

The Significance of Péter Bod as a Historiographer in the Light of the Change of the 18th Century's Paradigm

ESZTER GYÓRFFY

The Changes of Historiography in the 17-18th Century in Europe

The interest towards history became stronger in contrast with the scholastic educational system in the age of Renaissance and Humanism (the influence of Reformation). Melanchthon (1497-1560) played an important role in this with his evangelical world history published in more volumes, which reflects the traditional Christian approach of history (providence). But Reformation did not generate a change in the paradigm. Debates between the followers of Reformation and Counter-Reformation meant a great leap forward in the aspect of research-methodology of history.¹

The Jesuit thinkers of the Counter-Reformation aimed at relying on authoritative and objective sources. By the end of the 17th century such works were published which drew the attention to the fact that one did not only have to collect the sources, but those sources also had to be suggested to academic critique.²

The godly dimension got to the periphery in historiography within the 18th century's thinking. History became separated from theology which meant that providence was replaced by the aspects of nature, geology and morality.

These academic and theoretical tendencies were reached Transylvania by the peregrines students. Péter Bod was one these students, who gave a new stimulus to the Hungarian historiography after they got home.

The Antecedents of the Transylvanian Historiography in the 17th Century, the Beginning of the Ecclesiastical Historiography

Before demonstrating Péter Bod's historiographic activity, some thoughts about the antecedents of the Transylvanian- Hungarian in the 17th century must be discussed.

¹ Gunst Péter, *A magyar történetírás története*, p. 101.

² Jean Mabillon, a French Benedictine monk established the basis of source critique in his work titled *De re diplomatica libri* (1681). The aim of his followers and the other orders' historiographers was to demonstrate the history of the Catholic Church as realistic as it was possible. In: Gunst, *A magyar*, p. 102.

Transylvanian historiography was revived only in the second half of the 17th century, but it did not bring any innovations either in its methodology or its content compared to the usual historiography. Its characteristic features were determined by the detestation of Catholicism and by the strife of the denominations. The thought of Transylvanism was strengthened. Historiographers still stayed in the service of the Prince, except some like János Szalárdi, who wrote in Hungarian. In his work, called *Siralmas Krónika (Mournful Chronicle)* (1662-1664) he illustrated Transylvania's history from the bane of Mohács to the defeat of János Kemény (1526-1662). Although, he wrote as an eye-witness (he wrote in the third person singular), he already used sources.³ His peculiarity is his Calvinist-biblical approach.⁴ Among his contemporaries Szalárdi often mentioned Pál Medgyesi, whose view of history was also based on the Bible. This work is a bond between historiography preserving humanist traditions and the already developing Baroque memoirs.⁵

Among the historiographers of the Prince, the followings must be mentioned: János Bethlen, who wrote his works for the request of Apafi Mihály Prince.⁶ His nephew, Farkas Bethlen shaped a similar carrier as a historiographer. In his historical work, called *História*, he used consciously and of a high standards the archives.⁷

From these facts it can be estimated that the change completed in the 17th century's paradigm had not influenced either the Hungarian or the Transylvanian historiography. The Jesuit Gábor Hevenesi (1656-1715) started source researches systematically. After having collected the materials found in the archive, he systematised them and finally, he gathered them into volumes.⁸ This process had a great impact on the protestant historiography, although the protestant source collecting and historiography were not supported by the state

³ He asked for the last will of Gábor Bethlen from Teleki in order to complete his data. The guard of the archive in Gyulafehérvár had access to authentic data. (ex. Péter Alvinci's *Querela Hungariae pamphlet* about Gábor Bethlen's campaign; the paragraphs of the conclusion of peace at Linz; the orders of the Council at Szatmár)

⁴ He draws a parallel between the life of Israel and Transylvanian. Furthermore, he comments on the events as an eye-witness e.g. Rákóczi campaign.

⁵ Gunst, *A magyar*, p. 97.

