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A SYSTEMATIC ERROR OF THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF HUNGARIAN PHILOSOPHY: THE APPEARANCE OF A FICTIVE FIGURE: BOËTHIUS DE DACIA*

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The name of Boëthius de Dacia (Erdélyi Bojót) was a distinguished part of the historiography of Hungarian philosophy from the 17th century until the end of the 1940s; however, there were no subsisted writings by him, known by the scholars of this long period. Nowadays, it is clear that Boëthius de Dacia is identical to a significant figure of the circle of so-called Latin Averroists at the University of Paris in the 13th century, and he was born in Denmark. [Later, the text of one of his works was discovered in Budapest.] The aim of the present paper is not simply to unmask this error in the historiography of Hungarian philosophy—this task was completed more than half a century ago. The present writing focuses on the structural reasons for this long-term historiographical error. In other words, the target of the present,

meta-historiographical analysis of Hungarian philosophy is to discover the hidden requirements of the national philosophical historiographies, exemplified by the Hungarian case, especially in the long 19th century. By the hypothesis of the present article, the structure of the possible narratives of a national history of philosophy, prescribed by the beliefs about the cultural canons in the same epoch, required a significant late medieval Hungarian philosophical author. The figure of Boëthius de Dacia, as it remained in a 17th-century source, dated in the 14th century and identified as Transylvanian ['de Dacia'], was the ideal one for fill the gap of an imagined narrative of a would-be history of the Hungarian philosophy, based on the ideas of the 19th century.

KEYWORDS: *Boëthius de Dacia, cultural canon, historiography of philosophy, history of Hungarian philosophy, Latin Averroists, narratives*

*This paper was written within the framework of the research project entitled *The tradition of "sensus communis" in the Hungarian thought: Philosophy and the public realm; public philosophy, national philosophy, national characterology* (NKFH/OTKA K135638). For the most detailed recent essay on the same topic in Hungarian, see Mester 2017.

The name of Boëthius de Dacia, in its Hungarian form 'Erdélyi Bojót' introduced by János Erdélyi's history of Hungarian philosophy [Erdélyi 1981b], had a distinguished role in the narrative of the Hungarian philosophy by the 19th-century Hungarian philosophical historiography. After a prehistory of the Hungarian thinking, consisted of different semi-theoretical loci of the known text-corpus, he was the first professional Hungarian philosopher in the strict meaning of this term. His figure appeared in this function at first in Ferenc Toldy's history of Hungarian literature. [Toldy's influential doctrine about the identification of the *Hungarian literature* as a *literature written in Hungarian language* was not formulated in the first and second editions of his history of literature. In these editions, he regarded the Latin literature of Hungary as part of the Hungarian literature. In the later editions, the chapters about the inland Latin literatures are missing. Second edition of his masterpiece was the last moment in his oeuvre, when he expressed his opinions on the role and relevance of a Hungarian author who wrote in Latin.] He discusses the figure of the ancient Hungarian philosopher in a distinguished role in the chapter entitled *The Age of Kings Louis and Sigismund*:

It is remarkable that there was some philosophical life in this period. That is, the first one in the line of Hungarian philosophers, namely Erdélyi Boetius, a Dominican monk, was *in floribus* in the age of King Louis [1345]. He was praised in the yearbooks of his order not only as a famous theologian, a profound-minded philosopher, and a many-sided scientist, but as an author of an original work of philosophy [*De mundi aeternitate*—its title refers to a strictly philosophical, and not theological aspect— and as an interpreter of Aristotle [*De sensu et sensibili*, *De vita et morte*, *De somno et vigilantia*]. It means that in our medieval higher schools, philosophy was almost equal to an interpretation of Aristotle, similarly to other countries in Europe. [Toldy 1852: 158–159.]

