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Intersection of Images and Texts:

A Multidisciplinary Analysis of 1930s Catholic High School

History Textbooks

Doktori (PhD)-értekezés tézislevele

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Research

This dissertation focuses on the analysis of selected key themes in gymnasium history textbooks from the Horthy era, employing a combination of multiple methodological approaches. The research integrates quantitative text and image analysis, qualitative text analysis, and iconographic image analysis to examine textbook content.

During the course of the doctoral program, the research did not expand in a broad, exploratory direction, but rather developed a progressively narrower focus: the analysis concentrated on a single publisher, a specific author duo, and textbooks from a defined period. The study examines the three-volume textbook series *Egyetemes történelem* (“Universal History”), written by Ágoston Marczell and Tasziló Szegedi, published by the Szent István Társulat in the 1930s and 1940s.

This in-depth, “deep-dive” approach allowed for a multifaceted exploration of both the production context and the internal structure of the textbooks. The research specifically investigates representations of minority groups, content related to monocratic power and military themes, and, to a lesser extent, the visual representation of women.

The analysis applies perspectives from subject pedagogy, textbook history, and iconography, embedded within a broader history-of-education context. The study does not aim for wide-ranging comparison; instead, it emphasizes a historically sensitive reconstruction of the worldview, value system, and latent messages conveyed in the textbooks under examination.

1.2. Delimitation of the Research Topic

The initial research question was not simply to map the textual and visual elements of Catholic gymnasium history textbooks published under Bálint Hóman's Ministry of Religion and Public Education. Equally important was to address a methodological question: whether an analysis combining qualitative text analysis, quantitative content analysis, and iconography could serve as a valid approach for non-normative, foundational research.

The research questions encompassed the representation of specific ethnic groups, the presentation of ideological currents, the emphasis placed on historical events, the proportions of gender representation, the presence of power and military themes in illustrations, and the treatment and narrative of social issues within the textbooks. During my doctoral

studies, I observed at various conferences that investigating these aspects is highly relevant to both national and international scholarly discourse.

Additionally, I sought to experiment with a textbook analysis approach that integrates textual content with images and printing techniques, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of the textbook as a material and cultural artifact. Ultimately, the goal of the research was to present the selected textbooks of the period in a comprehensive and nuanced manner, contributing to the broader academic dialogue that continues to shape interpretations of Horthy-era education.

1.3. Relevance of the Topic

Textbooks are not merely instruments for conveying knowledge; they are also identity-shaping media, as the historical narratives they present significantly influence the development of national self-conception and collective identity. This is particularly true for history textbooks of the 1930s, whose study can shed light on how the official historical narrative and national consciousness of the period were formed.

The joint analysis of textual and visual elements is methodologically justified, as visual content plays a crucial role in shaping students' interpretive frameworks. Moreover,

examining Horthy-era textbooks is relevant from the perspective of memory politics, as these textbooks are linked to historical processes that preceded the later catastrophes of Hungarian history, including the Holocaust, World War II, and the communist takeover.

Analyzing the Catholic gymnasium history textbooks published under Minister Bálint Hóman also provides an opportunity to explore the international dimensions of Hungarian history education and can serve as a foundation for future comparative research. The textbooks under study conveyed not only knowledge but also values, identity patterns, and political self-images, highlighting how a state-legitimized historical narrative is constructed.

Themes such as revisionism, the idea of a “Christian Europe,” representations of power and the military, and the construction of “enemy images” remain highly prominent in contemporary historical discourse (Albert, 2006, 2020). Therefore, the multimodal analytical approach applied in this research is timely not only historically but also methodologically, contributing to the contemporary discourse on textbook critique, the history of education, and memory politics research.

2. Methodological Background of the Research

2.1 Research Questions

The research questions were developed inductively during the detailed analysis of the textbooks. While initial assumptions guided the investigation, the study cannot be considered theory-driven. The approach to question formation is partly aligned with the logic of grounded theory, although it does not follow its methodological framework. The structuring of the research was strongly influenced by Hajnalka Szabó's doctoral dissertation, which, despite examining a different historical period, provided an inspiring methodological and conceptual model (Szabó, 2023).

