

Thesis of doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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Lajos Jordáky (1913-1974)

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Research history

Lajos Jordáky (1913-1974), born in the workers' family in Cluj-Napoca, was a significant figure of the Hungarian left side politics in Transylvania.

He belonged to that Hungarian intellectual group in Transylvania, who, during the period of the state-socialist totalitarian dictatorship, assumed the representation of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania as faithful leftists. This role was characterized by the use of ambivalent discourse. In other words, the fact that they were both fans and operators of the state-socialist system, but at the same time, since they were of minority origin, they could never be an integral part of the power in Bucharest and the Romanian state/nation-building. For example, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Jordáky consciously combined his recent rehabilitation with careful power criticism.¹

Lajos Jordáky was not allowed to publish for a long time due to his political activities, so obviously they could not write about him, and the silence surrounding his person was only removed a few years before his death. For this reason, the writings about him were published afterwards, but only a few works specifically dealing with Jordáky can be found. Since Jordáky can be found on the border of the various sciences (he obtained his doctorate in economics and social sciences), he did not actually excel in any of the disciplines, he was not a truly professional in any field of science. He did not get into the canon of Transylvanian historians, and his cultural and cultural history works are known only to highly dedicated scholars (for example his work on the history of the Transylvanian silent film). Nevertheless, his works in history and in various social sciences (sociological, theatre and literary criticism) make up a chunky list of publications.

Objectives

In my research of the historical literature, I have found only a few mentions and moments about Jordáky. This can be partly explained by his marginalization. On the second part by the fact that the objective of my dissertation and the chosen genre – biography – served precisely to create the first summary work written about him, with the aim of a monograph. My dissertation has a chronological structure, but each major chapter follows a thematic division.

¹ D. Lőrincz József: *Az átmenet közéleti értékei a mindennapi életben*. Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, Csíkszereda, 2004.

The approach to the work is primarily political and intellectual history, but I tried to move towards the genre of total biography by flashing the private and social details of his life.

Since the dissertation as a genre is biography my questions were therefore clarifying in this regard. What interested me in the first place is how a young person born into a social democratic family is radicalised and breaks with social democracy, which he considered reformist? Why did he see the way out from the situation of Hungarians in Romania in Stalinism? What turning points had his life? How's his attitude towards socialism? After the second Vienna decision, having experienced the existence of a Hungarian majority in Northern Transylvania, how did he nationalize? How did he become a national communist?

What did he do beside his political activity - which, as the dissertation revealed, meant only a small part of his career - in the cultural and scientific field? By the early 1970's, how did he get to the level where he saw the way out from the threat of "restoration" in Hungarian minority culture in Transylvania into the growing Romanian national communist dictatorship of Ceaușescu? What type of relationship did he have with state security?

However, in the dissertation I dealt not only with Jordáky but also with the social medium of his city and time. I was also interested in the extent to which Jordáky's career is the same as that of other Hungarian intellectuals in Transylvania. Although most of his friends were left-wing and even downright communist, did Jordáky's responses to the challenges facing the Hungarian social reality in Transylvania move within the same intellectual framework as the others, or did they differ from them?

Research methods and sources

The following is about the sources of the paper. The starting point was primarily the Jordáky's archive, which was preserved in the manuscript library of the Transylvanian Museum Association (EME). Here, not only some of Lajos Jordáky's diaries (a few handwritten booklets from the years 1933-44, 1947-1957, 1971-74) but also other documents with a public theme were significant. I have transferred the manuscripts of the diaries to digital format myself, and the next step in the research would be the annotated publication of the diaries.²

There were several types of ego documents of Lajos Jordáky's life. On the one hand, his diaries, which, at the same time, cannot be considered a completely authentic diaries, since one of the booklets stated that Jordáky had rewrote them from the sheets of paper and omitted

² <https://jordakylajos.adatbank.transindex.ro/> (downloaded 20/10/2020).

several of them, and, on the other hand, his self-biographies and constructed life narratives related to the party or some kind of publicity. Philippe Lejeune is associated with the concept of the "self-biographical pact", during which texts can be understood in which "the author offers the reader a speech about himself and, on the other hand, a specific realization of this speech, which answers the question "who am I?", ³⁴by the narrative of "how did I become one" [emphasis in the original — A.R.].

