

ABSTRACT

HISTORIA LITTERARIA IN BENKŐ JÓZSEF'S WORKS A CONTEXTUALIZING READING

In my dissertation entitled *Benkő József, a historia litteraria művelője/Historia litteraria in Benkő József's works* I examined historia litteraria written in the 18th century by a Transilvanian author. Among the works connected to local history I mentioned the reformed pastor of Aita Mijlocie, Benkő József's work, entitled *Transsylvania*, an addition to Bod Péter's *Magyar Athenas*, entitled *Additamenta*, Benkő's literary annex to the letter sanded by Sófalvi József, as well as his science history reports published in Magyar Hírmondó of Bratislava.

Some segments of the complex work of the pastor are well explored, others less. His research in botany and linguistics are well documented while his activity as a literary historian has not been examined so far although this need was formulated by Éder Zoltán in the 1970s and Bretz Annamária forty years later. The topic proves to be of relevance as research into the science of literary history has intensified lately.

Through my dissertation I tried to comply with this call analysing Benkő József's writings connected to historia litteraria and placing them into the claim of traditions. I undertook the task of revealing the history of the genesis of texts as well as analysing their rapport to each other. I focused on revealing the characteristics of the texts besides comparing the chapter referring to cultural history of the local history with Bod Péter's *Magyar Athenas*.

Among the sources I found both handwritten and printed texts. It is known that the Benkő heritage was destroyed in the great fire of Aiud during the 1848–49 revolution and war for independence, so there are very few documents available. Despite this fact I searched the sources found in the archives of Cluj University Library, Cluj Academy Library, the Bethlen Gábor Library of Document in Aiud, the Teleki–Bolyai Library in Târgu-Mureș, the library of Haáz Rezső Múzeum, the Harghita and Cluj Departments of the Romanian National Archives, the archives of the National Széchényi Library and the Hungarian Scientific Academy. Besides these Benkő's correspondence found in the volumes of Correspondence of Hungarian Scientists as well as such paratextual elements like forewords, footnotes, reviews also served as important sources.

My dissertation consists of seven chapters divided into two main blocks. The first one contains the first three chapters which were conceived by the claim of contextualization. The second block consists of the remaining 4 chapters focusing on the analysis of 4 works based on *historia litteraria* and revealing the relationship between them.

In the first, mainly descriptive chapter, I followed the creation and evolution of the Benkő image beginning with the 18th century to the present days. I looked into the structure of the texts concerning his personality, what his contemporaries and successors said about him, the causes of changes in his professional and personal appreciation. I must mention that I have never considered this *domidoctus* scholar of Aita Mijlocie a polymath even though he was a historian, linguist, botanist, speleologist at the same time. I consider him the representative of a paradigm including most of the scholars of that period of time. Although he had never been abroad, his views can be identified with those of the scholars and students from the Georgia-Augusta University of Göttingen and which were based on a holistic outlook.

In this chapter I examined writings published in newspapers and encyclopedias in the 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st centuries concerning his personality and work. Besides this I tried to show the mistakes and deficiencies of the texts correcting and completing them where sources made it possible.

As it can be seen, these short texts recorded data of Benkő's biography, an incomplete list of his works containing mistakes that were passed on to later texts too. This shows that the authenticity of the resources was not strictly checked and there did not exist a critical attitude either. The results of my research prove that the majority of the texts, mainly those written in the 19th century are characterized by commemorating, the unjustly blamed scholar sometimes bearing an apologizing attitude. They emphasize Benkő's professional and personal merits, I only once encountered a negative Benkő image. The texts written at the beginning of the 20th century are also commemorative, but works analysing and criticizing Benkő's scientific, mainly historical and botanical activity were also published. The translation of Benkő's volume about local history from Latin into Hungarian made the beginning of new researches possible. At the same time the commemorative texts are also preserved their actuality. Newspapers of Covasna county are constantly publishing articles connected to Benkő's cult.

In the second chapter I tried to reconstruct Benkő's virtual library relying to his readings, and by this defining his level of expertise in several fields of science which he was interested in.

I searched several Transylvanian libraries without much success as I hardly found any volumes which could really be connected to his library. Consequently, I created his virtual library, i. e. I enlisted the works which could have possibly been read by him and which could have influenced his spiritual life. I created this list examining his correspondence mentioning his book loans.

As a result, I got a booklist of nearly 100 pages (Appendix nr. 1). His readings reveal his scientific activity in the field of local history, publishing and botany. From his readings I could deduce his more or less permanent interest in history though his scientific activity can be considered discontinuous. As far as the lan-

guage of the book is concerned, they do not show great diversity: the majority was Latin, very few were French, Italian, Hungarian and German. Most of the printed works were published in the second part of the 18th century which proves that Benkő kept up with the scientific development of his time. He published his botanical and historical works consulting and analyzing the latest scientific publications. Without doubt he was a cultivated historian and botanist but his loanings concerning the topic of *historia litteraria* consisted of two volumes written in Latin, the Bod-work did not even appear in this list.

