

BOOK REVIEW

György HAZAI 2019. *Against the Headwinds on the Lee Side. Memoirs of a Passionate Orientalist.* Edited by Cecilia Hazai. Translated by András M. Deák. Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter. 348 pp. ISBN 978-3-11-067857-4

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The life of the Hungarian Turkologist György Hazai (1932–2016) was far from being normal: with his research interests ranging extraordinarily far, he also nurtured scholarly contacts with various countries, including, apart from his native Hungary, also the Balkans, Turkey, France, Germany, Cyprus, Azerbaijan and many other countries. The variety of his contacts is also reflected in the languages he used for his publications: one will rarely find a scholar publishing in Hungarian, German, English, French, Turkish, Bulgarian, Russian, Polish and, apart from this, being published in Japanese and Greek as well. To illustrate the wide range of his scholarly interests, we might have a look at an arbitrarily chosen year of his publishing activities, the year of 1976: in this year he published a popular monograph on the life of the Hungarian Orientalist Ármín Vámbéry (1832–1913), articles on sources in Old Uyghur, Turkish texts in non-Arabic scripts, the role of the Serbian language in the Ottoman Empire, the importance of the Hungarian Turkologist Ignác Kúnos (1860–1945) in the research on Turkish folklore, Ottoman diplomatic documents and many more subjects (Hazai 1954–2019). His wide-ranging contacts are mirrored by his professional scientific activities at universities and academies in countries as different as Bulgaria (University of Sofia, 1956–1957), East Germany (Humboldt University and Academy of Sciences, both Berlin, 1963–1982), Cyprus (University of Cyprus, 1992–1999) and, finally, his native Hungary (among others, he was the founding rector of the Andrassy University in Budapest, 2000–2003). Moreover, he was a gifted organizer of science both in Hungary and internationally: he headed Orientalist organizations, organized several international conferences, edited many journals and series, and from 1984 to 1990 he served as the president of the publishing house of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

It goes without saying that such a life will inevitably attract the interest of the scholarly community, but first it was his twin daughters who urged him to write his memoirs: as Cecilia Hazai notes in the afterword to the present edition (pp. 341–342), it was in 2009 that her father started writing down episodes from his life, and from 2013 onwards she was helping him with the editing

process. While György Hazai was able to do final corrections in autumn of 2015, it was Cecilia who had the task of finalizing the editing process in the years to follow. In matters concerning her father's professional activities, she took advice by some of his colleagues, and the names of the scholars helping her are quite telling about György Hazai's reputation: we find both some his disciples from his Berlin years like Peter Zieme and Simone-Christiane Raschmann and colleagues he had cooperated with throughout decades, some of whom like Barbara Kellner-Heinkele and Pál Fodor even succeeded him at central positions in science organization. Cecilia Hazai agreed with her father's colleagues that some of the chapters of the memoirs should not be published at the present time, but only some years later. Thus, the present edition which is the translation of the Hungarian original published in 2018 (Hazai 2018), is only a selection of the episodes that György Hazai wrote from 2009 to 2015.

In his memoirs Hazai follows roughly the chronology of his life, starting with his childhood in a Hungary that was still under the influence of irredentism after the treaty of Trianon of 1920 where it had lost large parts of its territory. From a Turkologist's point of view Hazai's account of his student years is of particular interest as he was studying with prominent representatives of Hungarian Oriental studies like Gyula Németh (1890–1976), Lajos Fekete (1891–1969) and Lajos Ligeti (1902–1987). For György Hazai the final change of his subject from history to Turkology in the third semester of his studies seemed to be equivalent to an escape from the strains of Stalinism in Hungarian academia, to 'find[ing] cover in a safe haven on the lee side' against the 'stormy headwinds' (p. 30), yet, problems linked to this seemingly safe haven were to be following soon. According to Hazai, many of the problems he had to face in subsequent years were linked to the tensed relationship between Németh and Ligeti, with the latter trying to build an empire on his own in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Back in Budapest after a one-year stay at the University of Sofia, György Hazai found himself in the awkward position of being ostracized from the scientific community, with former colleagues even avoiding encountering him. In this situation the opportunity of becoming visiting professor at the Humboldt University of Berlin in 1963 was also the possibility of staying far from the strains the situation in Budapest brought along.

