

# Religion as a Factor of Intercultural Dialogue

edited by

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## CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT NARRATIVES OF THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE HUNGARIAN PHILOSOPHY

*Béla Mester, Budapest*

In the introduction of my writing, I will discuss the problem of the role of the historiography and narratives in the self-identity of philosophy. For a historian of philosophy it seems to be evident that every philosophical opinion has its historical context and the so-called *philosophia perennis* is just an ideal typical model of philosophy behind its actual forms incarnated in works tailored by the conditions of their age. Because of this bias of the philosophical historiographers, like the author of this study, *historicity of the history of philosophy* is hidden in the scholar discourse. Actually, philosophers have not discuss the philosophy as historical product in the bigger part of the history of philosophy; however, the method of the *doxography* of Alexandria has used biographical narratives, has established relationships of masters and disciples; it did not know the idea of the *narrative of philosophy as a whole*. The question of the possible narrative of philosophy has emerged as late as the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the first histories of philosophy in its strict meaning, and in the last decades of this century, a course of history of philosophy has become an obligatory part of the *curricula* of every Continental university. In the same time, the first marks of the turn of the structure of the public scholar sphere has appeared in Central Europe, from the *school philosophy* to *public philosophy*, and from the *Latin* to modern, *national* languages. It was evident that later when the new genre of *public philosophy written in national languages* have tried to find and theoretically formulate its role in the European philosophical network and in the new-born national culture in the modern sense of this term, as well; the inevitable way of the search of the self-identification has become the creation of the *narrative of the inland philosophical traditions*. This endeavour in the Hungarian case was more explicit than in the neighbouring national cultures because of the publication policy and financial support of the Hungarian Scholarly Society (today: Hungarian Academy of Sciences), what was the main factor of the organisation of the Hungarian intellectual life, established by the Hungarian Parliament as a counterinstitution of the single, but Royal (Hapsburg) University of Hungary.

In the following at first it will be touched the patterns of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century general history of philosophy offered for the national historiographers as models and norms, later it will be discussed the problems of the creation of a national narrative from different religious narratives in the case of the Hungarian philosophical historiography. Difficulties of the establishment of a coherent national history

based on the Catholic and Protestant narratives with often opposite patterns and evaluations will be exemplified by a famous error of the Hungarian historiography of philosophy, the unwitting creation of a fictive mediaeval Hungarian philosopher, is the main part of this treatise. Conclusions for the methodology of the contemporary historiography of philosophy will be the topic of the last section.

### **Patterns of the Manual of History of Philosophy Written by Johann Jakob Brucker**

By the evidence of the most known manual of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century history of philosophy, written by Jakob Brucker (1696–1770), the early historiography of philosophy has met the following methodological challenges (Brucker (1742–1744)). At first, the requirement of a clearly formulated *doxography* with listed theorems of the canonised authors and a narrative of philosophy has emerged at the same time. Because of the need of a unitary narrative, a history of the world philosophy cannot contain a temporal hiatus; it has to be continuous from Adam's wisdom through the mysteries of the Chaldeans and Egyptians, hidden by their indecipherable writings, in Brucker's lifetime, till the unwritten *philosophia barbarorum*, especially the archaic knowledge of the pagan Celtic and German tribes. The requirement of continuity means that the historiographer must summarise the epochs, as well, philosophically, what are not in the focus of the contemporary philosophical life, actually, their works has not new editions and experts; and what is more, the epochs of the history of the humankind without any philosophical document, must be a description in the narrative of the history of the world philosophy, as well. In epitome, it is the set of norms and models, which was offered by the relatively new discipline of the universal history of philosophy of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, for the national historiographers of philosophy of the next century.

