Social History in Hungary

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Social history is just beginning to become a special discipline in Hungary. Its constitution as a specific school or discipline was retarded partly because political history, the history of events, has taken the centre and dominant stage in Hungarian historiography up to now, partly owing to the long dominance of a rigid marxistic class-theory. It is to impute to the latter that the faint initiatives of the inter-war-period aiming the introduction of social history, criticized banned or suppressed by Marxist historiography, could not been continued for decades.

In the pre-war period, as everywhere, social history remained a subordinated part, a supplement of different schools of history. First of all of economic history, having had its first flourishing at the turn of the century and after a temporary decline established as a specific discipline in the inter-war-period owing to the inspirational teaching and excellent research organizing power of S. Domanovszky. The works written by him and his pupils were rather descriptive than analytic, and it is particularly for the richness of information and data that they were used by Marxist historians as well and that they also are frequently consulted nowadays. Research in social history focused on questions of legal relations, legal status and institutions, while problems of property, manners, clothing, culture etc. were treated in the few works published on cultural history.

Another impulse to social history could have been given by sociology, but in contrast to the mainstream of economic history the attempt of István Hajnal in the late 1930s to interrelate sociology and history remained an isolated achievement. An excellent historian, palaeograph of international reputation and pioneer of the history technics in Hungary, he was the first in Hungarian historiography realizing the sociological approach. His book on early modern European history was in many aspects congenial to the attitude of the Annales-school, though he didn't refer to their works. By his own admission he was inspired mainly by the works of Vierkand and Max Weber, albeit with a severe criticism towards the latter.

His concept, however original and up to date it was, hadn't had an impact on the Hungarian history writing of his time. He wasn't able to create a school, but his influence was nevertheless significant. Outstanding masters belonged to the limited circle of his pupils and adherents such as Ferenc Erdei or István Bibo, scholars and politicians. The dogmatic

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1 Out of the numerous publications there will be only mentioned a few published in Foreign languages: Die historische Entwicklung Ungarns, mit Rücksicht auf seine Wirtschaftsgeschichte, Budapest 1913; Die Vergangenheit der ungarischen Donau-Handelschiffahrt, in: Ungarische Jahrbücher 1922, pp. 161-187; Die Geschichte Ungarns, München/Leipzig 1923; La formation de la classe nobiliaire en Hongrie, in: Résumées des communications présentées au congrès à Varsovie 1933, Varsovie 1933, II., pp. 32-35; Zur Geschichte der Gutsherrschaft in Ungarn, in: Wirtschaft und Kultur. Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Alfons Dopsch, Baden b. Wien/Leipzig 1938, pp. 441-469. Domanovszky was editor of the Tanulmányok a magyar mez@ gazdaság történetéhez between 1939 and 1943.

2 Történelem és szociológia, in: Századok 1939; Az osztálytársadalom, in: Magyar m(üvel@)déstörténet V, pp. 165-200.

Marxists didn't appreciate the historical realism of Hajnal in spite of its closeness to the materialistic view, so much the more as until the 1970s sociology was banned.

In 1949 Hajnal was dismissed from the University and disappeared from the scientific scene. He died forgotten in 1956. It is only some years ago that he was reappraised as a forerunner of the modern school of social history and that the reedition or reprint of his works began. Meanwhile his ideas were diffused by works of Erdei an Bibo written in the 1930s and 40s and rediscovered in the last decades. These works have exerted a determinant influence on historical, political and sociological thinking up until the present day.

The popularistic school (Volkstumsgeschichte) is also to be counted among the inter-war antecedents of social history. Particularly the trend of research on settlement patterns and local communities done by Mályusz and his pupils. In spite of the ambiguous governing idea these were strictly scientific works purporting many important facts, data and methodological lessons. However, the concept could be and has been misinterpreted and misused to proclamation of racial superiority. Partly that, partly some declarations of Mályusz in the extreme right press was the reason of reprobation and silencing of this school. Mályusz himself expelled from the scientific life immediately after the war and could return only after 1956, but his earlier works remained banned books for a long time.

