

András Bodor

and the history of classical studies
in Transylvania in the 20th century

Csaba Szabó



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Introduction

Writing a biography is a provoking task. It is one of the ultimate genres of historiography and also one of the oldest: from the biographies of Summerian kings, Egyptian pharaohs, Roman emperors through the hagiographies of saints and monumental biographies of politicians and statesmen, intellectual biographies represent a relatively new type of work in modern historiography. In Romanian literature, intellectual biographies are much rarer. The current 'renaissance' of histories of archaeological thought and history of archaeology in Romania contributed to several important studies, focusing on biographic paths and personal heritages.¹

This short biography of András Bodor, classicist, historian and university professor is part of this new trend, in Romania and beyond. This work contextualises the personal life, academic carrier and intellectual heritage of a personality from the 20th century in a much broader, European context.

This work arrives after several important previous contributions on university history and the intellectual history of Transylvania and Romania in the 20th century, and anticipates hopefully a more intense focus on this topic.² The personal and academic life of Bodor unites not only four major macro-historical periods – the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its intellectual heritage, the interwar period, the Communist era, and the post-communist period – but also several academic networks – Hungarians, Romanians and foreigners too. It is a long, more than eight-decade long life and career, with several characteristic features relating to a Hungarian intellectual from central-eastern Europe in the 20th century, but with the addition of numerous unique features that makes his heritage even more interesting.

This book aims to present not only the life and academic heritage of Bodor through a large number of unpublished primary sources and documents, but also to contextualise him within the intellectual history of Cluj, Transylvania, Romania, and European classics as well. In this sense the book has two major objectives: to publish a significant part of the newly identified sources of the 'Bodor-heritage', and also to contextualise his work in a broader sense, along the way reopening some important discussions on the history of classics in Transylvania, the interaction of Hungarian and Romanian academic networks, the role of major political changes in the life of Bodor and the Hungarian academic elite, and the changing faces of Romania over the last one hundred years.

¹ Szabó-Bolindeţ 2017.

² See also the first sub-chapter.

Research history and sources

The earliest part of András Bodor's heritage was prepared by Bodor himself at the end of the 1980s. In this period – probably after he became professor emeritus and later pensioned, Bodor prepared his memoirs. His autobiographical notes were collected in two separate volumes, the first one focusing on the period of 1915-1948, while the second continues with the period of 'Bolyai University' from 1948-1959. These notes were finished around 1989 or before, but never published: they were kept in his home office until his death. In the same period, Bodor also prepared what he called his 'Selected Papers', which he intended to release with Kriterion Publishing. This typewritten manuscript containing 29 articles still remains to be published.³ From the period of 1990-1999 several interviews – one for Duna television and a detailed life-interview by Károly Vekov – were given by András Bodor, but, unfortunately, none are available for researchers yet.⁴

András Bodor died in 1999 at the age of 84. As member of several academic and religious institutions and associations, numerous obituaries were published at the time, representing an important assemblage of secondary sources.⁵ From before his death we have a few short, encyclopaedic biographies, especially from Hungarian publications and his personal, academic CV's. After Bodor's death, his family and legal executors – his son, István Bodor, and nephew, Péter Bodor – divided elements of his estate and donated them to several different institutions. The largest part was offered to the Archives of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church between 1999-2005. A significant part of the collection – mostly photographs and some of his library – remained in the custody of István Bodor and Péter Bodor.

The donation to the Unitarian Church comes as a recognition of Bodor's long-lasting – but not always peaceful – relationship with his church. The donations to the Unitarian Archives and Library was in two major parts: the first – to the Library of the Church – contains the largest part of Bodor's personal library (mostly books on ancient history, archaeology, and Hungarian literature), a large collection of articles, abstracts and photographs on ancient Roman artefacts, as well as several manuscripts and collections of notes. The second part of his legacy to the Unitarian Church consists of the selected, well-organised, and probably long-prepared also, correspondence of András Bodor from the period 1932-1999. His correspondence is presented chronologically in boxes, spanning usually 10-20 years. The overall majority (90%) of the 1348 letters relate to family correspondence, while a much smaller amount – 107 letters, published also in this volume – represents Bodor's academic correspondence.⁶ A significant number of letters and documents focus on the short history of the Bolyai Society from the early 1990s. These files are still unpublished and not researched.⁷

³ See also Chapter V.

⁴ Verbal confirmation of Károly Vekov (1947-2020) and his son, Géza Vekov.

