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The French-language press and travel narratives as a reflection of Hungary
(1837-1847)

Abstract of a PhD thesis

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The topic for this thesis is a subject of the Hungarian-French relations that has insufficiently been researched until now. It is the introduction and the analysis of the image of Hungary and the Hungarian society on the basis of two types of sources, a literary genre, the travel narrative (*récit de voyage*), and a non-narrative one, the information published by the press. The time frame of the thesis (1837-1847) is the period of the Hungarian reform age that was familiar to the readers in the West. By 1837, the first actual reform Parliament (1832-1836) had ended and the political trials conducted by Vienna (e.g. the Kossuth trial) gained publicity in the French press and focused attention on Hungary. Besides, this period saw attempts at political, economic and social reforms in both of these countries. 1847 was the last "year of peace" before the revolutions of 1848 that brought about a completely new situation.

The groups of sources that have been analysed were constituted by the travel narratives about Hungary published between 1837 and 1847, the articles discussing travel narratives or their abstracts published in French magazines during the July Monarchy (1830-1848), the travel narratives about Hungary or their abstracts published in travel compilations and the articles on Hungary published by the political press.

We are aware that it would be impossible to introduce the entire image of Hungary because beside other written sources, (e.g. historical and geographical publications, literary works of art), traditions and certain interests also shape the opinion of a given age on a given issue.

Inevitably, the thesis will also survey and evaluate those earlier Hungarian and French-language publications that were dealing with this subject.

The first part, an investigation of the travel narratives, will outline the history and the characteristics of this genre, the attempts made by 18th century French authors from Diderot to De Gérando to establish the standard rules of making journeys, and the main features of the transition of the readership at the turn of the 18th and the 19th centuries.

The genre of the travel narrative having existed for a considerably long time went through a significant renewal and transition in France at the end of the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th centuries. The decrease in the importance of circumnavigation and the English nobility's fashionable habit of the continental Grand Tour caused both the travellers and the readers to pay attention to the countries of Europe. The proliferation of both the routes and the travel narratives forced the philosophers of the period to prepare methodological references on the basis of which the travellers could set out on a journey armoured with methods (e.g. questionnaires) that would enable them to pursue investigation in a target country and to compile precise records utilising the same unique set of rules. This phenomenon had its roots in the transition of the concepts of travelling. The first signs of this process were the articles of the *Encyclopaedia* on travelling and the travel narrative *Voyage en Hollande* by Denis Diderot. The objectives of the new model travel narrative were not merely putting in writing what was seen and what impressions were

gained during the travels but it also had to represent the social reality of the given country.

Utilising a given method implies a given style or discourse. In the 18th century, besides the philosophical-political style established by Diderot, there appeared the scientific style represented by Horace-Bénédict de Saussure (1740-1799), the statistical discourse hallmarked by Constantin-François Volney (1757-1820) and the ethnosocial discourse introduced by Joseph-Marie de Gérando (1772-1842) in the genre of the travel narrative. The direct influence of Volney's statistic method and his questionnaire is also manifest in Marcel de Serres's *Voyage en Autriche*, written at the end of the first decade of the 19th century, partly dealing with Hungary, too.

The establishment of the "travelling methods" took place in parallel with the transition of the readership of the travel narratives. While the travel narratives kept their role as a means of relaxation, they also conquered a new kind of readership making a new type of reading possible. There appeared the "reading for interest" (*lecture intéressée*). In his *Leçons d'histoire*, Volney made it clear that by contributing to the mutual familiarisation, the travel narratives may assist the establishment of balanced inter-state relations. As understood by Talleyrand, who later on became the Foreign Secretary, reading travel narratives could also serve explicit political purposes, such as mapping out areas that could be colonised. The piece of work by Marcel de Serres that was purposely written for administrative experts may be considered as a specific foreign continuation of the statistical narrative that was started in the French

départments in 1801, when Home Secretary Jean-Antoine Chaptal was in office.

I. After both surveying the travel narratives about Hungary that were published in the 18th century and in the first part of the 19th century and analysing the circumstances of the journey and the publication, this thesis presents a thorough examination of the four most important works (by Marmont, Thouvenel, Démidoff and Marmier) of this period. The aspects of the examination are: a/ the route(s) taken, the regions and the towns, b/ the people of Hungary and the Hungarian society. Social conflicts, attempts at modernisation. Nation and the problem of the nationalities. Personal meetings with famous people; c/ the travel narrative, as text. What sources does it use, how can it be written and what are the recurring topics? On the basis of the analysis, the findings are the following:

1. In the 19th century, travelling – and consequently, the genre of the travel narrative – "became fashionable" again due to romanticism on the one hand, and transport, that had become increasingly easier and faster in Europe, on the other. The number of the passengers increased rapidly and old-typed passengers reappeared (e.g. immigrants or the first tourists). All these factors lead to the new golden age of travels in the 1830's and 1840's. Along with the new destinations, travels to the East managed to keep their popularity.