There is only one continuous link from the pre-war antecedents to contemporary social history: the school of István Szabó. Though inspired by works of the school of Mályusz, he held aloof from all ambiguous conceptional and political aspects of it and wrote pure scientific works on settlement and peasant-history and dealt with historical demography as well. He soon became the most acknowledged authority in these fields. His works were criticized but exploited and frequently referred to by leading Marxist historians, he himself was somewhat by-passed but not excluded from academic life and continued to exercise influence on history writing. A Professor of the Debrecen University, surrounded by a relatively wide circle of pupils, he alone can be considered practically as a creator of a historical school in the post-war period.

In the late sixties the rigour or orthodox Marxism was softening in history. A revision or open critic of Marxist theory of course continued to be illicit, instead of that a kind of a hidden neglect of Marxism can be observed in the historical literature. New inspiration was derived in the historical literature. New inspirations were derived from other social sciences and from the new European and American historical schools, becoming gradually better known as a consequence of closer international contacts and of the growing number of imported - frequently through private channels - books and journals.

4 A népiség története, in: B. Hóman (Ed.), A magyar történetirás új útjai. 1931, pp. 237-268; Geschichte des ungarischen Volkstums von der Landnahme bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters, Budapest 1940; Túróc megye kialakulása, Budapest 1922. A number of excellent studies from his pupils have been published in the serie edited by himself, „Településes népiség-történeti értekezések“. Among his treatises concerning social history are mentioned only a few Foreign editions: Geschichte des Bürgertums in Ungarn, in: Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte 20, 1928, pp. 356-407.

Though sociology gained official recognition in these years, its impact on history was felt only a decade later. It was much more the economic history, first of all the achievements of the Annales-school which influenced the mind of historians. The French histoire sérielle, the study of economic processes and structures awaked an interest in social structures and processes as well. From the 1960s onwards quantification, tables, statistics increased their role, promoted by a nation-wide exploration of censuses and different conscription kept in the archives. One might say as well that the first steps of social history were taken under the cover of historical statistics. Somehow, by chance, the study of historical statistics was encouraged by the archival authorities permitting, moreover stimulating archivists to do such studies. In consequence a lot of works were published on occupational-, property- and social structure of inhabitants in different settlements still before the general use of computers. Lacking a conceptual and methodological basis and due to the local isolation of researchers, the authors often confined themselves to tabulating their data without a deeper analysis. Nevertheless, these works contain valuable information, though the diversity of grouping criteria does not always allow comparisons.

The impact of such kinds of structural investigations, however, remained very limited, and created little stir in the official history writing, which considered them like so much other research in local societies as a matter of local history. Only slowly, step by step, have some branches of social history gained official acknowledgement; above all such as historical demography, structural analysis of nation-wide statistics. Other subjects remained topics of individual isolated research or - like questions of mentality, everyday life, housing etc. - were considered as fields of cultural history.

As mentioned above, in lack of an institutional background or a special university training, studies in social history were often (and remained) deficient in theoretical and conceptual foundation. Though late professor Ránki stressed upon the importance of social history in his article published in 1977, which contained a brief survey on different schools as well, new methodical approaches were known but within narrow bounds of historians, mainly among the younger generation. Above all in circles of those who could profit from the increasing opportunity to participate in international conferences or obtain a grant for scholarship the 1980s. They felt a need for theoretical foundation, for precision of definitions, for mutual exchange of information and discussions, for adaptation of new concepts and methods to Hungarian history and Hungarian sources. So gradually a workshop of social history was established where new concepts and reports on new research methods and results were discussed. The members of this workshop were the initiators of the establishment of an Association of Social Historians (HajnalIstván Kör) in 1988, that is before the political change (it was one of the first free organisations), aiming towards the spread of social history by means of thematical workshops, annual conferences, lectures, newsletters and recently by publishing of some important books in Hungarian language.

The Association succeeded in organising the collaboration of the researchers working in isolation, establishing thematical teams (e. g. on studies on nobility, schooling, small towns).
subventioned by the National Research Foundation. The Association initiated the edition of an English semi-annual journal entitled History & Society in Central Europe in order to contribute to the international discussions in social history by presenting the results of contemporary research in and on Central Europe. Financial and organisational difficulties forced the postponing of the original plan instead of which History & Society is to be temporarily edited as series of occasional papers.'

