

ABSTRACTS

Vera Bácskai: Five generations – The History of the Mannó Family

For the nineteenth-century, the sources for this study are the documents in the family archives, while their twentieth-century history is reconstructed on the basis of the recollections of family members. Demeter Mannó, the family founder, was a Greek Orthodox merchant who moved to Pest from Vienna. Here, he relinquished his trade and also instructed his sons' guardians to encourage their training for administrative careers. Both sons graduated in law: the older son, who died at an early age, became a clerk, but István, the younger one, grew up to be a successful merchant and an eminent public figure. István married his daughters to educated, liberal burghers. Szilárd, István's less gifted son, received land and married a woman from a noble family. Szilárd's children, the fourth generation, married into the landed nobility and did not continue their grandfather's work to increase the family's estates. Although the two sons graduated from university, they chose to live on their land and did not see much use of their education. Their lives and social position were entirely based on the revenues from their inherited wealth. Despite their fundamentally gentry lifestyle, their education and distance from public life separated them from the rest of the gentry community. Following the Second World War the family members became impoverished. For the fifth generation, the sons growing up after the war, university education was not merely the done thing for an aristocratic family, but an investment to build their future on. Although their childhood and upbringing was similar to previous generations, their mentality was markedly different even before the war. The fortunes of the family were finally on the rise again due to the educated members of the sixth and seventh generation.

Zsolt K. Horváth: About Biographical Space: The Application of Biographical and Synoptic Methodologies in Historical Research

Examining the biography of psychologist, educator and politician Ferenc Mérei, this study addresses the question whether the linearity and continuity traditionally associated with biographies constitute an appropriate concept for the study of the complex historicity of a *human life*. Separating life and biography, the study's premise is that the disparate data about a life, often carrying no meaning in themselves, are not of the same quality as the facts of a biography (let alone of an autobiography), ordered in hindsight and interpreted along preconceptions.

In short, research must differentiate between the experienced and narrated levels of biographies.

Through the application of the concept of ‘event of fate’ and a synoptic and parallel examination of documents (in the widest sense of the word), the study probes both these registers of biographic space from the angle of *faultlines*. Reaching beyond the narrated and ordered life history of a man so skilled in self-interpretation as Mérei, faultlines provide opportunities to explore those incongruent elements that do not fit in the narration, even though they comprise an integral part of the experienced register. Thus, by disrupting the homogeneous, linear and continuous temporality of biographies, this study reclaims the tentative, the aborted, the unexpected, and the unintentional; and by doing so, attempts to restore the complex, non-linear and heterogeneous temporality in historiography.

Ákos András Kovács: Intellectual History in the Interpretation of an Eighteenth-Century Life: Péter Debreczeni Bárány

Péter Debreczeni Bárány’s life is an example for a peculiar career type around the turn of the eighteenth century. At first sight, Bárány, a Catholic man of wide social network connections and a past overshadowed by troubles with censorship, seems to have had an atypical career, especially in the light of comparing and contextualising his political oeuvre and career. At the same time, examining his political writings in the light of his social and political functions may also provide insight into the characteristics of the political thinking of the age. Bárány’s life history shows the possibilities and limitations of microhistorical research into intellectual history. It sheds light on how social and intellectual history may merge in the analysis of a non-canonical figure of a given historical period and how this may affect our understanding of the canon. This entails research into the history of ideas, the adaptation mechanisms of the period and a peculiar mixture of political idioms. A perfect example for all these is a translation by Bárány, which reflects an interesting concept of Enlightenment and an unusual interpretation of political and social order.

Márton Szilágyi: Political ‘Volte-Face’ at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century: An Outline of Lajos Rhédey’s Career

This study revisits the career of Lajos Rhédey (1761–1831) using partially new archival evidence. Rhédey came from a Protestant gentry family and started a military career. Later he became a freemason, and in the 1790s he joined

a group of individuals in Zemplén county who were initially renowned for their Francophile views and later further radicalised. Although Rhédey was not personally involved in the Jacobin plot in Hungary, he was investigated and fell out of grace at the Court. As the sources suggest, he conquered this unfavourable situation by buying his former position back with recruits and money offered to the monarch. From this point on, his behaviour is characterised by loyalty to the government and the Court, which earned him the title of a count as well as the administrative position of Royal Deputy of the Lord Lieutenant in Bihar County in 1808. Documents concerning his political career and eventful private life raise the question whether this can be justly considered a political volte-face, or that his life is an example for how views traditionally perceived as polar opposites (such as conservative views versus freemasonry; or his support for the Court in Vienna versus his support for Hungarian national theatre and culture) could actually exist side by side in this period.

An interesting aspect of the biography is that most of the Rhédey material comes from the pen of Ferenc Kazinczy, an eminent writer of the age, who demonstrated an obvious disapproval towards Rhédey's post-1880 career and consequently constructed the count's portrait as an unsavoury counter-image of his own person. For this reason, it is important to achieve a more nuanced view by examining archival sources that are independent from Kazinczy. This study, the first such attempt to draw up the biographical outline of Rhédey, presents an important member of a political generation in which individuals were forced to adapt their life strategies to the turbulent actualities of revolution, Napoleonic wars and solidifying absolutism.

Zoltán Gábor Szűcs: "As Though I Wore Pearls on my Feet": The Relationship between the History of Political Thinking and Biography in the Szemere-Case

A major shortcoming in the history of early modern political philosophy in Hungary is the lack of political reflection on an abstract level and the low impact of theory on political canon. Due to these factors even existing theoretical works fail to enter the collective memory of the political community. One of the possible solutions for this problem is to bring the history of political philosophy closer to contemporary social and political practices and explore the layers of the political thinking of the day through a contextual interpretation of the texts of the quotidian. Both the limitations of generalisation and the necessary contingencies of narration must be considered in this type of examination of the history of political philosophy. Embedded in a biographical framework, the analysis of the Szemere case is an attempt to offer exactly this type of analysis of the history of political philosophy. Placed in the context of early modern political thinking in

Hungary, the study examines the documents of a secondary episode in the wave of repression following the Jacobin trials. The defence testimonies of a member of the gentry initially charged with treason offer an insight into the various layers of this political thinking, as well as the influence of legal hermeneutics, Stoic ethics, the tenets of *forma regiminis*, classic republicanism, Hungarian poetic traditions and a fundamentally conservative image of enlightenment.

Gábor Vaderna: The Other Great One: Avenues for Count József Dessewffy's Biographical Research

The name of Baron József Dessewffy (1771–1843) appears with fair regularity in the history of the eighteenth century. At times he is portrayed as an enthusiastic supporter of the freedom of press, at times as the conservative opponent to the liberal reformers of the nineteenth century, five times delegate to the parliament, the most erudite aristocrat of his age, poet and generous supporter of the arts. The interpretations of this colourful life and career are disparate and varied. This study explores the evolution of the biographical tradition that continues to frame the image of Baron Dessewffy. Ferenc Toldy wrote several Dessewffy biographies and Baron József Eötvös delivered a memorial speech at the Academy; these texts serve as the foundation for the discourse, which defines Dessewffy's reception to this day. The story of his reception raises two possible hypotheses. On one hand, it may be that Dessewffy's early political philosophy, which was so groundbreaking in his youth, became tired and dated towards the end of his life. On the other hand, it can be theorised that the quality of his output was less than consistent in his varied fields of interest. For example, while his literary career remained on the level of an amateur, his achievements as a reformer of the Hungarian language are impressive. Similarly, while he is considered an important historical figure as the defender of human franchise, his conservative views prevented him from siding with 'progress'.