### **Analogy between the Early European and Hungarian Histories of Philosophy**

The problems of the needed continuity and prehistory of the narrative of philosophy have emerged in the national historiographies, as well. If the philosophy of the humankind has begun with Adam, a national history must begin with the most ancient ancestor of the nation, and must contain descriptions about the philosophical life of the darkest epochs, as well. In the Hungarian case, this question was linked with the problem of the beginning of the story, and was solved by the topic of the Hungarian historical tradition what has identified the Scythians with the Hungarians, and its usage by the first serious, scholar history

of Hungarian philosophy. This work written by Pál Almási Balogh (1794–1867), entitled *Answer to the Following Question: What is mirrored in Different Periods of the History of our Scholar Culture, concerning the Conditions of Philosophy; In What and because of Which Reasons We are Backward than Several Other Nations, Regarding the Philosophy?* (Almási Balogh 1835) has won the award of the Hungarian Scholarly Society for the historiography of the Hungarian philosophy. On its first pages, by the identification of all the Scythian sages mentioned in the Greek records, were identified with the ancestors of the Hungarians. The problem is the obligation to find the position of the epochs with poor sources has emerged especially in the epochs of the early Hungarian history, and in the main part of the mediaeval age. An additional, special problem of the Hungarian philosophical historiography that in the time when it has emerged the main elements of the patterns of the Protestant and Catholic historiography in the political history of Hungary were established and the most important institutions of the national intellectual life, such as the Royal, but dominantly Catholic university, the networks of the Lutheran Lyceums and Calvinist Colleges has formulated the fundamentals of their narrative identities, as well. These narratives were concurrent ones in crucial points; the Turkish occupation was the punishment of God because of the corruption of the Catholic Church from the Protestant, and because of the emergence of the heretic ideas, from the Catholic point of view, and so on. Candidates for the positions of the historiographer of the Hungarian philosophy were not worked in a vacuum, they were embedded in the atmosphere of historicism, incarnated in parallel emergence of other historical studies, especially the *historical studies itself* with all their auxiliary disciplines, and the history of the (Hungarian) literature, and language. With the institutional support of the Hungarian Scholarly Society (later: Hungarian Academy of Sciences), the historical canon of the Hungarian philosophy was established within few decades, from the abovementioned writing of Pál Almási Balogh (1835) to the work of János Erdélyi (1814–1868), entitled *The Philosophy in Hungary*, published at first as a series of periodical articles in 1865–1867, (for its modern critical edition see Erdélyi 1981a).

### **A Fictive Hungarian Mediaeval Philosopher (Boëthius ex Transylvania / Erdélyi Bojót)**

Problems of the establishment of a unitary national narrative of the history of Hungarian philosophy from different traditions of the Hungarian Catholicism and Protestantism will be exemplified by a single but symptomatic mistake that is the creation of a fictive Hungarian figure of the mediaeval philosophy and his survival for a century in the historiographical tradition. The name of Boëthius

de Transylvania (in the Hungarian version created by the Hungarian historians of philosophy: *Erdélyi Bojót*) has appeared in the Hungarian philosophical historiography in Erdélyi's work entitled *On the Present of the Inland Philosophy*, published at first in 1857, (for its modern critical edition see Erdélyi 1981b). In this work Erdélyi has inserted this name in the context of a historical note connected with an argumentation against his contemporaries. Ten years later, in the chapter about the late mediaeval philosophy of his history of Hungarian philosophy (Erdélyi 1981a), he described the significance of this figure as the first *professional* philosopher in Hungarian philosophy who has written not commentaries for the education, only, but his proper works about the actual problems of philosophy of his age, rooted in the Aristotelianism of the late Scholasticism. In the Hegelian model of Erdélyi's historiography, the words *originality*, *professionalism*, and *system* had special significance; any possible narrative of the Hungarian philosophy is a development from the simple reception of the world ideas to writing original works, by his description. Based on this model he has hunted for original authors and system-makers both in his generation, in his criticisms of the current philosophical works, and in his writings of history of philosophy. The first historiographical milestone was for him the first philosophical work written and printed in Hungarian in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century by a Cartesian author (Apatzai 1653). For describing the antecedents, it was needed an *original* mediaeval, Catholic philosopher with *Latin* works, before the existing Calvinist one with Hungarian works, in his planned narrative, and he has found him in the figure of *Boëthius de Transylvania*. Erdélyi has not direct references to Boëthius, he has used the data of the first historiography of the Hungarian literature, which has contained several Latin data, yet (Toldy 1851). In the later versions has been established the author's principle that the Hungarian literature is identical with the literature *in Hungarian*, and he had given up his inquiries in the Latin literature of Hungary. From this point the problem of *Boëthius de Transylvania* has become an exclusive question of the historiography of the Hungarian philosophy.