Finally, the Chair for Economic and Social History (the first of this kind at Faculties of Art in Hungary), founded at the Budapest University in 1991, can be considered as an important step towards the establishment of social history in Hungary: However, the process of institutionalising hasn't meant a break-through in Hungarian historiography yet. There was a strong resistance against the establishment of the Chair; studies in social history are accepted mostly as apical curriculum, lectures and seminars in these topics can be taken by choice of a list of alternative subjects and in the beginning it was even discussed whether social history - and cultural history as well - should fit in the training of historians at all.

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Since social history is but developing in Hungary and the number of scholars working in this field is rather limited, it is naturally enough that schools and branches given as main points for my lecture are represented very unequally or not at all. The topics of research, of course, aren't independent of problems posed by the present. Consequently the forming of the middle class, the problems of national, ethnic, religious minorities, national feelings and nationalism, structure of elite are standing in the limelight. Most of these investigations are projects which are still going on.

The carrying out of such major projects depends not only on the financial support, but at least in the same degree on the success of introduction of a genuine team work. Team work was rather infrequent in Hungary, as political history writing used to be an individual achievement based mainly (if at all) on documents of higher authorities kept in the National Archives of Budapest. The exploring of sources kept in local archives was considered as the task of local historians. Historians, as well as other intellectuals as well, are concentrated in Budapest, so attempts of provincial research remained singular and isolated achievements only loosely and infrequently attached to major central projects. A systematic postgraduate training at the universities which could serve as a basis for team-work is at present only in the stage of being a project, its realization in the field of social history would need the permanent presence of competent teachers, while at present lectures on problems of social history, if any, are given mainly by visiting professors, spending generally one day at the universities outside Budapest. This is of course insufficient for either creating a school, or for accomplishing a major project.

A common feature of studies on social history is the exploring of new types and great variety of sources and the development of new methodology and technics of elaboration, helped by the spread of computers in the last years. While the structural analyses of the sixties and seventies were based mainly on censuses, diverse conscription, tax-lists, statistics etc. that is on sources comprising numerical data or data which could be easily elaborated statistically, in the last decade a growing attention has been paid to documents and sources

giving a deeper insight into the life of society and being used formerly only for explanation of individual cases. Among them one can mention testaments and probate inventories, records of legal proceedings, records of town-councils etc. The elaboration of these types of sources en masse needed new methods and led to the acknowledgement of formerly distrusted computer technics, appreciated by historians earlier only scarcely, owing partly to the rarity of computers, partly to the aversion from all kinds of mathematics among historians.

Let us see now what has been done in Hungary in the field of social history under these rather unfavourable conditions.10

Concerning politische Erfahrungsgeschichte12 I have to admit that I was not quite aware of the meaning of this concept. In interpreted it as the history of social experiences of politics, political events, the understanding what meaning people gave to the experience of the rather agitated epoch of the period from the time of the first world war. I think that all what was said on this issue by Natalie Zemon Davis at the International Congress of Historians in 1990 holds true of Hungary as well. In the last years people were indeed more interested in the facts of what actually happened, who did it and how. This demand was met rather by publicism and scoop-hunting publications than by scientific historical works as the accessibility of the former secret and reserved archivia remained even now restricted, and it is evident that their retrieval requires time. What is more, there are but few good experts of the history of the 20th century owing to the political taboos and falsifications so that historians of original thinking mostly held off from research work of this period.

So rather little is done even in the field of a revised political history of modern times and even that often from a rather actual political than scientific view. However, the first issues of a major project launched by the recently founded Institute for History and Documentation of the Revolution in 1956 gives evidence of efforts to exceed the mere reconstruction of facts or activity of leading personalities.11 Still, the first studies based on a comprehensive exploration of local acts (reports, records of legal proceedings), fulfilled by archivists under the direction of László A. Varga brought important information on the group and structures of people who were taking an active part in local happenings, a deeper insight into their interpretation and meaning of revolutionary events and the proceedings of the preceding period. A good example for this was the paper of a young historian, Gábor Kresalik, presented at the International Conference on the revolution of 1956, proceeding in 1991 in Budapest. It was an analysis of the experiences of young people who had been fighting at the barricades of Budapest in those days and were arrested and sentenced in 1957-58.12 The investigation was based partly upon the records of legal proceedings, partly upon interviews made recently with the survivors.

