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MAGYAR AFRIKANISTA KOLLÉGÁK KÜLFÖLDÖN
HUNGARIAN AFRICANIST COLLEAGUES IN ABROAD

OUTLINE HISTORY OF HUNGARIAN AFRICAN STUDIES

VIDACS, Bea (Budapest)

Hungary has never had a colonial empire. Her African research accordingly was on a considerably smaller scale than that of the other European countries with a different geographical position and historical role. This lack of traditions has the advantage that our relations to the peoples of Africa are at least free from the hostility and mutual prejudices deriving from colonial ties. In the absence of colonial relations, however, interest in Africa has also been more or less fortuitous. People only got to Africa incidentally, and their research was not received with the same degree of attention and understanding as in the colonising states. Thus the Black Continent has, in the eyes of the Hungarians, long remained remote and exotic.

Nevertheless, from the 18th century on, there always were a few people who spent shorter or longer periods of their lives in Africa and contributed to a better knowledge of the continent's geography and of the life of its peoples. As in the other European countries, Hungarian Africanism began with travellers; collectors appeared either simultaneously or later on, and last of all came scientific research. Obviously, the three often merged, as in the person of László Magyar who, although primarily a traveller, also made observations of a scholarly character and value, by the standards of contemporary science of course.

The succession of Hungarians who spent some time in Africa and reported back home in one way or another was opened by Count Móricz Benyovszky (1746–1786), who spent some time in Madagascar and related his experiences in an adventurous diary.

Recent research (see Győző Lugosi's article, now in press) has shown his data to be unreliable and the ethnographic description of Madagascar to be

borrowed from a French work published in 1658. Without exonerating Benyovszky, one may note that he in fact prepared the ground for more advanced and rigorous African research, calling attention to Africa, as he did by his early entry on the scene. The first Hungarian researcher to be taken seriously was László Magyar (1818–1864), who lived and worked in Africa from 1846 to the end of his life. Magyar first travelled widely in the world as a sailor; during his stay in Brazil, he wanted to launch a South American expedition; this idea of his, however, was frustrated by want of financial backing. Subsequently, in 1846, he entered the service of "the Calabari Negro King". While at Calabar, he made a journey up the river Congo and got as far as the Jellala Waterfalls; he sent his detailed diary of this trip back to Hungary. His report, his letters and some extracts of his diary were published in 1857. Late in 1848, he travelled to Benguella, one of the two major ports of Angola; and in January 1849, he moved inland to Bie, where he settled down and married Ina Kullo Ozoro, daughter of Kayaya Kayangula, the chief of Bie. It is his marriage to a lady of high standing that distinguishes Magyar and his ethnographic observations from the rest of the contemporary travellers. His direct family ties with the ruling class gave him a very thorough insider's view of Bie society, particularly its ways and means of organizing and exercising power. Bie remained the base of his travels until 1857. A detailed narrative of his travels to Bie is found in his book *Magyar László délafrikai utazásai* (The South African travels of László Magyar, Pest, 1859)[1] which he planned to be the first of three volumes. Besides the description of his trip, he gave a detailed account of "the Kimbunda nation and its customs" and also of the Kimbunda provinces. He planned to discuss his travels from Bie in the other two volumes which, however, never became completed. We know something of these travels from his diary extracts and letters. He set out on his first journey in February 1850 to explore the origins of the rivers Kuanza, Kuango, Kasai, Kubango and Zambezi. He stayed for some time in Yah Quilem; his account of this stay was his inaugural lecture to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. On his return trip, he paid a visit to the Muata Yamvo, the Lunda ruler at Kabete, which was then his capital. Magyar's second trip, from May 1852 to the summer of 1854, explored the territories south of Benguella. Moving southward, he travelled all over the catchment areas of the rivers Kunene and Kubango. He did not prepare a separate account of this trip, either, but the relevant fragments of his diary tell us about the life of the Ambo people and of the Kuanyama and

[1] Magyar 1859/B.