The topic that Erdélyi Bojót was the first Hungarian professional philosopher appeared in János Erdélyi's writing entitled *The Present of the Inland Philosophy* as an evident fact, with a reference to Toldy's above-mentioned work. [However, he refers here to the first edition; in his later publications, he actualized this reference, using the second edition of Toldy's book which was more known to the audience.] Here, he uses the figure of Erdélyi Bojót as a historical example in his argumentation against the Hungarian harmonistic philosophy of Gusz-

táv Szontagh and János Hetényi [i.e., a late version of the *common sense* tradition]. According to János Erdélyi's reasoning, the endeavor for harmony is an ancient commonplace in the history of philosophy, which is known everywhere, including as ancient and marginal authors as the first professional Hungarian philosopher [see Erdélyi 1981a: 69; for a detailed discussion of the *common sense* tradition with its Hungarian context, see my essay in the last Argumentor volume: Mester 2020]. Later, in his history of philosophy, János Erdélyi checked Toldy's source and uses it to mark the position of the medieval philosopher in the narrative of the history of Hungarian philosophy:

In the 14th century what is a shining period of the Hungarian history in general, appears several signs of the philosophical life in an amorphous form. It is more than probably that an Aristotelian discourse was dominant in this period. The main representative of the doctrines of the Stagirite was Erdélyi Bojót [Boëthius de Dacia] in 1345, in the period of the King Louis I.* He published Aristotelian interpretations entitled *de sensu et sensibili, de vita et morte, de somno et vigilia*. It was mentioned that he wrote an original work about the eternity of the world [*De aeternitate mundi*]. [Erdélyi 1981b: 340–341.]

*János Erdélyi's own footnote: Ferrarius, De rebus s. ordinis Praedicatorum 443. l.

The source referred to by Toldy and after him by Erdélyi is the work of Ferrari Zsigmond / Sigismundus Ferrarius / Sigismundo Ferrari [Ferrarius 1637]. Father Ferrari was an Italian Dominican monk; his task was a contribution to the reorganization of the Hungarian Dominican Province, after the Turkish wars and the Reformation. In Ferrari's lifetime, the Hungarian Province of his order was almost entirely destroyed, and a few of the remained Hungarian Dominican monks were provisionally affiliated with the Austrian Province. Ferrari's book is a bio-bibliographical manual of all the celebrities of the Hungarian Dominican Province, amongst them the saints, the Blessed, church leaders, faculty members, and theological and philosophical writers. The referred locus is the same that was quoted by Toldy and Erdélyi in Hungarian translation, with minor stylistic modifications and short comments, see the original below:

Fr. Boetius, ex Transsylvania, Theologus praelatus, Philosophus profundus, & consummatus, aliisq. discipline haud ignobiliter excultus, atq. reg-

ularis vitae merito conspicuus, scripsit super libros Aristotelis Stagyrtae,
Peripateticorum Principis, de

Sensu & sensibile,

Vita & morte,

Somno, & vigilia.

Eddidit etiam opus de *Mundi aeternitate*. Floruit ad annum Christi 1345.
[Ferrarius 1637: 443.]

However, it is the whole locus quoted by the 19th-century Hungarian authors, but it is not the whole paragraph of Father Ferrari, who continued it with a cautious note:

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. [as Father Némethi wrote in his *adversaria*. It is true that Antonius Senensis mentioned Boëthius amongst the alumni of the Province of Dacia, which is not identical with the Province of Hungary, as it is clear after Antonius Senensis.] [Ibidem; I express here my acknowledgements for Dániel Scmal for his help in the understanding of this locus.]

Antonius Senensis, referred to by Ferrari above, was a Portuguese Dominican monk; his bio-bibliographical manual was one of the most important sources of Ferrari. Father Antonius wrote almost the same data about Boëthius as it is available in Ferrari's work, only the origin of the medieval philosopher is different, and his life span is uncertain. Father Antonius summarises his information about Boëthius in the following form:

Frater Boëthius ex provincia Daciae, Theologus praelatus, Philosophus profundus et consummatus, & in aliis disciplinis non ignobilis, regularis autem vitae merito venerandus, scripsit super librum de sensu & sensato Arist. Super librum de morte & vita eiusdem. Super librum de somno et vigilia, eiusdem. Librum etiam cui titulum dedit, De aeternitate mundi. Claruit anno Domini* [Senensis 1585: 56.]

[*Antonius Senensis uses asterisk for marking the uncertain dates. He was highly cautious; the majority of the authors listed by him are without concrete years, in his manual.]