Due to the number of questions that emerged during the investigation, thematic grouping became necessary. To maintain the focus of the research, four main groups of questions were established:

1. Source and visual questions:

This group relates to the quantitative and qualitative examination of the textbooks' illustrations.

- What are the sizes of the images in the textbook series?

- Which volume contains the most illustrations, and what printing techniques were used for them?
- What is depicted in the largest illustrations?

2. Thematic and ideological representations:

This group aimed to uncover the political and intellectual-historical characteristics of the textbook narrative, with particular attention to the presentation of modern ideologies.

- How are liberalism, nationalism, and romanticism presented in the textbooks?
- How are fascism, Bolshevism, and National Socialism depicted?
- How is Joseph II and absolutism evaluated in the textbook series?
- How is the Reformation assessed in the textbooks?
- How is the Treaty of Trianon represented and evaluated?

3. Social and identity-political representations:

This group focused on the depiction of social groups and collective identities.

- Do certain nationalities and social groups appear in the *Egyetemes történelem* series (Romanians, Serbs, Jews, Slovaks, Transylvanian saxons, Freemasons)? If so, in what context?
- How is Judaism represented in the textbook series?
- What is the gender ratio in the image material of *Egyetemes történelem*?
- Do illustrations include imagery related to monarchy?
- Do illustrations include imagery related to the military or war?

4. Iconographic and symbolic analysis:

- What kind of iconographic analysis can be conducted on portraits of secular and religious leaders in *Egyetemes történelem*?

Throughout the investigation, a methodological question remained present, though not as an independent research question: whether the combined application of qualitative and

quantitative text and image analysis, together with iconographic analysis, is suitable for conducting scientifically rigorous research on textbooks.

3. Results of the Textbook Analysis

3.1 Quantitative Text Analysis Results

The conducted quantitative analysis reveals the emphases and structural characteristics of various ethnic and social groups in the *Egyetemes történelem* textbook series.

Serbs: The most frequently mentioned group, particularly in Volume III. The emphasis is linked to political contexts, such as the twentieth-century Little Entente states, territorial losses, and peace treaties. The absence of the term “*rác*” indicates a deliberate use of official language.

Romanians: Primarily appear in relation to the annexation of Transylvania and peace agreements. Their frequency is low in Volume I, the term “*oláh*” is used in Volume II, and they recede into the background in Volume III, reflecting shifts in terminology and historical focus.

Slovaks and Transylvanian saxons: Appear infrequently. For Slovaks, the brevity of the textbooks and lack of detailed discussion explain their low representation, while Saxons appear

less due to their diminished significance in the events of the twentieth century.

Length-based analysis: Sentence-level examination allowed for the study of the embedding of mentions within the text. Results indicate that the studied groups appear most prominently in Volume III, with Serbs showing an exceptionally high proportion, while Jews are only significantly emphasized in Volume I.

Roma minority: Completely absent. This absence is not accidental but reflects the prevailing approach to textbook writing at the time: the Roma did not fit into the conflict- and state-centered narrative of national history.

Overall, the representation of minorities in the textbook series is selective, functional, and centered on historical significance. The visibility of ethnic groups is determined by their connection to the Hungarian historical-political narrative, rendering them either prominent or invisible.

3.2 Quantitative Image Analysis Results

Female Representation:

Volume II shows the highest presence of women, with female figures appearing in more than one-third of the illustrations

depicting people. In contrast, Volumes I and III display a lower proportion of female representations, with the third volume showing an even further decline. The presence of women is largely incidental; within the traditional historical perspective, ancient and medieval history is primarily shaped by male actors.

Military and War-themed Illustrations:

Volume III contains the fewest absolute number of military images, yet the visual emphasis on warfare is strongest in this volume. Historical events are interpreted through the lens of conflicts, wars, and armed encounters. The textbook's visual narrative increasingly foregrounds war, reflecting a conflict-centered interpretation of history.