In the last decades a rich material suitable for this kind of research was accumulated mainly by sociologists. They began to make interviews and documentaries with prominent persons of economic and political life and with persons persecuted by the preceding

10 The literature listed in the following footnotes cannot be regarded as a complete bibliography. The Hungarian literature is restricted to the most important and to quite a few new treatises. Concerning the Foreign literature I strived to more completeness.
regimes, long before the political change. Books and log studies were published mainly by scientific institutes in limited edition on contemporary history and social conditions of several settlements, based on written documents and interviews. At the start these were individual achievements, expanding and establishing due to the financial support of the Soros Foundation, aiming the opening of closed societies. (In this connection it is to mention that a great lot of up to date individual research and minor projects in social history were enabled by the support of this foundation.) At this time interviews and series of documents provide excellent sources for an analysis of political experiences. It is nothing but necessary to find and train historians able to do this task.

Anthropology and History. Owing to the decreasing but still existing mistrust against anthropological theories little has been done in this field by historians. As everywhere the initiators were mainly ethnologists and ethnographers followed by historians, adherents rather of cultural-, everyday life-, or social history than engaged in historical anthropology. This diversity in approach very well demonstrated in the papers of the first Conference on Historical Anthropology, held in 1983 and published in 1984. There was no great progress in this field since then, and that is why Gábor Klaniczay could refer only to a few new works in the reprinted in 1990 version of his opening paper given at the above mentioned conference. He considered the book of Gábor Gyani on Family, Household and Urban Domestics published in 1983 as an unique monograph written in the spirit of historical anthropology. He referred to studies of Peter Hanak on urban housing conditions and furnishing and to his article on Death in Budapest as well, to studies which verge on cultural history.

Probably because of the usually very long time for getting through the press there was no mention by Klaniczay about the monograph of Zoltán Toth published in 1989. His book on the society of small town in Hungary at the turn of the nineteenth century based on a mass of various so far by historians not explored sources is really the best Hungarian monograph written in the spirit of historical anthropology. Presenting the local society he managed to demonstrate the process of transformation of the former feudal orders (estates) into orders of the capitalistic structure, into orders characterized by traditional and yet continually changing features of lifestyle. The presentation and analysis of various ground-plans of houses, furnishings and other movable are presented as the materialisation of different mobility-strategies of different ethnic, religious and professional groups.

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13 The most part of these interviews can be found at the Oral History Archiv of the Institut. For the catalogue see: Yearbook, pp. 267-291.
17 G. Gyáni, Család, háztartás és a városi cseleléség, Budapest 1983.
Besides the studies on rites, the cult of saints and witchcraft of Gábor Klaniczay\textsuperscript{20}, the most ardent propagator of historical anthropology initiation the collaboration of ethnologists, ethnographers and historian, one can mention the studies off Gábor Gyáni on urban anthropology, in particular on public and private urban space.\textsuperscript{21} However, he declared himself somewhat sceptic about the interpretative dimension of the „thick description“ in his paper presented at the International Congress of Historians in 1990.\textsuperscript{22}

One can mention here the first three volumes of Books on microhistory\textsuperscript{23}. One of them, written by Peter Szabó, deals with the question of funeral rites as spectacle.\textsuperscript{24} The analysis is based on a detailed report and picture of the funeral ceremony of an aristocrat in the 17th century. Walter Endrei is deals with clothing and textiles,\textsuperscript{25} while I tried to portray the wholesalers of Pest in the first half of the nineteenth century in a prosopographic way.\textsuperscript{26}

Research work in the field of kinship, family and household organisation (with the exception of Gyáni’s above-mentioned study) can not be considered as a part of historical anthropology in Hungary, as influenced mainly by the works of the Laslett-School, the are rather quantitative. Adherents of the trend represented by Stone, if any, are found rather among the ethnographers. Nevertheless it is to mention the research work of Rudolf Andorka and the historian Tamás Faragó peasant household- and family structure in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{26} Faragó discovered that the feature of Hungarian household structure was the increase of larger and more complex households at the turn of the eighteenth century. In a detailed analysis of eight villages with different economy, populated by inhabitants of diverse ethnic and confessional structure he differentiated three types of household structure. The households consisting of a nuclear family were typical for the German population while the large and complex families, the household of zadruga type


\textsuperscript{23} P. Szabó, A végitszélesség, Budapest 1989.

\textsuperscript{24} W. Endrei, Patyolat és posztó, Budapest 1989.