In the third chapter I examined Benkő's choice of language in his works. His predecessors and contemporaries like Rotarides Mihály, Bél Mátyás, Weszprémi István, Horányi Elek or Wallaszky Pál published their works in literary history in Latin with the only exception of Bod Péter. Benkő's former fellow worker who published his *Magyar Athenas* in Hungarian. In this chapter I tried to find out the criteria which influenced Benkő in his choice of language and what his goal was when publishing his works. From his correspondence and from the paratextual elements of his volume it became evident that his goal was to make his work and his name known abroad. This was only possible if he published in Latin or German. As his knowledge of German was rather poor, his only choice could be Latin. Hungarian was out of the question as it could not make his communication possible with the members of *respublica litteraria*. In this way he published his works in Latin, although more and more pamphlets appeared in the second half of the century demanding that scholars publish their works in their native language. His works appealed to a public that was familiar with the Latin language, on the other hand he desired to win the recognition and support of the Empress, which also supposed the use of the then official language, Latin. Moreover, the majority of the sources he used was written in Latin, their translation into Hungarian would have supposed huge efforts and extra work.

In the 1790s there was a slight change which could have been caused by the parliamentary decree that laid emphasis on the use of the native language. As a result of scientific works were first published in Latin and then translated into Hungarian. Benkő's Hungarian publications like his funeral orations, his articles published in the *Magyar Hírmondó* and his works popularising sciences were meant for the larger public, so his choice of language was defined by the nature of his writings and his readers.

The 4th chapter presents Benkő's works connected to literary history preceded by a review of research history. The studies written by foreign and Hungarian authors clarified the meaning of *historia litteraria*, how it came to life, what changes it underwent, who its representatives were and what their goals were.

Then I examined Benkő's works of literary history firstly mentioning the chapter concerning cultural from his volume of local history. Studying the chapter *De re litteraria in Transsilvania* I examined the way he built up his first work of this kind, what its novelty consists in and the relationship between Benkő's and Bod's lists of scholars. The comparative examination of the two lists revealed the authors' working methods. I found that Benkő himself made use of the fashionable compiling and excerpting methods which saved him much time and effort.

The 5th chapter exemplifies Benkő's working method. A main source of his work is the volume *Magyar Athenas*. I discovered another method analysing the chapter dedicated to the history of culture: Benkő restricted and enlarged his material as the same time. He restricted it as he hardly introduced information about religious intolerance or funeral orations so popular with Bod in his volume. He enlarged the material when he presented a large number of contemporaries, historical figures, family genealogies and women scientists, elements which represent the novelty of Benkő's volume. As far as the content of the works is concerned, there is a close connection between Benkő's and Bod's works.

The sixth chapter examines Benkő's notes referring to the *Magyar Athenas*, the *Additamenta*. I observed it in close connection with the list attached by the pastor of Aita Mijlocie to the letter written by Sófálvi József as well as with the notes of Szathmári Pap Mihály and his son, Zsigmond. I examined the connection between the texts and the question whether there existed a cooperation between the protestant pastors of the period by sharing information with one another.

My researches revealed the fact that Benkő started compiling his list of scholars immediately after publishing his work about local history. Concerning the contents of his volume he became more worldly, he appreciated poetry and translations, he occasionally criticized the authors of religious books and school textbooks.

The list attached to the end of Sófálvi József letter is highly inaccurate, it contains only names and contracted titles. By comparing this list with *Additamenta* it became evident that they were created independently without any impact upon each other as only one or two names appeared in both lists. The titles published here could have been familiar to Benkő from Teleki Sámuel's library or from the *Magyar Hírmondó*. This led me to the conclusion that the short *historia litteraria* from the end of the letter can be considered completions of both works. Comparing the notes of Benkő and Szathmári Pap Mihály it can be stated that Benkő probably shared the requested notes with Szathmári as there is an almost perfect identity in the first parts of the texts which diminishes later until towards the end there is no resemblance between the texts. In spite of this the examples show the measure of the initial usage which proves the cooperation of the reformed pastors.

The 7th chapter examines Benkő's writings published in the *Magyar Hírmondó* of Bratislava. The first newspaper published in Hungarian ensured a large diversity of topics including the presentation of the cultural atmosphere and conditions of the time. I wanted to find out if Benkő continued his activity as a writer of literary history and if he enlarged the list of his writings of this kind as a journalist.

It can be started that about half of this article present biographies of scholars, history of institutions and research works, which means that they fit into the character of *historia litteraria*. The rest of the articles cover information connected to public administration, economy, agriculture, trade and weather. The articles dealing with the history of science bear a vindictive, moreover a documentary character which was characteristic of the contemporary encyclopedias containing biographies of scholars, but this time Benkő wanted to address the speakers of the Hungarian language showing that there existed a scientific activity in Transilvania, that there were scientists and institutions ensuring. Such places were libraries,

botanical gardens, venues of scientific activities which could not be presented in his volume. Thus, the newspaper *Hírmondó* ensured for him spaces to present the actual events of scientific life on one hand, on the other hand he published the texts that could not be published in his volume.

Benkő József's *historia litteraria* can be considered not only sequels or compilation to one another, but they can be connected to the works of the protestant intelligentsia who took up the task of republishing Bod Péter's *Magyar Athenas*. The exchange available information and their collaboration shows not only the importance of its republishing, but also the possibility for the scholars of the 18th century to prove the existence of Hungarian and Transilvanian scientific life and development contrary to the opinion of foreign intelligentsia according to which Hungarian cultural life was underdeveloped.