surprising because the person of Dénes Csánky, like Gerevich, has been a major topic of art historians in recent years. In their studies, the rather negative picture of Csánky's professional judgment became more and more favorable, but this favorable assessment does not seem to be supported by a more thorough examination of the archival documents. Thus, in my dissertation by involving relevant sources I not only tried to give a more nuanced picture of the relationship which connects Tibor Gerevich and Dénes Csánky to Hóman, but I also tried to show the long-term professional consequences of helping an unsuitable person to a high position for implementing a given cultural policy concept.

Methodological considerations

At the beginning of my research, I was aware that a detailed mapping of family background would be essential to better understand Homan's personality, and I hypothesized that a thorough examination of the sources might call into question the validity of some statements connected to Hóman. The selection of these issues was, of course, inextricably linked to my interest as a researcher, which focused primarily on the activities of collection managers and cultural politicians, in addition to the family aspects of the development of the personality that fundamentally determined Homan's oeuvre.

During the examination of these two questions, additional problems and topics emerged which I planned to follow throughout my whole research work. Each of these could be the subject of a separate volume, and since I could only make well-founded statements due to my personal habitus and archival profession, I could only make some planned chapters despite the existence of the collected sources. However, the completed dissertation may not only provide a better understanding of Hóman's personality, but may also be indicative that research results published without a thorough processing of the sources may lead to a decade-long historical problem in its consequences.

Resource endowments

In the case of Bálint Hóman, unlike his predecessor, Kuno Klebelsberg, or his friend and fellow political warrior, Gyula Gömbös, it is not the lack of resources but the enormous abundance of resources that can cause a researcher a problem. The large-scale material of the Hóman legacy preserved in the Manuscript Archive of the National Széchényi Library, which consists of thousands of items, gave me the opportunity to examine numerous hitherto unexplored topics in terms of his career as a historian, collection manager, minister and politician, and his extensive network of contacts. Since Hóman's family background was terra incognita at the beginning of my research, the archives supplemented with the Darányi legacy preserved and "discovered" by me in the Manuscript Archive, and with the Darányi family documents in the Hungarian National Archives, together with the archives of Bálint Hóman preserved in the same place, provided an unparalleled opportunity to reconstruct the family background that fundamentally determined Homan's career.

Although the documents of the Ministry of Religion and Public Education between the two world wars were severely damaged during both the siege and the revolution, the relationship

between Hóman and Klebelsberg may have come into new light with the help of the documents of the Collection University established by Klebelsberg in 1922 and of the Council of the Hungarian National Museum partially reorganized by Hóman in 1934.

The differences in his cultural policy aspirations, which were thought to be similar in many respects, and other issues still having consequences until today could be clarified by the researches, such as the end-of-war escape of the public collections operating within the framework of the Hungarian National Museum or the taking into account of their temporary deposits.

In examining these issues, it was essential to review the relevant materials of the Archives of the National Széchényi Library and the Hungarian National Archives, and it would have been important to review the Archives of the Museum of Fine Arts, but I did not get a research permit. However, since the case of each of the public collections belonging to the Council can be traced in the Council's files due to the administrative order of the Hungarian National Museum, the problem in connection with the temporary deposits could be clarified despite the closed archives of the Museum of Fine Arts. In addition to the documents of the Council, my research was assisted by the relevant documents of the „Government Commissioner for the Enumeration and Preservation of Jewish Art” and of the „Ministerial Commissioner for Artwork Removed from Public and Private Collections” preserved in the Hungarian National Archives. In order to deal with the archives of the Hóman lawsuit and the fate of Hóman after 1945, although I did not plan it, it was inevitable to examine the issue of post-war prosecution, during which I explored the relevant documents of Hungarian Communist Party kept in the Hungarian National Archives.

Results

By mapping the family background of Bálint Hóman, it became possible to reconstruct the social medium that was the real scene of Hóman's socialization. In contrast to the “ancient Hungarian soldier noble” Darányi, constructed by Hóman primarily using the Darányi legacy, we got to know the Reformed Darányi family and the life strategy of Darányi Sr., who proved the possibility of 19th century Hungarian civil development as well. Ignác Darányi Jr.'s noble social status established by his land holdings, bought mainly from his father's sober thrift, and the utilization of his father's professional relations system in the political field gave a different direction to this development.

It was the result of the research that in the origin of Bálint Hóman the Hohmann family could be discovered, a Catholic peasant-industrialist family who migrated to Hungary from the territory of the German Empire in the first half of the 18th century despite the origin voiced by Hóman from the Hómans „who inherited the intellectual way of life from branch to branch” descended from Johann Babtist, the geographer who died in Nuremberg in 1724. However, the first intellectual member of the family, farm officer Bálint Hóman, set his son, Hóman's father, Otto Hóman, on a career he was not suitable for cultivating in terms of his talents and personal attitude. Ottó Hóman later was excluded from the status of a university professor considered one of the top positions of intellectual existence due to the difficulties of his marriage and his professional failure. These two different cultural media, played a major role in the development of Bálint Hóman's personality, but the most significant influence was Ignác Darányi's successful career as a party politician and minister. Nevertheless, it is clear from his notes and statements that he had already decided as a child that he would become a historian, and as he put it in an interview, "he was immediately made a university professor." His interest in the Middle Ages was due to the stories he heard at home about the Földvály family, but he attributed his receptivity to society and the history of science, as well as the precision and "systematisation" needed to cultivate scientific work, to the legacy of the German-rooted paternal branch.

