

Forgotten French sources

as a reflection of the perception of the Hungarians
in the eighteenth century

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1) Choice of subject, objectives

The doctoral thesis examines the way the French of the eighteenth century perceived Hungarians. Its objective is to elaborate on and, in a given case, to refute the general commonplace statement deeply inherent in the subject's bibliography that emphasises the forgotten Hungary of the given age. This opinion was rooted in the works of János Batsányi and from that time on this statement survived as a commonplace almost until the present day.

Undoubtedly, the rapidly changing political conditions of Europe in the eighteenth century objectively reinterpreted the historic role of the Hungarians in terms of the ever-varying European status quo. It is obviously the heroism of the anti-Turkish wars that gained prominence in the second part of the sixteenth century, but the Hungarian soldiers' heroism turned barbaric in the confusion of the seventeenth century (the Fifteen Years' War, the Thirty Years' War, the Kuruc revolts).

The Hungarians of national history, as viewed from outside and becoming increasingly worn out between the two pagans, were seen as an inconstant, shifty, lazy and barbaric people that was eager to co-operate even with the Turks. This view, however, was more and more successfully suggested by the Viennese propaganda. This opinion, even though the truth was more complex, remained prominent until the middle of the eighteenth century and then was followed by a more elaborate, colourful and comprehensive view of the Hungarians in the second part of the century. The objective of this thesis is to introduce this process.

2) Structure, sources, methods and the contents of the thesis

In a chronological structure, this thesis introduces the seventeenth-century roots of the perception of the Hungarians, the forms they appeared in and how they were altered in the eighteenth century, and finally, as an outlook, it introduces both the future possibilities of the view of the Hungarians as depicted by the French and the values that the Hungarians provided for the French and, consequently, for Europe.

Besides introducing how the contemporary French authorities viewed the presence of the French, or more precisely, the Lorrainese employees in Hungary who emigrated to and settled in this country for economic reasons, this thesis is based on the following types of sources. The static data of the contemporary *geographic and historic dictionaries*, which are also historiographic judgements, will not be presented for the sake of completeness but as a representative sample. The basis of the sources is constituted by the collection of sources compiled by Károly Kecskeméti,¹ the *reports and records of diplomats* complemented with a few *corresponding documents from the Archives of Nantes*, the *travel narratives* and a specific set of sources that had never been investigated yet, the *recollections of the French prisoners of war who were captured in Hungary during the revolutionary wars*.

The method was to let these sources speak in an analytical way in the sense that the factual mistakes of the authors were not corrected. Instead, the characteristics of the ways they saw the Hungarians and the variants of these views will be made tangible as a reflection of the given historical background.

The main elements of the thesis are: as an initial step, an attempt was made to collect the basis of sources of the ways the French saw the Hungarians in the specific historical age, *i.e. the contemporary bibliographies*. The first among them is the collection by Bongarsius.² The data of Jacques Bongars were updated at the end of the seventeenth century by the works of Claude Vanel (1644–1703) in the way that the author complemented them by the best of the travel narratives and lexicography of his century. Claude Vanel presented a rather inaccurate list of names without actual references to works. On this ground did we prepare the Vanel-bibliography, which was based on the 1686 database. The data of these two bibliographies were supplemented by the eighteenth-century geographical dictionaries so on these bases there are three important catalogues of the perception of the Hungarians in the eighteenth century: the Lenglet Dufresnoy (1713), the Moréri-Coignard (1725) and the Langelet Dufresnoy (1735) bibliographies.

Two authors were closely investigated in terms of the seventeenth-century roots of the eighteenth-century perception of the Hungarians. The first is the English traveller Edward Brown, who travelled to Hungary in 1669–1670. His work was published in London in 1673 in English but in one year's time its French translation was completed and ran into a number of editions later on. Edward Brown's thorough and minutely detailed travel narrative is inevitable because he was one of the most important sources for the French authors, even though they often did not even mention his name. A number of elements of his perception of the Hungarians reappeared at the end of the eighteenth and even at the beginning of the nineteenth centuries.

¹ *Notes et rapports français sur la Hongrie au XVIII^{ème} siècle. Recueil des documents, avec une introduction.* Brussels 1963.