His Berlin years were, according to his own account, a window of opportunity: Hazai took the chance of attending the annual meetings of the Permanent International Altaistic Conference (PIAC), before organizing the 1969 meeting in East Berlin himself. Ignoring the state-proclaimed line of avoiding contacts with 'capitalist foreign countries' (in German, 'kapitalistisches Ausland') and circumventing the related obstacles, he often visited West Berlin and established close contacts with leading academics at the (West) Berlin State Library and the Free University of Berlin – an endeavour that entailed further contacts, with Hazai becoming a leading part of the international community of Turkologists. When reading Hazai's account of his years in Berlin, the reader inevitably comes to the point of asking him-/herself why and how this time came to an end as the author remains silent about the exact reasons. One can deduct from some episodes that György Hazai remained in contact with the scientific community of Hungary – finally, he was elected corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1982 –, but why exactly he returned to Hungary is not to be learned from his memoirs. One might assume that an explanation might be found in the chapters that remain unpublished so far.

The later episodes of his life – his position as the director of the publishing house of the Academy of Sciences, his professorship at the University of Cyprus and the years after his final return to Budapest – are told in a quite cursory way, but his account is far from being dry, on the contrary: it is impressing to learn to which extent György Hazai was aware that the sheer exist-



tence of a department of Turkish studies at the University of Cyprus was an important symbol in itself. Even if most of his Cypriot students did not remain in academia (as he was able to tell as he remained in contact with many of them), his stay in Cyprus was crowned academically, too: the outstanding product of his years in Cyprus was the publication of the *Kadı Sicil Defterleri*, the juridical records, of Heraklion in four volumes from 2003 to 2014.

György Hazai's account of his final years back in Budapest stands out in one respect: apart from the account of his research on Turkish dialects in the Balkans in the 1950s, this is the only place in the memoirs where the author tells us more about the scholarly projects he was dealing with. In addition to the joint work on the catalogue of the Turkish manuscripts of the library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (which he surprisingly calls 'a digression from my own work in Turkology', p. 191), he edited and co-edited three major texts in Anatolian Turkish from the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries respectively, making thus important documents on the history of the language accessible to the scholarly community. The fact that the texts stemmed from three subsequent centuries gave György Hazai the idea of using them for a comprehensive linguistic analysis of early Anatolian Turkish – a project that he unfortunately could not bring to an end due to his death in 2016.

Against Headwinds on the Lee Side is the personal account of an outstanding Hungarian Orientalist, giving insight into the history of Turkish studies both in Hungary since the 1950s and internationally, and it is not by chance that the enumeration of persons György Hazai met throughout his career reads like a Who's who of Turkology. Given that the author so vividly describes the hardships he encountered in Hungarian academia, the tenor of his memoirs – Oriental studies giving him the opportunity to avoid facing the sharp 'headwinds' by remaining 'on the lee side' of life – comes a bit as a surprise, but taking into account that György Hazai is held in high esteem both in Hungary itself and in the international community of Turkologists, it becomes understandable. It has to be noted, however, that the Hungarian Turkologist intentionally chose which aspects of his scholarly activities to include in his memoirs and which not, therefore important aspects of his work remain outside of the focus of this book. In order to compensate for this, the reader of *Against Headwinds on the Lee Side* might take into account the complete list of his publications and consult some of the works the author had decided to remain silent about. If the readers do not expect György Hazai's memoirs to cover every aspect of his life extensively – which by the way would be a difficult endeavour anyway –, they will enjoy them as a historical account, giving insight into an interesting life spent with research on Turkish language and culture.

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