2. These changes were expressly beneficial for Hungary. As opposed to the 18th century, when not even the state of peace following the 1711 peace of Szatmár could increase the number of the travels of the French to Hungary,

(or at least the number of those appearing in the travel narratives), the decades immediately before the revolution of 1848 saw development in this respect, too. It was found that in France, during the less than three decades between 1818 and 1846, more printed reports of travels to Hungary were published than in the whole 18th century. The progress was given real impetus at the beginning of the 1830's when steamships entered into service and made shipping considerably easier on the Danube. This also brought about the decrease of the distance between the East and the West. The increase of the interest was also reflected in the faster and faster release of the travel narratives. All this, however, did not make Hungary a primary destination in the 1830's and the 1840's. It remained a "subregion" of the travels. The travellers interested either in the "Eastern issue", the present and the future of the Turkish empire, or the fate of the Slavic peoples – especially the Poles – of Central Europe usually arrived from the West and left Hungary for the Southeast regions.

3. All of Marshal Marmont, Count Démidoff, Edouard de Thouvenel and Xavier Marmier used this method. They travelled through Hungary in the 1830's and 1840's, their reports were published between 1837 and 1846, shortly after the end of the travels. All of them belonged to the contemporary élite but each of them represented a distinct type of travellers. Marshal Marmont expatriated himself after decades of pursuing a military and political career. The Russian born Anatole de Démidoff (Anatolij Démidov) embodied the prodigal dandy turning into a conqueror. Apparently, Edouard de Thouvenel came to Central Europe on a kind of a

study trip. Xavier Marmier was the most similar to the notion of the modern tourist; his travel narrative however is not at all a report of the bodily and mental experiences accumulated during the journey. Since all of them were well known in the France of the July Monarchy it is right to suppose that their travel narratives strongly influenced the image the contemporary French reader could form of Hungary.

4. The image of Hungary suggested by the travel narratives is less heterogeneous than what the differences relating to time and the styles would allow. On dividing the narratives into two parts (environment and society), it will be seen that the perception of the geographical environment, the "landscape", depended on two factors, the route chosen and the means of transportation.

Marshal Marmont, who, unlike the others, only travelled by land, is different from the others in the respect of the routes he chose, as well. His first travel to Hungary was a round trip in Western Hungary in 1831, then, in 1834, he passed through Northern Transdanubia and the Great Plane. Thus, he could report on geographical and social phenomena (e.g. Lake Balaton or the enormous villages of the Great Plane) that remained invisible for the others. As a result, his narratives provide a practically balanced representation of the urban, rural and uninhabited landscapes.

The other three travellers, at different times though, followed the Vienna-Pressburg-Pest-Mohács-Pétersvárad route and they mainly travelled by steamships inside Hungary. Thus, their narratives were necessarily limited to the representation of the stops and the riverside area of the Danube. As

the ports were usually situated in towns, this circumstance also contributed to reports dominated by the urban landscape, which had been converted into an actual topic of the accounts. Pressburg, Komárom, Esztergom, Pest-Buda and Mohács were almost obligatory stages of the journeys and the narratives.

5. The prevailing part of the representation of the urban landscape is taken up by the exterior, architectural features and this was characteristic of the travel narratives of the first part of the 19th century. In the narratives, each Hungarian town was associated with an almost definite function. Pressburg, the scene of the coronation and the Parliaments, receives a political character, Komárom, renowned for its fortress, gains a military one. Being the seat of the prince-primate and the construction of the new basilica made Esztergom an ecclesiastical town. The pair made up of Pest and Buda occupied a principal part in all the narratives. Every author mentioned the contrast between Buda, the town living on its past, and Pest, the perpetually mobile cradle of capitalist development, the token of the future. Without exception, the descriptions of the two towns ended up as essays on the country's present and the political and social obstacles to economic development. In the case of Mohács, all the travellers evoked the memory of the battle of 1526.

Besides the routes and the means of transportation, what may also account for the prevalence of the urban landscapes in the travel narratives on the one hand (even though ninety percent of Hungary's population lived in villages or homesteads) is that the travellers were trying to draw analogies

between Hungary and the countries they had set out of. On the other, as from the 18th century, the description of the urban landscape gained more and more emphasis in the reports of travels for further reasons, as well.

6. The search for analogies, i.e. explaining the unknown with what is known, was relatively frequent in Marshal Marmont's travel narratives, but later on this phenomenon started to fade away and became almost extinct in Marmier's works. This indicates Hungary's transition from *terra incognita* into a well-known region.