⁶ Bethlen wrote his work titles *Rerum Transylvanicarum Libri quatuor* (Sibiu, 1663 in latin) in order to justify the Prince's Turkish-friend politic before Europe. The work is about the story of the declining country since the death of Gábor Bethlen (1629) with a sharp critique concerning the two Rákóczi György's personalities and politics. The other work of BETHLEN is *Historia rerum Transylvanicarum ab anno 1662* (1782-1783) which would have been the continuation of the previous one, but he did not get further than data collecting.

⁷ Gunst, *A magyar*, p. 97.

⁸ <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/>

authority. Therefore, the history of the Hungarian evangelical church and the Transylvanian Protestantism could “only” be in appendix in 1710.⁹

Even the works of Pál Debreceni Ember could only be published abroad because the censorship. His work of a source value was the first work with real Hungarian content, although it was still written in Latin. It was published in 1728 in Utrecht with the name and systematisation of Lampe.¹⁰ The title of the book was *Historica ecclesiae reformata in Hungaria et Transsylvania (The History of the Calvinist/Reformed Church)*.¹¹ This book became antiquated very early, but Debreceni established the basis of the Hungarian denominational historiography with this book.

The Golden Age of the academic and ecclesiastical activity was in the mid 18th century.¹²

The Short Biography of Péter Bod

The events highlighted in the following thoughts, had an impact on Péter Bod’s life and his carrier as a historiographer.¹³

Péter Bod was born in a székely family in Felsőcsernáton (Cernatul de Sus) in 1712. His father died very early; therefore the family lived in straitened circumstances. These circumstances impeded and delayed Péter Bod’s studies. At the age of 12 he learnt in the College of Nagyenyed, where the influence of János Apáczai Csere was perceptible. Péter Bod was a teacher at the school of Nagyenyed for three years in order to collect money for his further studies.

From 1732, he studied theology, because he wanted to be a minister. In this period, he read the already mentioned work of Pál Debreceni Ember, which aroused his interests towards history.¹⁴

The talented, but poor Péter Bod had many patrons, which influenced his later life. From 1733 he is the teacher of the son of Mihály Türi, who is the bailiff of the college of Nagyenyed. With the help of Mihály Türi, Péter Bod could be acquainted with Kata Bethlen countess, who helped him in his later life. He became the caretaker of the library of Nagyenyed and later he was the assistant teacher of Hebrew which meant financial support for him.

In 1739 he won a scholarship and with further help he managed to go to the University of Leiden where he perfected his studies. During this period,

⁹ Gunst, *A magyar*, p. 106.

¹⁰ Balogh Ferencz, *A magyar protestáns egyház történetének irodalma* p. 21.

¹¹ Gunst, *A magyar*, p. 106.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 107.

¹³ Péter Bods personal data was collected from his *Autobiography*.

¹⁴ Pruzsinszky Pál, *Bod Péter és kiválóbb egyházi munkái*, p. 89.

he did not only take theological courses, but he also studied history and science.¹⁵ During his trip, he could make up and bring home his own library.¹⁶

Returning home, he became the minister of Kata Bethlen's court. He served for six years in Olthévíz (Hoghiz). In 1744 he was ordained. He became not only the minister of the countess, but her librarian also.

Encouraged by Kata Bethlen, he got married in 1748 with Mária Enyedi, who died soon. During their 2-year marriage, the intelligent and sophisticated Mária Enyedi has a great impact on Péter Bod. Mára Enyedi aroused his interests in Romanians. Therefore he wrote about the union of the Romanian church for the first time.¹⁷

Until his death, he remained the minister of the Magyarigen community. During this period he wrote not just theological but historical books as well.¹⁸ In 1751 he married Zsuzsa Bánai.

In 1755 he was invited to teach at the theology of Marosvásárhely, but he rather remained a minister. In 1758 he became the clerk of the Gyulafehérvár diocese. After that he was elected to be the main clerk at the council of Kézdivásárhely in 1767.

By offending the Catholic Church with three of his works (one of them is historical), he was investigated and all of his books were confiscated. He died in the spring of 1769 before this case could have come to an end.

Péter Bod's Activity as a Historiographer

I am going to assess Péter Bod's role in the changing of the 18th century's paradigm in the light of his historical works.