Kwangere kingdoms. He also wrote A Brief Sketch of the Provinces Lying between the Rivers Kunene and Kubango (*Rövid vázlat a Kuléne és a Kubángo folyamok között elterülő tartományokról*)[2] which he also sent to Hungary. On this journey, he had the intention of meeting Livingstone but failed to do so. Very little is known about his third journey in 1855, besides his reaching the Luvale people and the Zambezi. In 1857 he sent the first part of his book back to Hungary, but had to flee Bie in the same year because of the internal power struggle unleashed by the death of his father-in-law. He fled to the coast, first to Benguella, then to Mogamedes and finally to Lucira where he settled down to trading. On his travels in the coastal region he sent a report to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences: it was published in *Akadémiai Értesítő* (the Bulletin of the Academy) in 1862[3]. A letter dated June 9, 1862 was the last communication to be received from Magyar. He died in 1864; his estate and papers were later destroyed by fire.

However great the significance of László Magyar's expeditions and of his geographical and ethnographical discoveries, they are known only to a small circle. Although his publications in Hungary did arouse some interest, and his book was even translated into German, they never became really known to international research.

In Hungary, László Magyar's person and scientific activity were repeatedly studied in a scholarly fashion. In our days, László Krizsán is sparing no effort to restore Magyar's *oeuvre* to its rightful place in the history of international Africanism.[4]

The contribution of Count Sámuel Teleki (1845–1916) to the exploration of Africa was the most spectacular of all Hungarian endeavours. He set out on his expedition from Zanzibar, but made his preparations in London, where he acquired the foundations of elementary medicine, studied Swahili, geology and botany, and even practiced geographic surveying. Lieutenant-Commander Lajos Höhnel of Bratislava (Pozsony) accompanied him as cartographer, and later became chronicler of the expedition. In the course of their travels, they established contact with the Chaga, Kikuyu, Masai Pare, Reshiat and Taita peoples, among others, and collected many objects which went to make up the earliest segment of the East African collection at the Budapest Museum of Ethnography. Teleki first made an unsuccessful at-

[2] Magyar 1858, full text in: Thirring 1937.

[3] Magyar: A Délafrikai Munda-Evámbo, Lungo és Kapota tartományok Általános földirati Vázlata, in: *Akadémiai Értesítő*, 1862.

[4] Krizsán 1981, he recently published a volume on the life and oeuvre of László Magyar, 1983, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, p. 227.

tempt to climb the Kibo, the higher peak of the Kilimanjaro; he then undertook climbing Mt. Kenya, in which he was not completely successful either. The expedition then turned north and after a long and wearisome peregrination, discovered first Lake Rudolph, then the Teleki Volcano, and finally Lake Stephanie. Eduard Suess's subsequent recognition of the existence of an East African rift system would not have been possible without Teleki's discoveries.

In 1892 Höhnel published the history of the expedition in Germs n; later it was translated into English and Hungarian as well.[5] His account is no mere diary: it also contains some interesting information on the life of certain East African peoples. The same may be said of the illustrations, mostly photographs taken by members of the expedition. Not very long ago, Lajos Erdélyi published a book on Teleki to which he attached all the available photographs from the expedition.[6]

István Czimmermann (1849–1894) and László Menyhárt (1849–1897), Jesuit missionaries, spent several years in Mozambique. Czimmermann voyaged to Mozambique in 1885 and Menyhárt in 1889. They described their African experiences in several letters and reports.[7]