⁵ See also the obituary of I. Csucsujá: Csucsujá 2012.

⁶ See Chapter IX.

⁷ Gál 1990.

In the same period, few years after Bodor's death, the family donated the manuscript of his memoirs to the Jakabffy Library, Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár). This was later digitised by a team of young scholars and students coordinated, by Nándor Bárdi, however the digitised text was never published. A few passages, newly translated, from this memoir are presented here, notably in Chapter IV, focusing on Bodor's life.

Over the year 2008-2009, the author of these present lines worked on a commemorative (*in memoriam*) volume dedicated to András Bodor. During this period, I conducted several interviews with my former professors at the Babeş-Bolyai University from Cluj (Mária Makó Lupescu, Károly Vekov, Judit Pál, Elek Csetri), and also with István Bodor, the son of the historian. The aim of the prepared volume was to commemorate the heritage of Bodor, the only classicist of the Hungarian school of history from the 20th century. During this period I faced several objections and problems, which provoked me to engage in a more detailed research on the life of this interesting, and in many ways unusual, personality. Although that volume dedicated to Bodor was never finished and failed as an initiative, the brief research undertaken in 2008-2009 into his life opened numerous, unanswered questions.

In 2016, a year after what would have been his 100th birthday, the Department of History at Babeş-Bolyai University organised a commemoration of András Bodor. As part of this event, I presented a short paper on his life and academic contribution.⁸ This occasion also made it possible to speak again with the family, establishing a *longue durée* research project, which will focus on the systematic digitisation and analysis of Bodor's heritage. The family, in collaboration with the Jakabffy Library, very kindly agreed that I might access the manuscripts of his memoirs, digitised by Izabella Györgyjakab and Réka Vas.

2017-2018 found me researching the archives of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church in Cluj, under the supervision of Lehel Molnár and Sándor Kovács. As part of this project, I digitised Bodor's photographic material of ancient monuments and inscriptions (around 200 photographs), and partially also his manuscripts, abstracts, and articles. In this period, together with Attila Kovács, we digitised the 29 selected papers of Bodor lodged with Kriterion Publishing.

From September 2018 to May 2019, in the same institution, I worked on the digitisation of the Bodor's correspondence (1348 letters), linked to a short project financed by the Bethlen Gábor Alap and the Hungarian Government.⁹ The project was hosted by the Transylvanian Museum Society. Some of the digitised material is already in a database, online at the Transylvanian Digital Database.¹⁰

In May 2019 I spent 2 weeks in Oxford, as research guest of Harris Manchester College, researching the history of the college and some of the photographs and documents of the alumni from 1937-1939 – the period Bodor also studied there. As a consequence of my Oxford trip, I got in touch with Prof. Péter Somogyi, one of the

⁸ See also the bibliography of Bodor in Chapter X.1.

⁹ Webpage of the project: <https://bodorandras.wordpress.com/> (accessed: 15.12.2019).

¹⁰ <https://eda.eme.ro/handle/10598/31430> (accessed: 15.12.2019).

leading Hungarian researchers at Oxford: he offered me his digitised correspondence with Bodor from 1985-1993.¹¹

Based on Bodor's correspondence, and the personal photographs received from Péter Bodor, I was able to find one of the last students of Prof. Masaoki Doi, a well-known Japanese classicist, who had a long-lasting friendship and academic relationship with Bodor. In October 2019, Prof. Hirofumi Yoneyama visited Cluj and gave a lecture at the Doctoral School of the Department of History at Babeş-Bolyai.

This present book stems in part from the above-mentioned research phases from 2017-2019, however there are several phases left to complete. As part of the agreement with the family and the digitisation project, in the near future I will publish the memoirs of András Bodor (1915-1959), as well as his 'Selected Papers'. There are several other important categories of primary sources related to the life and heritage of Bodor that need to be researched in the future: e.g. his correspondence relating to the Bolyai Society, and several documents from the archives of the Romanian Secret Services from the 1950s and 1970s.¹² These documents need an interdisciplinary and careful approach, and historians capable of dealing with these extremely problematic issues in terms of contemporary Romanian historiography.