*Istent vitézülő anyaszentegyházának históriája*¹⁹

Péter Bod intended to fill the shortfall of Hungarian ecclesiastical works. Except for the already mentioned Pál Ember's work there was no other real ecclesiastical work. In the beginning his intension was to translate an

¹⁵ Van Ondendorf: "Turtellinus Compendium" was examined by Mikó Imre, *Bod Péter élete és munkái*, p. 10.

¹⁶ The 700 kg-library consisted of 400-500 volumes. In: Gudor Botond, *Bod Péter történelemszemlélete és a románok történelme*, p. 107.

¹⁷ Gudor, *Bod Péter*, p. 108.

¹⁸ Mikó, *Bod Péter*, p. 32.

¹⁹ *Az Isten vitézkedő anyaszentegyháza állapotjának, és világ kezdetétől fogva a jelen való időig sokféle változásának rövid históriája. Melly az isten magyar népének hasznára egyben szedegettetett, és a dolgok nagyobb megvilágosításáért, a világ négy fő mappáival ki adatott*, Basilea, 1760, 496 p, 4 maps.

already existing ecclesiastical writing, but finally he decided to write his own. The book was published in 1760.

Péter Bod often quoted Mosheim in his universal ecclesiastical history. But the influence of Spanheim, who was his teacher in Leiden, could be felt in the structure and division of his work.²⁰ Péter Bod often quoted Forbesius at the demonstration of the ancient times.²¹ He did not only make a record of the events, but also to give an understanding of the present with the help of the past. At the end of the book he raised the idea of forming a learned society.

*Historia Hungarorum Ecclesiastica*²²

Péter Bod was forced to publish his Latin ecclesiastical history in Leiden. He sent the majority of its manuscripts around 1756, but the professor, who would have published it, died. The manuscript got in the library of Leiden. It was only found in 1885. Therefore, when it could have appeared, it became very antiquated, but its source value and priority are indisputable.

Although Pál Ember and Lampe's influence can be discovered on his work, it is much more thorough and its tone is more individual.²³

A magyar nemzet Krisztus urunk születésétől fogva a jelen időkig való eklelesi történetje (The History of the Hungarian Nation from the Birth of Christ up Until the Present)

This work is the Hungarian version of the previously mentioned Latin writing. Although it is a translation, it still complies with the Hungarian reading public.²⁴

*Smyrnai szent Polikárpus*²⁵ (*Saint Policarps of Smyrna*)

The author had this biographical collection published in Nagyenyed (Aiud) in 1766. This collection was the outline of his ecclesiastical history. Péter Bod presents the life of 26 Reformed Transylvanian bishops. It is hard to

²⁰ Pruzsinszky Pál, *Bod Péter*, p. 90.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 90.

²² *Historia Hungarorum Ecclesiastica inde ab exordio Novi Testamenti ad nostra usque tempora ...* edd. L[odewijk] W[illem] E[rnst] Rauwenhoff, Car[olus] Szalay, vol. 1-3., Lugduni Batavorum, 1888-1890.

²³ Mikó, *Bod Péter*, p. 39.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

²⁵ *Smirnai Szent Polikárpus, avagy sok keserves háborúságok között magok hivataljokat keresztényi szorgalmatossággal kegyesen viselő erdélyi református püspököknek történetje. Mellyet ez ... sokszor tatár égette, török hammasza országának kő-porai között egybe-szedetetett ...* [Nagyenyed], 1766.

tell whether this is an ecclesiastical work, or just a literature type of anecdote-collection, as József Dienes Hermányi's work.²⁶

By comparing these works Margit S. Sárdi came to the conclusion that the objectivity and source collection of Péter Bod was not complete. He aimed his historical works to be written according to the enlightened modern way, but he did not manage to do it all the time. The following example demonstrates this. The data represented in *Polikárpus* are mostly incorrect. The writer is biased against the leaders of the church even if he has to contradict himself: he avoided presenting their mistakes. In *Szent Polikárpus* Péter Bod is rather a minister, than a historiographer. He still followed the characteristic features of the historiography of the middle Age: "he did not portray personalities, but he depicts different social groups manifested in one person according to their rank in the social hierarchy[...]. The attitude of Péter Bod in *Smyrnai szent Polikárpus* is no the attitude of a historiographer."²⁷

Szent Heortokráté.²⁸ (*Saint Heortokrates*)

Péter Bod had this work published first anonymously in Oppenheim in 1757, and then it was published in Nagyenyed (Aiud) in 1761.