"Luckily for me," Jordáky kept every bit of paper, so from his 1944 police case, through a letter written by Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1971, his more than 115 pages of 1952 autobiography, other letters, union speeches, etc. were of use to me. From the literature of communist autobiography, I refer only to the aforementioned K. Horváth study: the author convincingly proves that since the communist ideology wanted to master the past, it was necessary to prove the system-conform behavior with a self-writing. Here the "applicant had to "calculate" the good, i.e. the bad, so the silent pieces of the past." Furthermore, since we cannot judge the truthfulness of our self-writing claims in most cases, "behind these statements are the "meta-truths" of the political language: nothing else has been put on paper by these people but what the cadres on the power side wanted to hear." In Jordáky's case, therefore, in his autobiography he overemphasizes his communist relations, and his communist turnaround is years earlier. "... like all self-writing, it is actually about 'who am I', which naturally involves the question: how did I become myself?"⁵

At the same time, the manuscripts of all his published studies and smaller writings (the first handwritten version, then the versions typed by his wife, Mária Nagy) can be found, but it would have meant too much philological commitment if I had started to follow the differences between the "real Jordáky texts" and the already published writings that had passed through censorship.

³ "I take these notes only for myself; about what happened to me, the events around me, my individual insights, etc.." Manuscript of the Transylvanian Museum Association (hereinafter EME), Jordáky Archives, I/2, journal entry of 10 January 1933.

⁴ Self-writing is not a text written on a simple piece of paper, but, together with the context of writing, it means a social behavior, a strategy by which the self-writing individual binds to society and articulates his identity. Therefore, in the discourse of the individual who drafted the text, the personal – simplified – past appears, namely the present past, which is revealed from the moment it is put on paper. See: Lejeune, Philippe: *Önéletírás, élettörténet, napló*. L'Harmattan, Budapest, 2003.

⁵ Jordáky wrote the following sentence in hindsight, handwritten, on the heading of his 1952 autobiography: "I did this autobiography at the request of the Party's Audit Committee and securitate. That's why his voice is utterly self-descriptive. I've made too many concessions, but I was trying to save my life. I haven't been able to avoid arrest and a 12-year sentence. I'll keep it as a time document, but life has been different in many ways than paper. Dec 28, 1969". See EME Manuscript, Archive of Lajos Jordáky, I/1 (Autobiography), 1952 Autobiography, 1.

The Political History and Trade Union Archives (PIL) preserves another part of the Jordáky's archive. From there, his handwritten diaries of about four or five booklets from 1961 to 1971 were also the main source group. At the same time, there are several publicly significant materials in this part of the estate, trade union minutes, brochures, etc. From this material (fond 847) Jordáky's teaching activities (university notes, lesson plans, seminar papers of students, opinion polling) were reconstructed. Also important from the PIL archives was the correspondence between the SZDP centre in Budapest between 1940 and 1944 and the rural branch in Cluj.

From the Cluj county branch of the Romanian state archives (Serviciul Judeţean al Arhivelor Naţionale Cluj – SJANC) I was able to make the most of the material related to political events. At the same time, the materials of the Cluj County Organization of the Romanian Communist Party in 1945 and 1946 were useful. I was also able to review the records of Bolyai University between 1944 and 1946.

The General Secretary of the RCP protocols and, in particular, the Politbureau meeting of 25 May 1955 were of great help from the Central Historical Archives of Bucharest (Arhivele Naţionale Istorice Centrale – ANIC). In this brilliant text, the party secretary, Gheorghiu Dej, came to life before my spiritual eyes as he cynically suggested that Jordáky had been unlawfully arrested in 1952 and sentenced to imprisonment. He also suggested that they should be released because "they were not trench sellers, but behaved like Hungarian patriots in the summer and autumn of 1944".⁶

The most significant group of sources was more than a dozen dossiers recovered from the archives of the Consiliul Naţional Pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securităţii – ACNSAS). Here, not only the interrogation transcripts under the 12 volumes of Fond Penal 000217 were important, but also the observations of the Fond Informativ 210536, which also consisted of 12 chunky volumes. In the latter, it was downright depressing, as it was possible to follow Jordáky's day from home, work, street meetings with acquaintances, café terrace, lunch in the Restaurant on Jókai Street, on public transport in the city, etc.