7. All the reports introduce the Hungarian nobility as a dominant factor of the society. Armoured with the almost omnipotent authority, this order constituted the only politically mature social class. The French reports present the Hungarian aristocracy in rather contradictory ways. Even though they mention the existence of a "liberal" or "reformist party", the Hungarian noblemen were depicted as the impeters of development because of their senseless insistence on their privileges and because they kept the peasants in humiliating servitude. The representation of the further social classes is much more fragmentary and the portrayal of the peasants is almost picturesque.

8. The surveys of the Hungarian reality and the prospects of the future inclined all the travellers, without exception, to give advice and even lessons sometimes. All of them advocated the abolition of the nobility's privileges and the emancipation of the serfs, which they considered as the pledge of the future. Their motives were different though. Marshal Marmont, for instance, gave a "generous" reproof in liberalism; while

Thouvenel proposed the correction in order to eschew an impending social disaster. In certain cases all these pieces of advice reinforced the image that Hungary was a backward country where the feudal heritage (and the opposition of the Vienna government) wrecked every attempt at modernisation.

9. The travel narratives practically did not deal with the ethnic conflicts at all. The travellers merely mentioned that there were nationalities living in Hungary at the time. The accounts by Thouvenel and Marmier, however, shed a particular light on the issue of the emancipation of the Jews. According to these works, the Jews occupying a lower social level took their revenge by imposing financial dependence on the Hungarian nobility. This rather tendentious report is obviously a result of the information transmitted by the biased Hungarian nobility: Marmier went as far as to talk about the *holocaust carried out by the Jews*.

10. The actual presence of the Hungarians in the narratives is the result of the encounters. These encounters could not always render actual communication possible because the common language was absent many times. When communication did take place, it almost always happened at pre-planned and organised meetings with illustrious partners. Marshal Marmont met with prominent persons exclusively, while Xavier Marmier was able to become acquainted with the "man in the street", too.

The other method of representing an individual person was to put down famous people's deeds or thoughts. With the exception of Marshal Marmont, it was Count Széchenyi István who embodied Hungary's hope

for a rebirth. The representations of the other important historic figures (such as Joseph II) were much more contradictory.

11. The analogies between the travel narratives can mainly be explained with the travellers reading mostly the same works about Hungary, even though Xavier Marmier was the only one to attach the list of his readings to his book. The sources include earlier travel narratives and Count Démidoff also mentioned Marmont's thoughts concerning the Hungarian peasant post. Despite of all this, there appeared changes in the choice of subject of the travel narratives between 1837 and 1846. While Marshal Marmont showed interest in the stud farms and the mines, the others concerned themselves with the case of the Chain Bridge or the debates in the Parliament.

12. Besides the representation of the towns and the nobility, five further topics turned up in all the travel narratives that are the coronation, taxation, the new basilica in Esztergom, the spas and the Hungarian history. All this also contributed to the association of the image of the country with permanent features. However, the representation of the Hungarian history did show some slight development. Even though it was still dominated by the Turkish occupation of Hungary, an explanation for the failure to keep pace with the West, the descriptions grew more and more organised and the information on the contradictory relations with Austria slowly started to come out, as well.

13. The examination of the French reading habits drew attention to the fact that, for financial reasons, the travel narratives were written for the élite of

the given age. Thus, the narratives themselves were not able to influence a broad audience. The stopgap compilations of travel narratives failed to provide a more accurate image of Hungary because they did not focus on Europe therefore they devoted exceedingly small parts to the works on Hungary. What is more, they transmitted a rather typified image by publishing details and abstracts most frequently; hence it was impossible to get familiar with the social features and phenomena depicted by the travel narratives.

II. The second large unit of this thesis focuses on the analysis of the image of Hungary transmitted by the press. After introducing the periodicals of this examination (e.g. *Revue des Deux Mondes*, *Revue de Paris*, *Magasin pittoresque*, *Journal des Débats*) and reviewing their development, it will evaluate the articles and news that were written explicitly about Hungary. It will investigate the types and the origins of the bits of information. Under what circumstances (e.g. time lags) were they published? What influences did these articles reflect? How significant was Hungary for the contemporary French press? What issues came up in connection with Hungary? Parliaments, crime, political trials and social conflicts. The place of Hungary inside the Hapsburg empire.

I. The representational methods of the contemporary French press were much more ideologically influenced than those of the travel narratives; hence they broke the image of the Hungarian society in a sense. During the July Monarchy, having got rid of the legal, administrative and fiscal obstacles of the Bourbon Restoration (1814-1830), similarly to the travel

narratives, the French press was also at one of its golden ages. The various political views and needs paved the way for the free political press. At the same time, new-typed newspapers were also published.

2. One of the most important common features of the articles under analysis is that they almost entirely lacked any reference to the geographical environment or circumstances.