² Bongars, (Bongarsius Jacobus) Jacques, *Rerum Hungaricarum scriptores varii. Historici, geographici.* Francofurti, Apud heredes Andreae Wecheli, Claudium Marnium, & Ioan. Aubrium, 1600.

Brown's Hungary was a country of rivers, fertile plains, mines, spas, mineral springs and delicious wines. He thought of the Hungarians as a witty and hard-working nation and in his opinion the Hungarians had grown to prefer war to commerce throughout their history. He also believed that they were endowed with the wits, industry and talent to get involved with sciences and the liberal arts. Following Brown, such fixed attributes were articulated that greatly influenced the way the French viewed the Hungarians as the image of a gallant nation which had turned militant through its history and did not display much affinity for commerce and the sciences. It was also Brown who added the splendid fur-decorated Hungarian noble attire to the image of the country and it was he who introduced the mining towns as the most important parts of the country.

The geographical dictionaries are considered as one of the most important sources of the perception of the Hungarians because they are the vehicles of informative historiography. Claude Vanel's works on Hungary, completed in the 1680s, determined the way the French saw the Hungarians for more than fifty years. In this thesis, his own perception of the country was reconstructed on the basis of his *Le Royaume de la Hongrie ou description nouvelle, Chronologique, Géographique de ce Royaume selon d'estat auquel il se trouve à present et des choses les plus memorables y arrivées*, published in Cologne in 1686. Claude Vanel's work is considered important for two reasons. On the one hand, he practically provided the cross-section of the entire Hungarian history, and on the other he was the first to compile a geographic and historic dictionary about Hungary satisfying the criteria of dictionary making. His description is a history communicated through entries of the names of the towns combined with comprehensive and introductory chapters containing general information. Vanel could not accept the Hungarian revolt against the Habsburgs because the faith put in the legitimate monarch was the cardinal principle of his view of history. (All rebels are fickle and bring the country into ruin.)

As for the geographical and historical works of the eighteenth century, we have examined Hungarian history and its consequences in the forgotten great "dictionary of the world" by Bruzen de la Martinière. His conclusions are important because he used the latest results of his age and they finely matched the history of the Hungarians. (He emphasised that the Huns and the Hungarians had probably had nothing in common and he used the model of Persian historians as translated by the French orientalist Pétis de la Croix to characterise the Hungarian prehistory.) The Hungary of Bruzen de la Martinière was exceedingly swampy due to the unregulated waters, the air was not particularly healthy but the land was rich in corn, wine, fruits and in pasture. The wine was strong and excellent and Hungary was able to supply Austria and Poland with it. The Tokaj wine was outstanding. The pastures fed a large number of cattle. The small and the big game appeared so ordinary that everyone was free to hunt them in order to prevent the damage these animals might cause and even the peasants could often eat the meet of wild-boar and deer. There were many mineral springs and they provided water for a number of spas.

His Hungarians were quite militant but were charged with cruelty, pride and a vengeful spirit and they were so lacking in unity that it was no surprise they had fallen prey to the Barbarians. This is the seventeenth-century picture suggested by Vanel, but Bruzen de la Martinière handled it with care when saying: they were charged with such characteristics. The language of his slender Hungarians was a dialect of the Slavic language. He gave high priority to the mining towns relying upon the findings of Jacobus Tollius, who visited Hungary twice in 1660 and 1687 in order to investigate mines and had prepared very detailed economic, geographic and historical analyses of the regions.

This thesis surveys the French interpretation of the Hungarian present of the eighteenth century in the entry *Hongrie* in the dictionary by Vosgien, in Sané's portrait, and in the travel narratives, the reports of diplomats, the French settlers and the prisoners of the revolutionary wars.

We have used three different editions of the dictionary by Vosgien, those published in 1767, 1801 and 1811. The entry *Hungary* in the 1767 edition reflects the Hungary of the first part of the eighteenth century, the 1801 edition describes the country in the second part of the century and the 1811 edition introduces Napoleon's Europe. By contrasting the various texts it is plain to see that the currently dominant political considerations of Europe were imprinted on the geographic dictionaries as well. For instance, the 1801 edition underlined that if the Hungarians were not so lazy a different opinion of this fruitful kingdom would be appropriate. The 1811 edition, however, highlighted the former individual Hungarian statehood.