Monarchical Symbols and Depictions of Rulers:

Volume II includes the most illustrations of rulers, particularly those with Catholic affiliations. Female monarchs are represented in only six images, highlighting both the male dominance in rulership and the exceptional nature of female sovereign authority.

Overall, the visual world of the textbook series is hierarchically organized: male figures dominate political, military, and monarchical roles, whereas female characters occupy a subordinate and incidental position. The strong presence of

militarism and monarchical iconography conveys a vision of history as primarily a sequence of power-related, dynastic, and armed events.

3.3 Qualitative Text Analysis Results

Narrative Trends and Ethnic Group Representations:

A clear narrative tendency emerges in the textbook series, with ethnic groups that are mentioned more frequently typically being associated by the authors with negative or at best neutral evaluations. The Serbs and Romanians are the most frequently referenced groups, particularly in the context of conflict situations, violent events, and historical disputes. In contrast, the Slovaks and Saxons appear less often and are generally portrayed as neutral or partially positive actors, rarely participating actively in conflicts.

Political and Social Ideologies:

The representation of ideologies follows a clear hierarchy. Liberalism appears ambivalently, sometimes framed alongside nationalism as a legitimate domestic and foreign policy stance. Italian fascism is depicted favorably, aligning with the foreign policy orientation of the Horthy era. National socialism is presented more distantly, filtered through ecclesiastical and

moral considerations, while Bolshevism is consistently framed negatively, as a threat to the Christian and national order.

Representation of the Jewish Community:

In Volume I, the Jewish people are credited with notable historical achievements, such as spreading monotheism and contributing to the Old Testament tradition, yet they are also depicted as militarily weak and vulnerable. In Volume II, their presence is minimal and framed negatively, often linked to greed. In Volume III, negative evaluations reappear, connecting the Jewish community to Marxism, liberal reforms, and economic roles in Hungarian history (e.g., *numerus clausus*). Overall, while formally neutral, the implicit juxtaposition against national and Christian values generates a negative narrative.

Reformation and Religious Narrative:

The portrayal of the Reformation is fundamentally neutral, though its leaders are often described using negative or violent terms. Positive aspects occasionally appear, such as the promotion of educational competition or the policies of Bethlen Gábor. Logical inconsistencies are also present, for instance, in linking the Battle of Mohács causally to the Reformation, which is historically unjustifiable.

Evaluation of Joseph II:

In the first two volumes, Joseph II appears modestly, with his measures briefly discussed. In the third volume, he is framed negatively, associated with Enlightenment ideas and anti-clerical movements. This assessment is heavily shaped by the authors' ecclesiastically aligned perspective.

The Treaty of Trianon:

This event is treated as a central traumatic element, often described as an "imposed peace." The textbooks present Hungary's territorial losses with emotionally charged language, attributing external responsibility primarily to France and the Little Entente, and internal responsibility to leftist political forces, particularly Mihály Károlyi and the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Miklós Horthy is presented positively as a heroic figure, and the construction of his cult aligns with the era's highly politicized discourse.

Overall, the textbooks' narratives closely follow the ideological and political frameworks of the Horthy era. Quantitative data corroborate the authors' value choices: negatively evaluated actors are given greater visibility, while neutral or positive figures are marginalized. The textbooks thus convey not only historical knowledge but also a coherent, ideologically guided worldview.

3.4 Iconographic Image Analysis Conclusions

Deliberately composed images, such as paintings and woodcuts, contain multiple, clearly interpretable visual signs, in contrast to documentary photographs. Pre-planned attributes, poses, and spatial arrangements facilitate iconographic identification and expand iconological interpretation. The combined use of quantitative and qualitative methods enables a comprehensive analysis of textbooks, capturing trends, proportions, emphases, and interpretive nuances.

Depiction of Maria Theresa:

Her portrayal is rich in symbolism, with imperial attributes and crowns that highlight both the unity of the empire and the legitimacy of her authority. The visual message remains recognizable even without textual context, emphasizing the primacy of visual communication. Due to the Baroque woodcut style, the reproduction is less dramatic, as historical legitimacy is already embedded in collective memory.