### The Creation of Boëthius ex Transylvania in the Hungarian Historiography

However, both Erdélyi and Toldy were great figures of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century historical studies in their fields, as fathers and key figures of the historiographies of the Hungarian philosophy and *belles-lettres*, with developed routine of the interpretation of the original documents, in this case they have a single secondary source, only, which was a result of a historical reconstruction for creation of the new narrative identity of the Hungarian Catholicism in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, after the Reformation (Ferrarius 1637, 443). All mistakes of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century historiographers and their 17<sup>th</sup>-century source are based on the multiple structures of different



narrative identities. The task of Brother Sigismundo Ferrari (in his Latin works: Sigismundus Ferrarius, 1589–1647), an Italian Dominican monk was to offer a biographical lexicon of the significant figures of the Dominican order from the former Hungarian Province. In the Reformation, the Hungarian Province has collapsed, cultural memory of the community has been broken, and the aim was the reconstruction both of the Hungarian Province and its cultural memory in the frame of a Catholic revival, without living oral tradition of the monasteries, based on written records, only. Ferrari has used ecclesiastical biographical lexicons of the previous half century; the most important was the work written by a Portuguese (Dominican) monk, Antonius Senensis (1539–1585), (see Senensis 1585). He has probably found several manuscripts in the monasteries, mainly in Austria, and oral and written testimonies of father Jakab Némethi (1573–1644), a Hungarian Jesuit monk, who was the editor of the first catalogue of the library of the University of Hungary. Ferrari in his work refers in significant loci to Némethi's notes in manuscript, his oral information and his opinions about the interpretation of the sources. In the case of the significant Dominican scholars, the earliest common sources of all the mentioned documents were manuscripts written in the Dominican monasteries in the first decades of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in an age when the need of the written record of the Dominican contribution to the Great Scholasticism of the previous century has emerged after the death of the last personal disciples. Probably, for the scribes of the so-called *Stams Catalogue*, and similar lists, the chronology was or evident, or meaningless. (The monastery in the village of Stams in Tirol was never been Dominican, but the manuscript of the Catalogue has survived in its library. For a modern edition of the *Stams Catalogue* see Denifle 1886). For Antonius Senensis, the lacking chronological data has emerged as a problem, he has always used the same formula in these loci "Claruit anno Domini ". Némethi has solved the chronological problem, probably by the identification of the supposed *acmē* of *Boëthius ex Transylvania* with the date of the manuscript record consulted by him. In this way the year of 1345 has fixed after the combinations of father Némethi, who identifies *Dacia* with *Transylvania* as synonyms for the same territory, as well. Ferrari is careful in the toponym, known that never was Dominican Province called *Transylvania*, and *Dacia* is something else in this context, but he accepts the *acmē* of *Boëthius* calculated by Némethi:

"Fr. Boetius, ex Transsylvania, [...] Edidit etiam opus de Mundi aeternitate. Floruit ad annum Christi 1345. sic P. Nemethi in suis adversariis. Verum est, Ant. senensem, illum inter Provinciae Daciae, alterius a Provincia Hungariae, (ut liquet ex S. Ant.) alumnos recensere." /Brother Boëthius ex Transylvania [...] has published a work On the Eternity of the World, was in blossom A. D. 1345, as father Némethi has written in his *adversaria*. Ant[onius] Senensis has listed

him [Boëthius] amongst the alumni of the Province of Dacia, which is different from the Hungarian Province (as it is clear based on [the work of] S[enensis] A[ntonius])./ (Ferrarius 1637, 443.)