However, when using the secret service documents, I did not take into account their statements for factology, but sought to put together the alleged conspiracy of the Hungarians in Transylvania by the Romanian political police, Securitate, the Hungarian communists in Transylvania.⁷

⁶ ANIC, fond. CC for PCR, Chancellery, folder 40/1955.

⁷ György Gyarmati: Discovery of the past from secret service materials. A generalizable outline of the Hungarian characteristics. In: *Korunk*. January 2014/ Numbers 9 to 16.

New scientific findings

Based on the chosen genre, the submitted dissertation can be considered a new scientific achievement in the first place. As I wrote above, about Jordáky was hardly written before, and what we knew about his activities was known from urban rumors and legends in Cluj.

As a young person he identified with socialism, and later with the knowledge of Marxism-Leninism (we do not know if Antal Márk, who is a reference point among left-wing intellectuals in Cluj-Napoca, participated in the circle, but in any case in the Social Democratic Kautsky Circle), and after meeting left-wing movement colleagues and friends (Edgár Balogh, János Demeter) and the group of the civic minority generation, he came to the idea of popular front politics. His philosophical development bears similarities to this evolutionary arc: while in the early 1930s he considered himself an austro-marxist, from 1935 he moved to the left of the Social Democrats to fight what he called "opportunistic right-wing social democrats". He believed that socialism would be unlikely to be achieved within the framework of parliamentary democracy in Romania in the 1930s, so his attention was focused more on the proletarian dictatorship promising an immediate and certain victory.

Perhaps this explains why in the 1930s the question of nationality did not apply so emphatically to Jordáky: it is peculiar that compared to other left-wing youths, he was not led into the movement by the question of nationality, by overriding ethnic fault lines, but by finding himself there as a family. Therefore, Jordáky's nationalization took place after 1940, since in the 1930s the Hungarian language was considered primary since the majority of the city's population was still native Hungarian – and almost all Romanians in Cluj-Napoca knew Hungarian. Therefore, the everyday use of languages was still dominated by Hungarian at that time, only in the state administration the Romanian language appeared as a communication channel. In the four years following the second Vienna decision, Jordáky wanted to establish a group in Transylvania, regional Social Democrat Cluj-Napoca, opposite the Social Democratic Party Headquarters in Budapest. The four years under the "small Hungarian world" were characterized by continuous conflicts: he was dismissed from his job, followed by police summonses, police supervision, and internment in the summer of 1944. In addition, however, he is a keen presence in hungarian cultural life: he had a good relationship with the folk Irish, which also contributed to his nationalization. The University of Cluj-Napoca, which he visited between 1940 and 1944, similarly strengthened his membership of the Hungarian nation.

The peak of his political career and social recognition was the uncertain period of 1944-45. In this power/political vacuum, he gained special authority in the local society: his social organizing actions and competences made him one of the first people. As a result of his trade union career, he gained acquaintances among communists who came to power, but he was also accepted by the representatives of the city's citizenship who remained in Cluj-Napoca, as well as by university professors and church leaders. This network predestined him to be a person who brought these groups together or mediated between them: he tried to fulfil this function when attending party meetings, university meetings, trade union and cultural events – but he represented a consistent left-wing voice everywhere.

This trajectory was broken in the summer of 1945: since its recruitment in 1944, it has had to face the fact that the Communist Party, operating according to constant conspiracy and intrigue, is a foreigner. In the spring of 1946, he was expelled from the party on charges of Hungarian nationalism and autonomy. It is questionable whether this exclusion was due to the principle of operation of the party – democratic centralism – or because of Romanian nationalisation within the Communist Party of Bucharest? The answer is somewhere in the middle: Jordáky did not identify with the character of the party's vanguard discipline, but wanted to see it as a broad, mass movement, like the Social Democratic Party. However, Jordáky's autonomy in Transylvania and his pursuit of Hungarian institutions were more pronounced than for exclusion: Bucharest and the central party leadership quickly became uncomfortable with the local leader popular in Cluj, which, with his "autonomy", could jeopardize political and social transformation.