3. The articles in the *Revue de Paris* dealing with Hungary were based on German sources. What they revealed about Hungary was the image of a backward country over which the nobility reigned and the obstacles created by nationalism wrecked the scarce attempts at reforms. To be sure, these articles used the words resembling the Hungarian political discourse (e.g. "colonisation", "exploitation") but mentioning Hungary's problems merely served to intensify the concerns about the future of Austria's position as a leading power.

4. The *Revue des Deux Mondes* issued a number of articles that were closely or distantly related to travels to Hungary. Besides publishing the abstracts and certain chapters of travel narratives that were also released as books, there also appeared studies that were actually inspired by the experiences of a journey made in Central Europe. Both Cyprien Robert and Hyppolite Desprez published two articles of this kind. The experiences of the journeys, however, carried a limited significance only and merely provided the frames for the studies. Both these authors were Slavophile Slavists and they investigated both Hungary and the Hungarian question from a particular point of view. The central issue of the four texts was the

confrontation between the nationalities of Central Europe, a subject almost entirely absent from the "traditional" travel narratives.

5. However, the two authors evaluated their experience in different ways. Cyprien Robert practically put an equality sign between the Hungarians and the rest of the "Graeco-Slavic" peoples of Eastern Europe and presented the conflict that had arose between the Hungarian liberals and the conservatism of the Vienna government in the Parliament of 1843-44 in a straight manner. Hyppolite Desprez described the Hungarian nobility as the nationalist "oppressors" of the other peoples living in Hungary. These texts also contain pieces of advice regarding the future. Since both authors evaluated the issues of Central Europe in their globality, the advice they gave to the Hungarians was to make peace with the other nationalities and to establish the confederation of the peoples along the Danube.

6. The *Magasin pittoresque*, the first representative of the popular magazines, targeted a much broader readership than its predecessors and provided little and fragmentary information on Hungary. Thus, it is just to state that it is more than controversial whether this type of source could have contributed to the formation of the country's image during the July Monarchy.

7. Concerning the national political daily newspapers, this thesis analyses the articles relating to Hungary published in the *Journal des Débats*, that had turned conservative by that time. By nature, this paper offered a rather politicised image of Hungary. Thus, most of the reports dealt with the functioning of a political institution, the Hungarian Parliament. Regarding

the image of the country, the features indicating conflicts dominated these records. Besides the "traditional" opposition between the two chambers of the Parliament, there also appeared the difference between the liberals and the conservatives and so did the struggle between the national-liberal opposition and the Vienna government.

In addition to the incomprehension that had met the early "immobility" of the Parliament and the slightly contemptuous discourse, a particular characteristic of 1839 and 1840, the French press gradually started to cover the issues negotiated by the Parliament. The legal reforms and the emancipation of the Jewish population were permanent and important subjects of this era. Among the issues related closely or distantly to the parliament, the question of the Catholic-Protestant mixed marriages and that of the peasant movements in 1837 are easy to spot. Approaching 1848, the reports grew more balanced; the opinion of the liberal opposition practically gained as much publicity as that of the aulic. The articles also clearly indicated that the opposition lead by Kossuth Lajos was playing a more and more important role in the Parliament commencing in November 1847. The fact that the subjects of the parliamentary debates practically did not change during these ten years implies that the differences between the two sides prevented the comprehensive modernisation of the country, and their elimination only seemed possible by a revolution.

8. In many of the cases, the news on Hungary published in the *Journal des Débats* was shallow. This phenomenon was particularly apparent during 1839 and 1840. In other cases the records by the French contemporaries

(e.g. Cyprien Robert) were in flat contradiction to certain articles of the paper. The methods of the contemporary French press to accumulate information account for this. The editors, lacking the news agencies and the special correspondents, had to rely on the papers published in Germany which were often supervised by the Vienna government.

9. Subjects other than politics only acquired secondary importance and gained little publicity in this era. To sum it up, the *Journal des Débats* reported on a multinational country with various religions dominated by the social stratification originating in the feudal system where, until 1848, the Court of Vienna kept rejecting the liberal and philanthropic reforms of the parliamentary opposition. Certain subjects however, the reform of the judicial system for instance, aroused interest in France, for domestic reasons, though.

10. The local press, as it is shown by the example of the *Précurseur de l'Ouest* of Angers, was confined from time to time to publishing, in a random and often fragmentary way, articles about certain events that had taken place in Hungary. This led to the failure to provide the readership with a rounded picture of any kind about Hungary. The only rule that could be found in this case was the "scoop-hunting", the effort to present exceptional – mainly shocking – events. Besides, the frequency of certain issues (e.g. fires) shows that what determined the content of the reports on Hungary was the local or domestic interest and not the events taking place in Central Europe. To be sure, Hungary was present in this type of press at least but this presence was rather marginal.

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