The next Hungarian traveller and collector was Baron Pál Bornemisza (1853–1909). He travelled far and wide in East Africa, especially on the southern slopes of the Kilimanjaro. He sold a collection of some 2000 objects to the predecessor of the Budapest Museum of Ethnography, the Ethnographic Department of the Hungarian National Museum. Two things make Bornemisza's collection exceptionally significant. In contrast with the predominant interest of the collectors of the day in ritualistic objects, Bornemisza also collected objects of everyday use in great quantities. Another notable contribution was that in 1902, he prepared an exhaustive descriptive catalogue of his collection in English. His thoroughness is best illustrated by the following quotation from the Preface to the Catalogue: "The Ki-tságá (or ságá) nomenclature relative to the Tságá-Specimens was supplied by M'Kumbe (alias Kélélo) a wonderfully intelligent Tságá, a very skilled "fundi" (craftsman) of very inventive and artistic disposition ... – and was afterwards supervised by Father Dürr of the Cath. Miss. St. at Kibosho who speaks the Ki-tságá perfectly and lives on the Kilimanjáro since 1894."

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[5] Höhnel 1892.

[6] In 1977 Erdélyi published a volume of the original photographs taken by Count Teleki.

[7] Cf. Krizsán 1981.

(Throughout the quotation Bornemisza' s original spelling has been retained.)

Bornemisza abandoned his African travels in 1906 and died in 1909. The best known and most important representative of Hungarian Africanism was Emil Torday (1875–1931); only Magyar approaches Torday's significance. Whereas Magyar remained practically unknown, Torday, working under more favourable conditions, was able to publish his findings. He thus enriched the common fund of knowledge of a Europe that, by that time, had become 'deeply interested in Africa.

Originally, he did not want to become an African explorer; he never even planned to visit Africa. In 1895 he went to Belgium, where he worked as a bank clerk until 1900, when he received an appointment in the Congo as a Belgian government official. He first settled in Kinshasa, and was then transferred to the region of the Great Lakes. In 1904, he returned to Europe and established contact with the British Museum. It was only then that he decided to study Africa scientifically. In 1905, he still travelled as a Belgian government official.[8] He undertook his third trip in 1907 on a British Museum assignment, to study the life of the ruling people of the Kuba Kingdom. He had in his company the British traveller M. W. Hilton-Simpson, and painter Norman Hardy; they returned with a large collection of fine ethnographical material, some of which is found in the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, another part in the British Museum (Museum of Mankind) and the third part in the Tervuren Museum (Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika). After this trip in 1907–1909, poor health prevented Torday from returning to Africa. He lived on in London as a scholar at the British Museum until his death in 1931.

Torday was a person of immense scholarly accomplishment, who spoke seven European and eight African languages. His impressive work, African Races,[9] an outstanding representative of comparative African ethnology, comprises information (mostly in the form of carefully selected quotations) on some 800 tribes and subtribes and is sufficient in itself to grant his place in the universal history of Africanistics. His true greatness, however, is revealed only if we also consider his work on the Bushongo, his writings in a lighter vein and his numerous articles published in various scientific journals.

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[8] Joyce 1932, pp. 48–49.
[9] Torday 1930.

Although Rudolf Fuszek (1882–1941) was a medical doctor, we owe to him one of the finest African collections in the Budapest Museum of Ethnography. After graduation, Fuszek pursued postgraduate studies in tropical medicine, in Germany. He first went to South America, but from the early 1910's on he practised medicine in the Cameroons and Liberia. He was later appointed Minister of Health of the latter country. In 1937, he donated the greatest part of his invaluable collection to the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest (a smaller portion of the material got to Vienna). Most valuable in the material originating from Liberia is Fuszek's collection of Dan-Kran masks.

General ethnological education in Hungary only began after World War II at the Institute of Ethnography of Budapest University; as a part of the curriculum, undergraduates could read Africanism from the 50's on. Formerly there were simply no means of studying Africanism. László Vajda began his activity during the same period, he has written several articles on African subjects. (One could mention for example his papers, "Zum Religionsethnologischen Hintergrund des 'Nungu' im Kilimandscharogebiet" and "Obo-Haufen in Afrika").[10]

