Péter Hajdu: Modern Hungarian Culture and the Classics. (Classical Diaspora, Bd. 5.) Bloomsbury Academic. London u. a. 2024. 218 S. ISBN 978-1-3502-5812-9. (£ 85,–.)

Classical antiquity played a crucial role in shaping European culture, and humanistic education based on ancient history is a shared heritage, including for central Europe. Latin was the official language in Hungary until 1844, retaining a key role among the subjects taught in grammar schools even after that. Only ending with the Second World War, traces of its influence not only in the visual arts and literature, but also in everyday life, language and identity formation can be seen to this day. Péter Hajdu's book provides a very thoughtful and insightfully illustrated summary of this phenomenon, which is closely linked to European culture but also has its own Hungarian characteristics. The monograph, written with great erudition, also outlines the arc of the history of Hungarians, with literary and artistic elements embedded in an ideologically, politically and socially defined historical framework.

The emphasis is on literature, complemented by chapters on education, the fine arts, identity issues, and the history of Hungarian classical philology, with a time frame ranging from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century. Its main focus is on that which is closest to us: four of the monograph's six chapters deal with the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Reaching back to the eighteenth century is well justified, since this period, which preceded the emergence of modern concepts of nationhood, raises a number of issues of importance for national identity, including the question of the genetic relatedness of the Hungarian language. The identity of Hungarians is based on the East–West dichotomy, which is illustrated by Endre Ady's metaphor of the ferry country: Hungarians are pushed like a ferry between East and West. Although classical antiquity is one of the pillars of Western culture, and the Hungarians, who came from the East, embraced it after their arrival in Europe, the image of the East that Hungarians have can be, as H. points out, traced in many respects also to ancient sources. During the anti-Ottoman struggles, Hungarians tended to emphasize the Western elements of their own culture (such as Christianity and their shared classical heritage), while during the resistance against the Habsburgs the emphasis was more on the Asian, Eastern origins and their resulting influences on identity. The culturally muddled position of Hungarians was abused in anti-Hungarian propaganda, for example, by Jan Kollár, who promoted pan-Slavic brotherhood and portrayed Slovaks as Europeans, and Hungarians as Asians, in the Slovak–Hungarian conflict. In this context Asian origin was given a negative connotation. The history of peoples approach to the question of genetic similarities within the Hungarian Language was important in this context because, alongside classical antiquity and Christianity, the Finno-Ugric origin of the language became a pillar of the European character of Hungarians, despite the fact that some of the related Finno-Ugric people, including those closest to Hungarian, the Mansi and the Khanty, live in Asia.

H. analyses how identity issues were reflected in nineteenth century art, looking at paintings by Károly Lotz and Mór Than and at historicist architecture based on classical elements. The analysis is given alongside illustrations to assist comprehension. Mihály Vörösmarty's epic "The Flight of Zalán," about the Hungarian Conquest, and Ferenc Kölcsey's essay "National Traditions," among other works, contributed to the development of Hungarian identity. Both of these nineteenth century works draw heavily on elements originally from antiquity: Vörösmarty's epic, written in hexameters, is also known as the Hungarian Aeneid, while Kölcsey set the example of Greek culture as a model for Hungarians to follow.

After the first chapter on identity issues, the second chapter, "The Everyday Presence of the Classics," shows how the reading of Horace became a way of life in the nineteenth century, and how Horatianism assumed a political dimension. Horace is also read by the characters in Mór Jókai's novels, in order to help them better understand themselves. A common topic is also the frustration that comes with learning Latin: The ancient classics can be not only a source of guidance in everyday life, but also a source of immense suffer-

ing. In Mór Jókai's novel "Debts of Honor," for example, one of the characters has to memorize Latin hexameters summarizing grammatical rules. These otherwise meaningless verses, which list grammatical exceptions and examples, had been used in European Latin teaching for centuries, handed down from grammar book to grammar book; H. shows that the Latin hexameters quoted by Jókai appeared in textbooks as early as the sixteenth century, and the line quoted in the novel is an imprecise combination of two Latin hexameters from the textbook.

For many of the authors of the journal *Nyugat*, which was the most important forum for Hungarian modernism, their primary inspirationscame from antiquity. H. analyses, for example, Mihály Babits's classically themed poems, his drama *Laodameia*, Dezső Kosztolányi's novel "Darker Muses: The Poet Nero," set in the time of the Roman emperor bearing the same name. Antal Szerb's novel "Journey by Moonlight" describes a trip to Italy in the 1930s and has as one of its main characters the religious historian Rodolfo Waldheim, whose person was partly modelled by Szerb on the internationally renowned Hungarian classical philologist Károly Kerényi. In an innovative way, from the first half of the twentieth century, H. explores not only the image of antiquity shared by the *Nyugat* authors, but also analyses the classical centered short stories of Cécile Tormay, the editor of the conservative *Napkelet*, which can be considered an anti-*Nyugat*,[1] in the section called "Another Shade of Modernism."

Chapter 4, "Classical Studies during the Communist Period," begins with an introduction to Hungarian society before the start of communist rule, the first half of the twentieth century, and provides a to-the-point, concise summary of the history of Hungarian classical philology in the twentieth century. During the communist period, publishing was centrally regulated, and the classical philology committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) made recommendations on the works to be translated. H. also draws on manuscript material in the archives of the HAS to show how, in those days, gestures towards Marxist ideology were necessary to legitimize works of antiquity.

The translation of Latin authors, as H. points out, is closely linked to schooling, and the chapter on translation of Latin works therefore also provides a brief historical summary of the teaching of classical languages. It is from the practice of translating from Latin as a form of school exercise that the material of the Latin language, its foreignness, is made felt in the Hungarian text; this, as H. points out, is not a uniquely Hungarian phenomenon, but in Hungarian (unlike in European languages belonging to the Indo-European language family) it creates much more forced structures. A separate section deals with one of the most important translation debates in twentieth century Hungarian translation history, what was referred to as the Horace Debate, which had purely linguistic aspects, but also expressed dissatisfaction with the practices of the publishing houses of the time.

The final chapter discusses the relationship between contemporary literature and the classics, analyzing, for example, the works of contemporary poets linked to classical mythology and the poems of Horace and Catullus, and the description of the imagery in Péter Nádas's novel *A Book of Memories*, in which a mural of an Arcadian landscape becomes the trigger for a panerotic bodily experience.

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1 In Hungarian, *nyugat* means "west" and (*nap*)*kelet* means "east."