Pope Pius XII:

The depiction is restrained and somber, featuring a dark background and photographic style. The emphasis is on the authority, tradition, and moral weight of the Catholic Church. Iconological interpretation is more limited, constrained by the

Pope's short tenure and the narrative's underdeveloped nature. Nevertheless, his inclusion signals a clear endorsement of a conservative, Catholic worldview.

Portrait of Miklós Horthy:

Horthy is depicted as an experienced military leader, adorned with medals. The visual focus is on his military past, competence, and authority, aligning closely with the textbook narrative and the Horthy cult. The image and accompanying text mutually reinforce each other, providing the viewer with a clear interpretive framework.

All three depictions feature individuals holding the highest ecclesiastical or state authority. The compositions emphasize respect for authority and a hierarchical visual structure. Through integrated text-and-image analysis, the ideological, pedagogical, and intellectual-historical characteristics of the textbooks can be explored in depth and with nuance.

4. Summary

The aim of this dissertation was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the textual and visual content of the *Egyetemes történelem* textbook series, using an integrated approach that combined qualitative and quantitative methods. The research

was based on the assumption that textbooks are not merely instruments for conveying knowledge but also reflect the pedagogical, political, and intellectual-historical thinking of their time, transmitting values and norms through the interplay of text and image.

The theoretical background, including established textbook research approaches and models, allowed the 1930s textbooks to be interpreted not through anachronistic standards but according to the logic of their own period. The defined analytical criteria and the application of a print-historical perspective contributed to understanding the technical and institutional conditions of the production of visual material, providing a more nuanced picture of textbook creation.

Empirical investigations revealed that the textual and visual world of the series is neither uniform nor consistent, but selective and, in many respects, contingent. The presence or absence of social groups, the low proportion of female figures, the dominance of military and monarchical themes, and the interpretation of modern ideological currents all align with the dominant political and ideological discourses of the period. The narratives concerning Jews, the Reformation, the reign of Joseph II, and the Treaty of Trianon clearly illustrate how historical

storytelling intertwines with normative judgments and identity-forming intentions.

The analysis of visual material confirmed that illustrations function as independent carriers of meaning. Deliberately composed works allow deeper interpretation on both iconographic and iconological levels, visually conveying messages related to power and authority. The prevalence of portraits, the low representation of women, and the dominance of military and monarchical images can be understood as visual manifestations of an authoritarian, hierarchical conception of history.

The research demonstrated that the integrated methodological toolkit—combining qualitative and quantitative analysis of both text and images—is well suited to the nuanced exploration of textbooks, the identification of narrative and ideological structures, and the support of an integrated interpretation. This dissertation should not be regarded as a closed study but as a step in a broader research trajectory, opening avenues for comparative analyses of textbooks from different publishers of the period and earlier publications by the Szent István Társulat. Such research can enrich the domestic and international understanding of Hungarian history of education and textbook studies.

5.Nyilatkozat a munka önállóságáról, a szakirodalmi források megfelelő idézéséről

Alulírott Szalay Ignác ezennel kijelentem, hogy a *Képek és szövegek találkozása: A harmincas évek katolikus, gimnáziumi történelem tankönyveinek multidiszciplináris elemzése* című doktori értekezést magam készítettem, és abban csak a szakirodalmi hivatkozások listáján megadott forrásokat használtam fel. Minden olyan részt, amelyet szó szerint, vagy azonos tartalomban, de átfogalmazva más forrásból átvettem, a forrás egyértelmű megadásával megjelöltem.

Amennyiben az értekezés elkészítése során mesterséges intelligencia alapú rendszereket használtam fel, a felhasználás nem irányult az egyes részek teljes megszövegezésére, tartalom létrehozására. Minden olyan részt, amelyben mesterséges intelligencia alapú rendszerek felhasználása történt, egyértelmű jelöléssel láttam el.

Eger, 2025. 12.15



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A doktorandusz aláírás

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