In the summer of 1965, folk dance researcher György Martin and ethnomusicologist Bálint Sárosi spent two months in Ethiopia. Their aim was to get as complete a picture of the country's traditions in music and dance as possible in such a short time. The findings of the journey were published by György Martin in an article entitled "Characteristics and Principal Types of Ethiopian Dances"[11] and by Bálint Sárosi in a paper entitled "The Music of Ethiopian Peoples."[12]

Tibor Bodrogi's African Art,[13] the first significant Hungarian contribution to the field, was published in 1967, and since then has been translated into many languages. It relies mainly on the material of the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, complemented by certain objects from the museums of Leipzig, Dresden and Prague, to give as full a picture of African art as possible. In his introductory essay, Bodrogi traces the development of European attitudes to non-western art, discusses Africa's outstanding regions and artistic genres and investigates some of the functions of art in African societies. He then discusses plastic art in Black Africa, grouped into five main regions.

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[10] In *Acta Ethnographica* 1953 and 1955 respectively.
[11] Martin 1966.
[12] Sárosi 1967.
[13] Bodrogi 1967.

Endre Sík (1891–1978) published his four-volume work, *Fekete-Afrika története* (History of Black Africa) between 1964 and 1973.[14] In it, he traces the history of the Continent minutely and thoroughly from before the white penetration to independence.

Social anthropologist Csaba Ecsedy did field work in the Sudan, with the Maiak subtribe of the practically unknown Hill Burun tribe from March to July 1972. His findings are summarized in his paper "Aspects of Hunting among the Maiak of the Hill Burun, Sudan"[15]. This is the only work so far written by a Hungarian anthropologist on the basis of field work done with up-to-date methods. Later, Csaba Ecsedy investigated the problem of the origin of the state in Africa in several papers.[16]

Although interested mainly in theoretical socio-economic issues, Mihály Sárkány has also dealt with questions of an African study nature in several of his writings.[17]

The most recent product of Tibor Bodrogi's studies in the art of non-European peoples is the work entitled *Törzsi művészet* (Tribal Art)[18] whose chapter on Africa has been written partly by Csaba Ecsedy and Mihály Sárkány.

Although Hungarian Africanism has grown richer by several outstanding representatives since 1945 and Africanism has been included in the university curriculum, its main role is still one of popularisation. This task, which scholars often find tiresome, is in fact of considerable importance, since the general public still has to be made to accept Africa, its customs and creations, whether literary, artistic or musical. We shall of necessity remain short of understanding for the Africans until we learn something about Africa, since openness towards other peoples (and especially races) is an acquired rather than an innate property in Man.

Popularising works include, for example, the African volumes in the series *Népek meséi* (Peoples and their tales) from Europa Publishing House.[19] Its forerunner was a collection of African tales entitled *Karunga, a holtak ura* (Karunga, Lord of the Dead), published in 1944, selected by István

[14] Sík 1964–1973.
[15] Sík 1973, pp. 293–319.
[16] Among others see: 1972, or 1976.
[17] Sárkány 1973.
[18] Bodrogi 1981, pp. 161–248.
[19] The Series have published folktales from Madagascar, Morocco, South Africa, Guinea and East Africa.

Kende and translated by the great Hungarian poet Miklós Radnóti, it carried an afterword written by Gyula Ortutay, the outstanding folklorist.[20]

The chapter on Africa in the *Mythological ABC*[21], written by Imre Katona and Csaba Ecsedy also belongs to the same group although it is useful and important from a strictly scholarly point of view as well.

Another important achievement of Africanism is István Fodor's *Az afrikai szavak és nevek, főképpen nyelv- és népnevek magyar írásmódja* (Hungarian Orthography of African Words and Names, with Special Regard to the Names of Languages and Peoples).[22] Géza Füssi Nagy has written a university textbook on African languages (now in press) which no doubt will also greatly help students interested in Africa.

Owing to the historical causes referred to at the beginning of this survey, and also to the present financial situation, Hungarian Africanism must be modest about its result so far. This situation is not likely to change much in the future either, all the less so since the time has come when Africans are claiming priority in exploring their own Continent.

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