A fundamental change in the way the Hungarians were viewed occurred in the second part of the eighteenth century due to the travel narratives detailing visits to Hungary. Travellers who had gathered misleading information in Vienna had a pleasant surprise in Hungary. The road conditions were not that terrible, there was enough food, and the country was fertile and mostly cheap. It is no surprise that the French prisoner of war Francois Dellard wrote that in spite of the arduous journey and all the trials of their captivity "we lived quite well, food was cheap and easy to buy. A goose for instance cost not more than six or seven sous, a pound of mutton or beef was not more than three sous and lots of kinds of vegetables were available and a bottle of wine cost only four sous."

As for the travellers, the thesis examines in detail the records by the Lyon merchant Jean-Claude Flachet, the secretary of Marqui l'Hôpital, Saint Priest and Charles-Marie d'Yrumbery Salaberry. A wide range of travellers came to Hungary such as employees, travellers in search of scientific knowledge, diplomats, tourists wishing to have a nice time, to satisfy their curiosity or to gain experience, and also those French traveller who had left his country because of the Revolution.

The Hungarian economy mainly attracted the diplomats of the second half of the eighteenth century. It became a generally accepted idea that it was not only the Turkish oppression that caused Hungary's backwardness but also the short-sighted Viennese economics that kept giving preference to the hereditary provinces even though Hungary had all it took to become a rich country.

So, in the second part of the eighteenth century Hungary had become the land of possibilities both for the French diplomacy and the settlers who arrived here with bread-and-butter worries. The basic idea of the economic plan worked out by the French consul of Trieste De la Vergne was that the Hungarian economy could be linked to the Mediterranean world-trade system by encouraging Adriatic commerce. (Naturally, French diplomacy was interested in causing damage to the English in the Mediterranean commerce and in this respect the Hungarian corn and a number of products could have become marketable throughout the world. De la Vergne's report, in fact, was examining a historical possibility that failed to materialise.)

On compiling the catalogue of the *hungarica* relating to the eighteenth century³ the intention was to include all the works that provided important data on the image of the Hungarians. The Appendix also includes the records of two French prisoners of the revolutionary wars, those of François Dellard and Joseph Hautière, whose writings had never been previously examined.

3) *The findings of this thesis and the possible aspects of further work*

The most important findings of this thesis are as follows.

3.1. By examining these sources the thesis primarily aims to grasp and introduce the process by which the French of the eighteenth century (influenced by all the temptations of the imprints of the past) discovered Hungary, for Europe and for themselves. Starting out from the seventeenth-century roots, the thesis uncovers the modification undergone by the image of the Hungarians in the eighteenth century. It is especially in the 1760s that this image became an elaborate one, though not exclusively dependent on politics as the experiences of individuals obtained a more and more important role.

3.2. In compiling the bibliographies, the collection of the *hungarica* relating to this subject have been expanded.

3.3. When examining the way the French perceived the Hungarians in the eighteenth century, this thesis is the first to have used two sources that had not been known before: the French ambassador to Constantinople Sain Priest's observations and the records of the first prisoners of the revolutionary wars captured in Hungary.

3.4. We touch upon the French reception of this image of the Hungarians when we investigate De la Vergne's report, a historical possibility that did not come about.

An example of a chance that did materialise was the Fourcroy-plan, inspired by the Mining Academy of Selmeç, that established the predecessor of the famous École polytechnique, the institution of the École des travaux publiques in Paris.

3.4.1. The full analysis of the bibliography by Vanel may reveal new and important pieces of information.

³ To be found in the *Appendix* of the dissertation.

3.4.2. The catalogue of the *hungarica* relating to the eighteenth century could and must be expanded because there are innumerable expanded re-éditions to individual pieces of work. What is added or taken away when a re-édition is published? The result is quite informative as can be seen as the thesis contrasts the three Vosgin editions.

3.4.3. The best of the biographies relating to the eighteenth-century image of the Hungarians have not yet been touched on. (It is not only the 1715 biography of Fráter György by Béchet that we mean since the matters of various kinds of famous persons, e.g. kings, women and generals relating to Hungary have not been widely examined at all.)

3.4.4. We believe that the thorough reconsideration of the history of the Hungarian-French technical and mechanical relations may also reveal new findings.