Acknowledgements

This book is the result of a long, personal journey too. It began in 2008, when I choose to study ancient Roman religion and the history of Antiquity, despite the pressure of my professors from Cluj, who suggested I focus on Hungarian Medieval history, or Byzantine history.¹³ Finding my way between various school of Hungarian historiographic traditions, which persist in the recent educational system in Romania, I found a 'role model' in the personal life, academic versatility, and choices of András Bodor. This led me to study his life and problematic legacy, which opened several doors for me and provided the opportunity to enlarge globally my academic network, from Oxford to Tokyo. I am therefore most grateful, first of all, to András Bodor, although I am already from a generation who never met him personally. His family, István Bodor, Gyöngyvér Bodor, and Péter Bodor merit special thanks for their generosity and collaboration. This book is dedicated to their family and the memory of András Bodor.

I am indebted to my professors at Babeş-Bolyai University, especially István Bajusz, Károly Vekov, Mária Makó Lupescu, and Judit Pál, who helped me in the early days of this research. I owe my gratitude to Sándor Kovács and Lehel Molnár from the Library and Archives of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church. Their kindness and help contributed substantially to the organisation of the prime material.

¹¹ The letters between Péter Somogyi and András Bodor are only partially published in this volume, the large corpus of letters and the complete documentation of the Transylvanian Academic Exchange programme will need a separate research project.

¹² Written confirmation of Csongor János.

¹³ I recall here, especially, my former professor of modern history, Judit Pál, who introduced me for the first time to the curious case of András Bodor in 2008.

Izabella Györgyjakab, Réka Vas, and Nándor Bárdi all made enormous contributions to the digitisation of the memoirs. Attila Kovács, Csilla Lehel, and Gyula H. Szabó helped me with the digitisation of Bodor's selected papers. Mátyás Bajusz, from the Transylvanian Museum of History, Cluj, was kind enough to help me considerably with the preparation of the research. I also received a most positive response and encouragement of my project from the Transylvanian Museum Society, especially from Enikő Bitay and Júlia Szilágyi. Intense discussions and advice from researchers and colleagues at the Historical Research Institute of the Museum Society helped me also to contextualise more realistically the role and impact of Bodor in the sphere of Transylvanian historiography.

I owe my deepest gratitude to Susan Killoran from the Library of Harris Manchester College, who helped me so much during my stay there. Similarly, Simon Blackmore and Andrew Wilson from the Oxford Institute of Archaeology guided me in terms of some of the details about the lives and correspondence of Sheppard Frere and András Bodor, which are published also in this book.

Furthermore, I am most grateful to Prof. Hirofumi Yoneyama from Hosei University Senior High School, who not only helped me reconstruct the friendship and relationship between Masaoki Doi and András Bodor, but also found time to visit Cluj to commemorate this long-lasting bond of Hungarian-Japanese friendship.

Prof. Wolfgang Haase from Berlin, Prof. Péter Somogyi from Oxford, and Prof. Tibor Szilágyi from Târgu Mureş (Marosvásárhely) also provided me with considerable assistance in researching some of the key details and problematic questions regarding Bodor's activities and academic carrier. I cannot exclude from this list the help of Csongor Jánosi and Gyula Dávid, both of whom helped me with valuable information regarding the darker, and not yet researched, elements of Bodor's past, and his contribution in the 1956 revolutionary events in Cluj.

I owe my deepest gratitude to Ágoston Fehér, who sacrificed his free time to translate this text from my original, Hungarian manuscript.

Finally, I owe a huge debt of thanks to my family, friends, and colleagues from Cluj, Budapest, Sibiu, Satu Mare, and Oxford too, who supported me over the last 2 or 3 years. David Davison and his team at Archaeopress Publishing Ltd, Oxford, have kindly seen this work through to publication and I am most grateful.

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Biographies and historiographic reflections

András Bodor (1915-1999) is the only Hungarian representative of Transylvanian classical studies who has achieved international recognition. His rich intellectual and scientific legacy, his substantial role as a teacher, and also his role within the Transylvanian education policy are an essential, but, for the time being, undocumented legacy of 20th-century Transylvanian-Hungarian cultural history and historical studies. This volume seeks to compensate for the absence of a scientific history by, firstly analysing Bodor's work as a classicist and, more broadly, to describe it within the historical context of European and International classical studies and also in the light of new biographical and historical sources. Our study will assess Bodor's main research themes, examining their intellectual background, their significance within the historiography, and his evolution as an intellectual and teacher. We will also look at Bodor's development within Transylvanian university life and intellectual history, based on new and unpublished sources (recollections and correspondences).