Ferrari's suspicion about the geographical meaning of the term 'Dacia' is realistic. Father Antonius had never mentioned the homeland

of the authors listed by them, but the Dominican Province where they were affiliated to. Consequently, Dacia cannot be identical to Transylvania because there was no Transylvanian Province in the Dominican Order, and Transylvanian monks were affiliated with the Hungarian Province. Actually, in medieval Latin, Dacia was identical to Denmark as a country and, with the whole of Scandinavia, as a Dominican Province. Another source and friend of Ferrari, Jakab Némethi [1573–1644] was the one who suggested the usage of the toponym Transylvania instead of Dacia just because it was the more common form in the Latin of his period. Father Némethi was a bibliographer, head of the library of the Jesuit University of Tirnavia, editor of the first catalog of this library, and author of a whale of notes that remained in manuscripts till today, mainly with philological, biographical, bibliographical, and micro-historigraphical content. Némethi offered his notes for Ferrari's research, and helped the Italian monk through oral consultations, mainly about local Hungarian affairs. The genre of Némethi's manuscript, referred to concretely by Ferrari, is a so-called *adversaria*. It refers to a method commonly used by scholars of this epoch. It is a notebook with a list of all the supposed mistakes and errors that were discovered by him, and his proposals for the correct utterances, data, or linguistic forms. An *adversaria* was not written for publication, it is just a useful preparation for writing any future work. The usage of this manuscript of Némethi by Ferrari marks a close, friendly relationship between the Italian Dominican and the Hungarian Jesuit scholar monks.

After the identification of Dacia with Scandinavia and/or Denmark, knowing the uncertainty of the date of 1345, and mainly based on the remained list of the sole original work and commentaries of Boëthius, it is clear that Erdélyi Bojót is identical with Boëthius Dacus a.k.a. Boëthius de Dacia who was the second most known author of the group of the Latin Averroists at the University of Paris, after Sigerius de Brabantia, before 1277, when the bishop of Paris prohibited the Averroist theses. These data of the medieval history of philosophy today are evident for everyone who consults an average companion of the history of philosophy; but this knowledge was not easily available before, four centuries after the age of the Great Scholasticism in the 13th century and before the revival of the medieval studies in the history of philosophy. The authors referred to above, Toldy, Erdélyi, and Ferrari worked in a kind of informational gap, and their errors emerged in this special situation. In the following section, it will be analyzed how the temporal and geographical data and the mere name of an unknown philosophi-

cal author could evaporate, how its role and function in the cultural memory of different identity groups, and their narratives of the history of philosophy could be found. The evaporation of the temporal and geographical data probably began as early time as the earliest source of all the above-mentioned historical works. It is the so-called *Catalogue of Stams*, a manuscript in the Archives of Abbey of Stams, in Austria [for its modern edition see: Denifle 1886]. This 14th-century Dominican manuscript discusses Boëthius in the following formulation:

fr. Boetius natione Dacus, scripsit libros de modis significandi. Item questiones super topica Aristotelis. Item sup. librum physicorum questiones. Item questiones de celo et mundo. Item questiones super librum de anima. Item questiones super de generatione et corruptione. Item questiones super de sensu et sensato. Item questiones super de somno et vigilia. item questiones super de longitudine et brevitae vite. Item questiones super de memoria et reminiscencia. Item questiones super de morte et vita. Item questiones super de plantis et vegetabilibus. Item librum de eternitate mundi. [Denifle 1886: 230.]

We can see that in the terminology of the catalog, it is not the term 'Dominican Provinces' used but that of 'nations'; here, nation means one of the 'nations' of the medieval universities. All individuals mentioned in the catalog have an academic degree [*magister*, or *doctor*], and had taught at a university—the most frequently named is the one in Paris—sometime in their career. The sources of the catalog were probably the university documents or documents connected to the universities. Denifle published a kind of second-type source within his collection of documents referred to above; it is a list of the Dominican *magisters* of the University of Paris. Here, the personal name is completed with his 'university nation'. The document lists the *magisters* in chronological order, rarely with concrete years of the *magister* degree of several people; some can be dated as 'between a previous and a following known year'. The list of the type of sources presented by the *Catalogue of Stams* was amended with the titles of the writings of the scholars mentioned. At the time of publishing the *list of magisters*—the beginning of the 14th century—the Dominican Order was a relatively new organization, and some of the disciples of the newest scholars on the list—those at the end of the chronological order—might have still been alive. It means that for this interpretative community, the chronology of the listed scholars was not a big problem; it was part of the tacit knowl-

edge of the same community. *Catalogue of Stams* probably automatically followed the chronological order of previous lists without concrete years and temporal orientation points. From another aspect, the first decades of the 14th century mark the date when the cultural memory of the Dominican Order as a community of remembrance must be institutionalized in written documents. Usually, it is the moment when the last generation, who witnessed important events, is at the end of its lifetime.

