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**LITERATURE AND CULTURE IN
THE TRANSDANUBIAN REGION IN
THE REFORM AGE
István Bodroghy Papp's Poetry**

Thesis of PhD Dissertation

Doctoral School in History of Literature

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I. Research background and problem statement

The present thesis focuses on the life of István Bodroghy and his book of poems called *Faragószék [Carving Stool]*. This book of poems of this poet, who has been unknown by the literary history until now, was found in the Xántus János Museum – presently called Rómer Flóris Art and History Museum – during a revision procedure by the author.

István Bodroghy Papp was born in 1796 in Uraiújfalu of Vas County as the seventh child of Ádám Pap a tailor and Mária Szekér. He started his studies at the Lutheran Lyceum of Sopron and went on to the Law Academy of Pozsony and Győr. In 1822 he appeared in Mezőberény where he was the local notary. He spent his life in the Great Hungarian Plain: he moved to Békés in 1840/41 and from there to Arad around 1858. Finally, he died in Pankota on 30th April 1859.

The history of his family goes back to the 16th century, when his first known ancestor, Gergely Bodroghy got a grant of arms. The family moved to Somogy County in the 18th century, from where one line of the family moved to Uraiújfalu, the other moved to Szombathely, while some members remained in Somogy County. Some members of István Bodroghy Papp's generation turned up in Győr, Bakonyszentlászló and Békés County.

On the title page of István Bodroghy Papp's book of poems the following lines can be read: *Faragószék mellyen néhány üres óráit meg vonókésezte Bodroghi Papp István Első Kötet.* [*Carving Stool on which István Bodroghy Papp carved some of his empty hours. First Volume.*] Interestingly, he chose the name of such a tool (carving stool) as the title of his book which was used to fix the workpiece while carving it with a special drawing-knife. For the author the carving stool meant the book of poems itself where he collected his poems he had written in his spare-time. During his work he paid special attention to the layout by drawing margins with a pencil and carefully numbering the pages. When he finished his copying job, he took the volume to a bookbinder, who bound it between simple, smooth covers.

The volume contains 70 of his poems having been written between 3th September 1817 and 15th October 1824. Ten of the poems are epistles; while concentrating to the bibliographical data featuring in them the author does not enter into their detailed analysis. The remaining 60 poems show quite diversified picture in view of their genre, style and length. Some of the latter group has been presented and analysed in this paper so that – firstly – we can look into the writer-reader relationship in the Reform Age (first half of the 19th century) and the contemporary vivid cultural life of the

Transdanubian Region in Hungary through the personality of Bodroghy Papp, and secondly, so that we can find his and his poetry's place among the poets at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century.

II. Methodology

This PhD dissertation is divided into two parts which were analyzed using different methodology. The first part, called *Család-, társadalom- és művelődéstörténet [Family, Society and Cultural History]*, draws up István Bodroghy Papp's walk of life while placing him in his family history. The starting point of it was the personal hints to be found in the epistles relating to venues, dates, studies, relationships, etc. The information gained this way is often impossible to check, so the author is bound to accept it as true until the reverse is proved by control sources.

The literature relating to István Bodroghy Papp is very limited and he was sometimes even mixed up with one of his brothers: József Bodroghy Papp. Such mistakes were corrected in each case. After having processed the data of the epistles and the scanty literature there still remained a lot of open

questions, so archival research was also carried out (in Vas, Győr-Moson-Sopron and Békés County) to present the possibly fullest picture of the person in question and his family. Unfortunately, even these efforts could not bring fully satisfying results, but the unfolded problems hopefully could be answered with time.

The second part called *Faragószék [Carving-stool]* presents a selection of István Bogroghy Papp's poems. There was no place to analyze all the poems of the manuscript and on the other hand, they were used only as a tool to find an answer to the question concerning – firstly – the favorite authors of the members of the contemporary literate society and – secondly – whether they were able to internalize their works in such a depth that they became capable to follow suit and create own works. István Bodroghy Papp did have his favorite poets and taking them as an example he managed to internalize their work and became able to create his own poems which diverged from their models sometimes only slightly and sometimes more substantially.

III. New Results

The novelty of the thesis lies in the presentation of a poet and his book of poems – the full content of which has been annexed to the first volume of the dissertation – until now having been unknown by the history of literature.

It was migration that – demonstrably from the 18th century – determined the life of István Bodroghy Papp and his family. It was not a unique feature in this epoch, still the results extend and enlarg the social and family-history researches relating to this matter, most importantly those of Adrienn Szilágyi and István M. Szijártó, who study the noble families of Somogy and Békés Counties resembling to the Bodroghy Papp family. Still, István Bodroghy Papp's case can be considered peculiar, since he left the western part of the country to move to the periphery i.e. to the eastern region left unpopulated by the Turkish wars. As he put it in one of his epistles: „Itt szegénységemen jobban segíthetek / Jobban gyül csűrömbe az isten áldása / Jobban vagyom rajtom bőség áradása.” [“I can make a better living here/ The blessing of God pours into my barn/ An influx of plethora is felt here.”]