Toldy accepts Némethi's chronology known by Ferrari's book, and neglects the terminological problem of *Transylvania* versus *Dacia*. In the end, Erdélyi uses the offered data as a brick for building a narrative of the Hungarian philosophy. Based on our today knowledge of the history of philosophy, the serial mistake is clear; *Dacia* as a Dominican Province was identical in the mediaeval period with *Denmark*, or with the whole of *Scandinavia*, and Boëthius de Dacia, or, Boëthius Dacus, by the evidence of the list of his works, is identical with a significant figure of the Great Scholasticism in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a well-known magister of the Faculty of Arts in Paris, discussed in every popular manuals of the Western Philosophy. (He was active at the University of Paris in 1262–1277, dead before 1284). How could been remained hidden this simple fact till the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when a Hungarian scholar, Géza Sajó has revealed the legend of Boëthius ex Transylvania, in his article (Sajó 1947) entitled "*Boëthius ex Transylvania*", a *Mediaeval Philosopher with Supposed Hungarian Origin in the Illumination of the Newest Researches*. (It is a sorrowful speciality of the intellectual history of our region that this issue of a philological periodical has never been printed because of an event of the gradual Communist turn in the cultural sphere; it was reconstructed based on the authorial proofs in the digital collection of the Hungarian National Library.) This blind spot of the greatest figures of the historical studies of their age was depended on the hiatus of the knowledge about the history of philosophy. Mediaeval studies, especially the history of mediaeval philosophy was not in the focus, the aim of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century and 19<sup>th</sup>-century scholars was not the description of a better picture of the mediaeval philosophy, but the usage of the accidently found data for building of their narrative identities. When the competence of the mediaeval studies has accumulated, the mistake has revealed.

### **Consequences for the Methodology of the Historiography of Philosophy**

We have seen above the multiple re-contextualisation of a single element of the history of philosophy, within its original context, a reconstruction of the local Catholic identity, and within the building a national narrative, constructed by both Catholic and Protestant contributions. A fictional figure as a historiographical error has emerged and developed *between* different narratives. Conclusion for the methodology of historiography that an asynchrony of the nation-level and European researches is a danger, and this field cannot be researched without

comparative investigations, and theoretical reflections to our pre-established narratives.

It is an interested epilogue of the story detailed above that Géza Sajó who has revealed the legend of *Boëthius ex Transylvania*, has found the first known manuscript of the masterpiece of the real *Boëthius Dacus* in a codex of the Hungarian National Library, a few years later (Sajó 1954). Consequently, a Hungarian historiographer of the mediaeval philosophy should give up the romantic conception of the Hungarian origin of a key-figure of philosophy of the Scholasticism, but a new problem has emerged; it is the reception and significance of the works of Boëthius Dacus in the history of the mediaeval thought of the Hungarian Kingdom, based on the philological evidence of the rediscovery of an important text of the Scholastic philosophy, which was found in Hungary, and did not survive in Paris.

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## **Catholic and Protestant Narratives of the Historiography of the Hungarian Philosophy**

A need to offer a general *narrative* for the history of philosophy, instead of *doxographies* edited in historical order, has appeared as late as the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as an academic discipline, and a part of the university and college curricula. Several decades later, with the turn of the structure of the scholar public sphere from Latin to the national vernaculars, and from the sphere of colleges and universities to the sphere of the editorial houses and scholar periodicals has appeared the need of the self-understanding of these new-type philosophical communities and their audiences. In the Hungarian case, the process of the self-understanding of this new *public philosophy* was formulated as a historiography of the local past of philosophy, supported by the policy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. This new genre of the *national history of philosophy* or, *history of national philosophy* has been created as a synthesis of the elements of the narratives of particular philosophical communities, embedded in different religious communities and institutions. The sources of the narrative elements of the *history of Hungarian philosophy* regarded as a substantial entity were the traditions of the Calvinist colleges, Lutheran lyceums, and the Catholic university, the ecclesiastic historians of the different denominations. The planned presentation offers an analysis of the process of the creation of a national narrative made of different religious ones. In the end of the planned presentation they will be discussed the limits of this 19<sup>th</sup>-century national narrative of the history of philosophy and a need of a comparative history of the philosophy of East-Central Europe.

**Key words:** *national history of philosophy, history of national philosophy, history of Hungarian philosophy, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, narratives of philosophical historiography, comparative history of philosophy, East-Central Europe*

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