However, the lack of chronological data of the *Catalogue of Stams* and other lists edited at the same time was not a real problem for the original target audience [i.e., the 14th-century Dominican monks], but for Antonius Senensis, in the 16th century due to irreparable lack of data—all he could do was mark the missing date by an asterisk. Fathers Ferrari and Némethi had a more serious problem. Their task was not simply to write the history of the Hungarian Dominican Province through a *systematic edition* of the remained historical data, different local traditions preserved in the archives of monasteries and abbeys, and the oral tradition of the elderly monks. They must *reconstruct* the history of the Hungarian Dominical Province that was actually liquidated in the time of the Turkish wars and the Reformation. They could not meet a living tradition or a working interpretative community, only separate written data without their original context. For the Jesuit Father Némethi, the term ‘Dacia’ lost its original meaning as Denmark or the Dominican Province of Scandinavia, it was just a changeable synonym of Transylvania, for him, with mere stylistic differences; ‘Transylvania’ was a more common toponym, by his Latin norms than ‘Dacia.’ Father Némethi proposed the date A.D. 1345, as well. His source was probably a version of the *Catalogue of Stams*, and he regarded the *date of the publication of the document* as the year when Boëthius was *in floribus*. A well-known scholar of ancient Hungarian philology, Antal Tarnai supposed that a variant of the Catalogue was known in Hungary, as well, like in other peripheral territories of Europe [Tarnai 1984: 89]. In the first half of the 17th century, based on his position as a university librarian and his international Jesuit network, Father Némethi was in a position where it was possible the access to these sources, and his interest in the bio-bibliographical and philological data could inspire him for the investigations in this field.

This is a reconstruction of the roots of the false data regarding Boëthius’ origin and lifetime. This error is the root of the distinguished role and position of the fictive figure of Erdélyi Bojót in the canon of

the history of Hungarian philosophy, exactly when the canonization of the Hungarian philosophical tradition began. This story is not complete if we do not have in mind the [lack of] knowledge of the 19th-century [and previous] scholars concerning the Great Scholasticism. Based on the data available, the figure of a fictive Hungarian philosopher as an important part of the cultural canon was established and constructed in the 19th-century. Nowadays, when one can easily check the name of Boëthius, we can hardly imagine that it was almost unknown for centuries amongst the scholars of the history of philosophy, as well. This situation marks an asynchrony of the Hungarian and European philosophical historiographies. When the Hungarian researches needed the international data, the data were not available; later, when they were available, they were not so interesting for the Hungarian scholarship.

The philological correction of the error of the fictive figure of Erdélyi Bojót happened in a crucial period of Hungarian history, it is the Communist turn after WWII. A distinguished medieval scholar, Géza Sajó wrote a detailed essay about the conception of this fictive figure for the periodical of the Hungarian librarian scholarship entitled *Magyar Könyvszemle* [Sajó 1947]. Although volume 71 in 1947 of this periodical was finally edited and lay-outed, it was never printed for political reasons; the digitalized version available today is based on authorial proof copies. Under the above-outlined conditions, Sajó's correction could be just gradually known in the Hungarian scholarship based on his later publications. In his essay of 1947, Sajó mentions that to reveal the error, he needed the recent results of the international research of the history of medieval philosophy; concretely, "the name of Boëthius de Dacia, one of the distinguished figures of the medieval philosophy, was just recently known in the contemporary scholarship [Sajó 1947: 33]. Several years later, the same researcher, Géza Sajó found the manuscript of Boëthius' *De aeternitate mundi*, which was unknown before, in the Hungarian National Library, and published it with an interpretation in the context of the 13th-century Latin Averroists of the University of Paris.

From this point, the figure of Erdélyi Bojót disappeared in the Hungarian history of philosophy, and the person of Boëthius de Dacia is discussed purely in his original context. However, it was a needed correction of the biggest factual error of the Hungarian philosophical historiography, two elements of the Hungarian context remained. First, we have a valuable manuscript of medieval philosophy that can mark a high-quality reading community, probably in the monasteries of the

Hungarian Dominican Province, or in other places. Second, Erdélyi Bojót, as a *fictive figure*, has a distinguished position in the history of Hungarian philosophy. For the historian of philosophy, the problem is not Erdélyi Bojót's real existence, origin, and life, but his role and function in the 19th-century history of Hungarian philosophical historiography as a *fictive figure* of the narratives created by the same historiography.

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