The Swiss Hospinianus's (Wirt) work, celebrating the church, gave the inspirations to Péter Bod for writing a Hungarian book which represents and evaluates the church celebrations. He often uses strong critical voice, which was not characteristic for his other works.²⁹

In most cases this book is not regarded as one of Péter Bod's historical works.³⁰ Due to the peculiarity of the genre, the linearity of the happenings was not kept, but it is about the illustration of the different events in relation with the celebrations.

There is an interesting contradiction in Péter Bod's scholarly activities. While he wrote the biography of his church's leaders with the attitude recalling the church of the Middle Ages in *Szent Polikárpus*; then he turns to the Catholic Church with an obviously enlightened approach. The influence of the age

²⁶ S. Sárdi Margit, *Püspökéletrajzok és Bod Péter emberábrázolása*, p. 71.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

²⁸ *Szent Heortokráté avagy a' keresztények között elő-forduló innepeknek és a rendes kalendárióban feljegyzetett szenteknek rövid historiájok, mely a szava bé-vehető hiteles írókból egybeszedegettetett és magyarra fordítottatott egy bujdosó magyar által*. Oppenheim [Szeben], 1757.

²⁹ Pruzsinszky, *Bod Péter*, p. 96-97.

³⁰ Imre Mikó ranked this work, among those which deal with Péter Bod to the Biblical works. Aladár Sámuel considered it to be a historical one. Sámuel: *Felsőcsernátoni Bod Péter művei*, p. 114.

(Mosheim) can be observed here as well in the fact that he did not use dogma (except for three short, but sharp notes).³¹

*Historia unitatorum in Transsylvania*³²

Péter Bod as reformed pastor wrote the history of the Unitarian church in this work in Latin. Its uniqueness consists in the fact that when it was published the works of the Unitarians had not been published yet. Although Bod regarded the Unitarian religion as a religious sect, he considered the history of its foundation being worth recording.³³

Kősziklára épült ház ostroma (The Siege of the House built on Rock)

This is an interpretational translation of the former galley slave, Bálint Gergő Kocsis's writing. Considering its topic, it can be catalogued as an historical work. Because of the translation; Péter Bod's work is the only one which could be read in Hungarian in relation with the galley slaves.³⁴

Péter Bod's Significance in the Changing of the Transylvanian Historiographical Paradigm

In his biography, Péter Bod regarded himself as a *minister*.³⁵ He called himself *the unworthy steward of Jesus Christ's gospel*. His faith and his protestant identity can be observed in his ecclesiastical history as well.³⁶

The judgement of Péter Bod's historical significance is not unanimous and changes with time. While his literary historical notability is indisputable, his historiographic activity differs from period to period. In four of his monographic works dealing with his life and activity, his role as a historiographer is emphasised differently.³⁷ Imre Mikó confined himself to a linear and objective introduction of Péter Bod's work, so did Aladár Sámuel (p. 107-148). In his summing appreciation Mikó wrote the following: "*The reason of his writings' carelessness-mostly his historical ones-is the immaturity of our literature and it is*

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 120-121.

³² *Historia unitariorum in Transylvania, inde a prima illorum origine ad recentiora usque tempora ex monumentis authenticis concinnata*. Ex msspto auctoris nunc primum edita. ([Intr. et ed.] Josephus Soofalvi), Lugduni Batavorum, 1776.

³³ Sámuel, *Felsőcsernátoni*, p. 132.

³⁴ Pruzsinszky, *Bod Péter*, p. 30.

³⁵ Péterffy György, *Bod Péter lelkipásztori szolgálata és kora*, p. 12.

³⁶ Révész, *Bod Péter, mint történétíró*, p. 3.