One of the oldest traditions of historiography is what we might call 'biography writing', which analyses an historical period through the life of one or more important personalities. Hellenistic biographic literature, and later the emperor-biographies from Roman historiography, created a tradition that established and made possible the biographies of great historical figures, and later the creation of 'holy lives' (hagiographies).¹⁴ Historical biographies and the search for intellectual pathways have now become a sub-disciplinary method of research within historiography, through which not only the reconstruction of the life path of an historian, but also his or her historiographical vision, evaluation of history, and the peculiarities of the cultural, social and political history of the era, are subsequently revealed.¹⁵ However, the analysis of historians' pathways is a self-reflection and also an inward retrospective of a certain discipline: a necessary feature of the social and human sciences that appeared at the end of the 19th century and begins to emerge and reach its present, prosperous era from the end of the 20th century. The works within reception history and the history of disciplines – which we must understand as a specific version of the history of historiography – recently became particularly popular in the fields of archaeology and classical studies. The lives and professional works of many prominent classicists and archaeologists of the 19th and 20th centuries have been recently presented in monographic form, primarily based on their correspondence and biography analysis, as well as for the contextual interpretation of their scientific work. Without being exhaustive, researches into the works of

¹⁴Popkin 2005; Caine 2010; Renders *et al.* 2016.

¹⁵Ambrosius 2004.

Rodolfo Lanciani,¹⁶ Theodor Mommsen,¹⁷ Franz Cumont,¹⁸ Francis Haverfield,¹⁹ Moses Finley,²⁰ Robin Collingwood,²¹ William Collingwood,²² Alföldi András,²³ and Ronald Syme²⁴ should be noted as among the most significant examples of international literature. The large number of such works indicates the need for the self-reflection of classical studies as a discipline, and, according to some, it also indicates its crisis in the 21st century and its period of reconsideration and changes of paradigms.²⁵ At the same time the detailed analysis of scientific careers is important not only for the history of the discipline in question, and for the history of historiography, but, through the statement of primary sources, they provide an insight into the social, cultural and political history of an era.

The self-reflection of local, Romanian archaeology and classical studies started in the second half of the 20th century through the work of Zsigmond Jakó, Volker Wollmann, Radu Ardevan, and, last but not least, through that of András Bodor.²⁶ However, the ‘Romanian Renaissance’ of the history of classical studies and research into scientific career paths undoubtedly began with the paradigmatic work of the historian Zoltán Vincze, whose research played an important role both in re-launching the Hungarian School of Archaeology from Transylvania, paving the way for its own identity search, and also in boosting research into the history of archaeological thought.²⁷ Over the past ten years, as part of the process he started, several important works of history and research on archaeological biographies have been published in the Transylvanian specialised literature.²⁸ To this phenomenon, however, are closely related the emerging researches into university and intellectual history in the Hungarian and Romanian historiography.²⁹ In a similar way, the history of classical studies – especially, classical philology – is a trending phenomenon in Romania, although there are no systematic works on this topic as yet.³⁰

In the light of these research and historiographic tendencies, Bodor András’s professional work, and the analysis and interpretation of his scientific legacy, are an integral part of this trend and at the same time a completing element of local historiographic tendencies, which, up until now, only analysed in any detail mainly the primary sources and biographies from the 19th century.³¹

¹⁶ Palombi 2006.

¹⁷ Rebenich 2007.

¹⁸ Bonnet 1997.

¹⁹ Freeman 2007.

²⁰ Jew *et al.* 2016.

²¹ Boucher-Smith 2013.

²² Craig 2018.

²³ Richardson-Santangelo 2015.

²⁴ Garcia 2016.

²⁵ Beard 2013.

²⁶ For research history, see: Szabó-Bolindeț 2017; Szabó 2017a.

²⁷ Vincze 2014. For a detailed analysis of the history of Transylvanian archeology, see: Szabó 2019a.

²⁸ Ardevan 2011; Ardevan 2012; Boda 2014; Gáll 2012; Gáll 2014; Petruț 2017.

²⁹ See the mini-monographs in the series entitled: ‘Personalități ale Universității Babeș-Bolyai I-VII’ from the University Press of Cluj-Napoca.

³⁰ Ciocârlie 2014; Ardevan *et al.* 2017.

³¹ Transylvanian archaeological, historiographic, and classical studies dealt primarily with the archeology of the Hungarian Dualist era, with very few studies focusing on the period before 1867 and after 1920. See also: Szabó 2013; Pețan 2018.