One of the key characteristics of his personality was the “systematizing ability” which left its mark on his historical work mainly in his early works, and provided him with the possibility of quick and efficient organization as a public collection specialist, director general and minister. However, this ability to systematize was not associated with the complementary tendencies required for long-term scientific work, and it is therefore no coincidence that he sought to get rid of his university department after only a few years.

Beyond his own field, he was not interested in literature, fine arts, or the world of classical music, and he did not speak any foreign languages other than German. This fact was mainly due to his upbringing, while Darányi Sr. placed great emphasis on the development of skills related to foreign language, classical music and fine arts, the parents of Hóman didn't consider all of this really important. Otto Hóman himself did not speak any language other than German, which was a serious disadvantage of his own specialization in the cultivation of classical philology. For Hóman, music meant primarily gypsy music, he read detective novels as a recreation, and he was only interested in literature, as his prison letters clearly indicate, only during his bondage. However, Hóman was a much more balanced person than his father, with great perseverance for his goals, and above all with confidence in his own abilities and

leadership position, who repeatedly reached out to solutions which were disapproved by his old friends, Marcell Benedek and Andor Lázár.

The professional and human relationship with Kuno Klebersberg seems much less balanced than it was assumed in Gábor Ujváry's studies. Based on the results of my research, it can be stated that Hóman, although he did everything to gain as much professional power and influence as possible during Klebersberg's reign, there was no question of that he was Klebersberg's appointed successor or the second most important man at Collection University after Klebersberg. It is also a question of when Hóman could have won the ministerial velvet chair without his political fall of István Bethlen. There were fundamental differences between their cultural policy preferences, which were reflected not only in their differences of opinion on the organizational transformation of public collections, but also in their art policy aspirations.

The much-mentioned influence and power of Tibor Gerevich was mainly due to Hóman's ignorance of artistic issues and his ideological consideration of artistic issues. But this influence existed only in the case of modern art, and the concepts of "independent Hungarian medieval art", "Hungarian trecento", and "Anjou-era Hungarian proto-Renaissance" which defined Hungarian art history between the two World Wars did not come from Gerevich, but from Hóman's historical policy guidelines. Hóman, as a historian, cultural politician and politician alike, placed great emphasis on political propaganda, which is why it seems a barren undertaking to seek to separate his historical and political activities. It was Hóman himself who never separated these two aspects of his activity. He even thought that his historical training and ability to present a particular political problem in historical perspectives provided him with special opportunities on the political career. This aspiration can be seen not only in his resolutions on current political issues, but also in the fact that he did not return to his scientific field after his career as Minister of Culture, but remained an active politician. Hóman's formerly presented attitude is also reflected in the fact that, as the president of the Pál Teleki Institute, established on the basis of his own ideas, he considered his main task of directing the preparation of post-war peace settlements.

Gábor Ujváry believes that Hóman joined the Hungarian National Alliance because, as a representative, he felt obliged to persevere in the crisis situation of the nation. However, according to sources, it seems that Hóman, like other politicians in Sopron, trusted until the last minute in a compromise peace between the Western Allies and Germany, where he as the representative of Hungary, and as a historian, politician and the president of the Pál Teleki Scientific Institute would be able to play a decisive role. On the other hand, Szálasi, who was often caricatured by the leading politicians in Sopron, knew very well that Bárdossy, Imrédy

and Hóman were only forced to stand by him and would confront him for the first time if they could. Szálasi therefore in the case of Hóman sought to take over the management of the Pál Teleki Scientific Institute, which they wanted to rename after the proposition of Rajniss as the Institute of Political Science and History. However, the events that had taken place swept away all ideas and plans, and fate held a hitherto unimaginable future for Hóman in the new world, which trapped him not even on July 2, 1945, but on October 9, 1944.

Although we can find several “historical narratives” about the political changes taking place in Hungary between the end of 1944 and the spring of 1949, examining the process of people's court legislation and the application of people's court law, we see confirmed the facts according to which the construction of a Soviet-type total dictatorship was the ultimate goal from the beginning. It is also very well demonstrated that the main assets of this dictatorship were the administrative and law enforcement bodies occupied by the Muscovite leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party. A direct consequence of this fact was the operation of the system of total observation and registration introduced by the State Defense, in order to totally expand the dictatorship. The subsequent manipulation of the data found in the people's court documents played a key role in this operation, during which the primary target could no longer be the convict of the lawsuit, but any other person in the lawsuit. In the case of a given lawsuit, this procedure meant that State Defense breaking the natural order of the documents created in the legal process of the people's court proceedings, mixed the documents into the investigation files (File V) open to the convicted person, other target person or case. It is not advisable to disregard this fact in the analysis of Hóman's lawsuit. Important elements of the history of Hóman's accountability also include the objective presentation of his prison years, mainly because it was reduced only to the suffering of the last one year spent in the Vác prison following the studies of László Béla Horváth and Gábor Ujváry.

The most important result of my research may be that there is still a lot to explore in all areas of Hóman's career, the results of which may be all the more useful since Hóman's career did not begin at his birth. His life history and tragic fate represents well the processes of Hungarian history that are still generating serious professional debates, such processes which are very well presented with the Darányi family fled from the village of Darány in Somogy to the market town of Kecskemét away from the Turkish, entered in the second half of the 17th century the path of peasant bourgeoisie and then opted for the novelty instead of the civic ethos of the modernization of the age of dualism in Hungary; with the Swabian Catholic peasant-industrialist Hohmann family migrated to Hungary from the territory of the German Empire in

the first half of the 18th century; and finally with the impoverished middle-class nobleman Földvály family.