³⁷ In chronological order: Mikó Imre, *Bod Péter élete és munkái* (Pest, 1862), Sámuel Aladár, *Felsőcsernátoni Bod Péter művei* (1899), Dr. Pruzsinszky Pál, *Bod Péter és kiválóbb egyházi munkái* (1913) and Révész Imre, *Bod Péter, mint történétíró* (Kolozsvár, 1916).

*greater evidence that historiography was only in its first stadium... therefore my comments on Péter Bod must be just appreciations or even praises.*³⁸ Imre Révész and Dr. Pál Pruzsinszky focus on Péter Bod's ecclesiastical and even on his historiographic activities. Révész, as a historiographer, depicted a subtlety portray of Péter Bod's role as a historian. According to Révész, Bod refused the enlightenment in its content, but regarding his methods, he adapted its source collection method and its source critique.³⁹ Révész criticised Bod's handling of sources more harshly than Mikó, characterising him as a dogmatic and denominational narrow-minded.⁴⁰

The contemporary fellows characterises him as a modern knowledgeable historiographer, who adopts the Western academic tendencies with particular critique in his works.⁴¹ Péter Gunst considers in his work titled *The History of the Hungarian Historiography (A Magyar történetírás története)* Péter Bod's heritage by his native-speaking.⁴²

But in opposition with his contemporaries, Péter Bod's historical interests were not limited to his own nation and denomination. As we already saw, he had written about Romanians and Unitarians as well. *“His historical writings are not simply the list of documents and events, as it could be observed in his teacher's, Pál Debreceni Ember's (F. A. Lampe) analytical works.”*⁴³

Due to his theological background, Péter Bod only accepted those representatives of the French historiography, who were accepted by the church.⁴⁴ But the influence of the German school, most obviously the affect of Mosheim professor, can be observed as well in his historical approach. For the German scholar it was important that ministers had to be experts not only in theology, but in other studies as well. In his works, Mosheim avoided dogmatically digressions which were very characteristic for the 17th century and he also refrained from controversy in his historical writings. This approach was also peculiar for Péter Bod. Although he was a strong Calvinist, he avoided from dogmatically digressions even in those works which dealt with Catholics or Unitarians. These writings can be best characterised with tolerant open-mindedness.

³⁸ Mikó, *Bod Péter*, p. 105.

³⁹ Révész, *Bod Péter*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

⁴¹ Bod Péter, some authors of the study volume called the experts of *historia litterata ex. Gudor Botond*.

⁴² Gunst, *A magyar*, p. 107.

⁴³ Gudor, *Bod Péter*, p. 110.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

The Significance of Péter Bod

From my point of view, the contradictory judgement of Péter Bod proves that he lived in the border of two eras. He preserved a lot from the 17th century in his works, but the effect of his foreign studies and his collected library cannot be denied. Because of his peregrines background, he managed to implement the *change of paradigm* in historiography in order to raise the Transylvanian historiography to Western-European standard.

Bibliography

- BALOGH Ferencz: A magyar protestáns egyház történetének irodalma, Without edition number.
- Bod Péter írásaiból, írásairól (ed: UGRIN Gáborné), Püski, Budapest 2000
- BOD Péter: Magyar Athenas, Magvető kiadó, Budapest 1982.
- GUNST Péter: A magyar történetírás története, Debrecen 1995.
- GUDOR Botond: Bod Péter történelemszemlélete és a románok történelme (p. 107-124), S. SÁRDI Margit: Püspökéletrajzok és Bod Péter emberábrázolása (p. 71-84), In: Bod Péter, a historia litteraria művelője (ed: TÜSKÉS Gábor), Universitas Kiadó, Budapest 2004.
- gróf MIKÓ Imre: Bod Péter élete és munkái, Pest, 1862.
- PETERFFY György: Bod Péter lekipásztori szolgálata és kora, Szakdolgozat, Budapest, 2003.
- Dr. PRUZSINSZKY Pál: Bod Péter és kiválóbb egyházi munkái, Budapest, 1913.
- REVESZ Imre: Bod Péter, mint történetíró, Kolozsvár, 1916.
- SAMUEL Aladár: Felsőcsernátoni Bod Péter művei, Budapest, 1899.