In line with the Stalinist trials in Eastern Europe, in 1952 there was also an important turning point in Jordáky's life: he was arrested by Romanian state security. I consider the most important result of my dissertation to be the reconstruction of the arrest of Jordáky and his "group" and their trial on the basis of archive documents. Our previous historical knowledge of this event was mainly based on recollections, but now it is possible to follow the interrogations and trials of the teachers of Bolyai on the basis of archival documents. Jordáky, with several of his fellow intellectuals from Cluj (Edgár Balogh, János Demeter, Lajos Csógör), must stand trial in the Romanian military court for the same charges as, in their view, "reactionary" Márton Áron: treason. At the same time, the trial material revealed a principled attitude: Before the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty in 1947, Jordáky wanted to represent the regional interests of his own community – but only on a left-wing basis. Studying the materials, Jordáky was drawn to a principled national communist figure.

He was released by presidential decree in 1955, and was almost immediately appointed professor at Bolyai University in Cluj. This is where the news of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 came to him. After disillusionment with Stalinism, Jordáky still had faith in socialism as an idea of social, political and economic betterment. Therefore, in the autumn of 1956, he fell under enthusiastic illusions: on the one hand, he wanted to see the liberalisation of the Romanian system, and on the other hand, with the never-denied Hungary ties, he marched towards another arrest – only then he did not know about it. After the defeat of the Hungarian Revolution, he was the only one who did not sign the condemnation of the revolution and its stigmatisation as a counter-revolution. At the same time, he not only stood up for the Budapest Revolution with a full chest, but also became involved in the Dobai-Memorandum. This is Jordáky's second "treasonous" activity, but after experiencing the "reality" (stalinist prison) of 1952-55 and under pressure from the April-September 1957 rehab, he assumes the self-criticism that humiliates him – he was not imprisoned. With intimidation, he first uttered the concept of counterrevolution at public rallies in Cluj-Napoca and several major Transylvanian cities.

In the early 1960s, Jordáky remained silent. At the same time, a very important cultural fault line between Jordáky and the Hungarian official culture in Transylvania is also emphasized. Jordáky's expectation is the journal *Korunk* and from 1970 the Kriterion Publishing House represented him the “danger of restoration” (canonizing the literature that put former civilians in positions and canonizing literature between the two world wars). It could also be said that Jordáky remained who he was: he socialized in a working-class family, he was an intellectual promoting labour education, socialist, suburban culture. In the middle of Jordáky's career, however, he faced the mainstream intellectuals not only in the cultural field: as a politically appointed university professor and then as a researcher at the Historical Institute in Cluj-Napoca, he also lacked professional preparation. Although he had published since the mid-1930s (his first book was published in 1939), his works mostly reached the level of social democratic party pamphlets and brochures. Therefore, the 1960s were characterized by social and professional marginalization, disappointment, constant self-blame.

His development of ideas seemed to find his way back to the roots of his youth: as a result of the rise of the Western European left in the 1960s and the Soviet thaw, he returned (?) to reform socialism, which was criticized in his youth, only not within the framework of capitalism and parliamentary democracy, but within the framework of state socialism. At the same time, despite all his "humanist socialism" he returned to the ranks of the Romanian Communist Party after the publication of the theses in July 1971 by the Secretary-General of the RKP, Nicolae Ceaușescu. Luckily for him, he died in 1974 and could not experience the

darkest period of the Ceaușescu's dictatorship, and thus did not have to face the fact that the intellectuals who recognized the need to develop a kind of minority Hungarian advocacy from the idea of a minority Hungarian society between the two world wars, or the smaller group that proclaimed the exclusivity of socialist culture, and he believed that the resolution of ethnic grievances could only be done on a socialist basis.