István Bodroghy Papp's life also presents a good opportunity to study the career chances of the noblemen in the Reform Age. He could have followed his father's example

who had acquired the tailor's craft often chosen by impoverished noblemen. However, his father, who certainly felt the limits of his profession, oriented his children to the intellectual career by having them learned. As a Lutheran member of the lower nobility two ways remained open for the young István Bodrogy Papp: to be a pastor or a civil servant. The fact that he chose the latter was a typical decision of the epoch, since the existence of a pastor offered only little chance for social advancement (i.e. by becoming a bishop) and the income of this profession was also quite limited.

The dissertation also uses the relationship-network analyse, which method has been widely used by the sociology researchers since the 1990s. As a result of this, 22 persons are introduced in 4 groups whom István Bodrogy Papp must have been in personal contact. The first group includes those teachers, who motivated him to write poems, with special emphasis to his years at the Lyceum of Sopron.

The second group contains his student-mates at the Lyceum of Sopron and the Law Academy of Győr. Two of them (Antal Tulok and Lajos Guoth) were his countrymen with whom Bodrogy Papp might have remained in touch after his move to the Great Plain.

The third group features his young protégés whom he met in Mezőberény. Most prominent of them was the future

Lutheran bishop: József Székács with whom he remained in contact until his death. Mention also should be made of the future poets: Lajos Szakál and Gyula Sárosi and also Lajos Haan, who later probably became a historian. While studying at the Mezőberény Grammar School they often visited István Bodroghy Papp to discuss about poetry, writing poems and questions of the language reform.

The fourth group includes people whom he met in his dwelling place, with special regard to Endre Pázmándi Horváth and Terézia Orczy.

Expanding the similar researches of Árpád Tóth the dissertation also emphasises the determining role of the Lutheran Church in the life of the contemporary people, which might have been crucial when choosing school, determining the possible destinations of the migration and later in the course of advancement on the professional career or while playing an active part in the local congregational life.

Last but not least the dissertation emphasises that the members of this low nobility family had sound education background– including already the first known ancestor: Gergely Bodroghy. As a proof of this statement the study aims at reconstructing (for lack of a testimony) the content of the Bodroghy Papp Family's library, which must have been richer

than what seems to be the case based on the subscriber's lists and the references to be found in the poems.

Based on the analysis of the poems of the *Faragószék* manuscript it can be said that István Bodroghy Papp belonged to the third-rate poets. While some of the poems offer cathartic experience, the style, wording, composition and quality most of the poems lag behind the works of the great poets of the epoch. Bodroghy Papp did not possess outstanding poetical qualities and he did not even seem to develop during writing. On the contrary: when proceeding with reading his poems they seem to be even poorer and of lesser quality.

He took the poems of Sándor Kisfaludy, Dániel Berzsenyi and Mihály Csokonai Vitéz as his starting point when writing poems with drawing tropes, poetical forms, ideas and poetical pictures from them. He did not follow them to the extremes, so he cannot be considered their epigon, rather he was a dilettante, partly, because he lacked the necessary talent and partly, because he voiced his momentary feelings, actual existence and state of mind in his poems. Due to the fact that the individual and collective knowledge appears simultaneously in his works István Bodroghy Papp can be categorised as an author of the popular poetry, although belonging the higher level of this group. This statement is supported by the fact that he used not the favourite poems of

Mihály Csokonai Vitéz as they have been compiled by István Csörsz Rumen, but the little-known poems of Csokonai indicating that he must have been well-versed in the poetry of his poet idols.

The real value of István Bodroghy Papp's book of poems called *Faragószék [Carving-stool]* lies in the fact that it provides useful material for the reception history of the epoch. His poems reflect not only his most inspiring readings but also the common historical awareness and the respect of traditions.

IV. Relevant publications

- 2017 – *A Bodroghy Papp család, adalékok a kemenesaljai evangélikus kisnemesség vallásosságához [The Bodroghy Papp Family. Contributions to the Religious Life of the Lutheran Low-Nobility in the Kemenesalja Region]*, Győri Tanulmányok, 38(2017), 147–159.
2015. – *A Bodroghy Pappok – Betekintés egy 19. századi jogtudó nemesi család történetébe [The BodroghyPapps. Looking into the History of an 18th Century Lawyer Noble Family]*, Győri Tanulmányok, 35(2015), 143–160.
2013. – *A Bodzafa Lantos, Kisfaludy-hatások Bodroghy Papp István műveiben [The Bodzafa Lantos. Kisfaludy Influences in István Bodroghy Papp's Poetry] = Doromb, Közköltészeti tanulmányok, 2, szerk. CSÖRSZ Rumen István, Bp., Reciti, 69–85.*
2012. – *Csesznek váráról. Adalékok a 19. századi rege műfajtörténetéhez [About the Castle of Csesznek. Materials to the Genre-History of Saga in the 19th Century]*, Arrabona, 50/1, 165–193.