

Pražák, Richard

## Josef Dobrovský as an expert in Hungarian and Fenno-Ugric

In: Pražák, Richard. *Josef Dobrovský als Hungarist und Finno-Ugrist*. Vyd. 1. Brno: Universita J.E. Purkyně, 1967, pp. 171-176

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/119887>

Access Date: 14. 12. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

## JOSEF DOBROVSKÝ AS AN EXPERT IN HUNGARIAN AND FENNO-UGRIC

The present monograph on "Josef Dobrovský as an expert in Hungarian and Fenno-Ugric" deals not only with the strictly philological aspects of Hungarian and Fenno-Ugric research of the founder of modern Slavic and Bohemistic studies Josef Dobrovský, but also with his relations to the Fenno-Ugric nations in general, that is to say, to their languages, history, and culture. The author's starting point in his approach to the Hungarian and Fenno-Ugric Studies is a wider conception, based on all-round culture, politics, and history of the nations in question, and seeing in this branch of science, in contrast to the exclusively linguistic view, a line of investigation dealing alike with the languages and with all other essential manifestations of culture of the Fenno-Ugric nationalities, whether in reference to the Mid-European sphere only (Hungaristic) or to the wider Eurasian area (Fenno-Ugric).

Josef Dobrovský's interest in the problems of Hungarian and Fenno-Ugric Studies manifested itself in two ways. Partly he tried to establish scientific contact with the Magyars and partly he went in for purely philological investigation of the Fenno-Ugric languages. One of the reasons why he was so keenly interested in Hungary was the fact that this country had been bound with numerous ties with the Czech-speaking parts of the Monarchy, and Dobrovský could find in this area various valuable sources for his pioneering Slavic and Bohemistic research. The person who primarily initiated him into purely Magyar problems was the Slovak Juraj Ribay, residing in the Magyar part of Hungary, and his influence found complementary stimuli in letters of his Czech friends, who were closely associated with Dobrovský as well. In this connection we may mention Václav Fortunát Durych, Jan Petr Cerroni, Jan Bohumír Dlabač and others. To these names we have to add also the Czech Zlobický and the Slovenian Kopitar in Vienna, the Pole Bandtke, apart from others. Among the Magyar scientifically-minded people Dobrovský was on most friendly terms with Miklós Jankovich, Johann Christian Engel, and the well-known patron of Hungarian science Count Ferenc Széchényi. When corresponding with them he discussed different historical and linguistic questions; the most important of these were the territorial extent of the Great-Moravian Empire (in the dispute of Sklenár contra Salagius Dobrovský sided with the latter), the problem of the historical background of Magyar foreign borrowings (especially from the Slavonic languages), the Magyar-Slavonic participation in the formation of toponyms etc. As to etymology, Dobrovský saw in the grammatical system of a language the outcome of its historical development and a safe corrective of every philological speculation, ascribing, for instance, significance to the conformity in the meaning and the sound of a word when this concerned pronominal and numeral expressions, basic verbs, or names of parts of the human body and the like. In this respect he displayed the attitude of a real modern philologist.

Dobrovský's scientific co-operation with the Hungarian learned people was restricted, with the exception of Jankovich, Engel, and Széchényi, upon the whole to individuals whose traditional Hungarian patriotism was as yet unaffected by nationalism. To this group there belonged e. g. Schwandtner, Kovachich, Cornides, Katona, and others, and we can see that Dobrovský shared their views rejecting as an adherent

of the Enlightenment Era Engel's nationalism. Dobrovský endeavoured to keep in touch with the Hungarian scientific production, often applying to Hungarian research workers with questions or giving them valuable suggestions in reference to their work. Important are for example his participation in the discussion of the origin of the word "tót" or of the Hungarian hydrographic designations, further his pointing to the Turkish-Magyar linguistic points of contact in his unpreserved treatment of this subject sent to the Transylvanian Society for the cultivation of Magyar in Klausenburg, his philological criticism of the historical works of Engel (Engel e. g. adopted from Dobrovský his laying stress on the historical significance of Turkish and Slavonic words in Magyar), and other contributions.

Dobrovský's linguistic interest in the Fenno-Ugric languages followed two paths. First it was prompted by his project of 1793 to write a basic philological work on general lines bearing the title "Systema linguarum"; next he contemplated to make the Fenno-Ugric languages figure in it as a special group occupying their proper place in the system of languages, and besides, his impulse sprang also from his extensive Slavic studies and made him desirous to know the mutual relations and points of contact between the Slavic and the Fenno-Ugric languages.

In his book of travel "Reise nach Schweden und Russland" [Journey to Sweden and Russia], published in Prague in 1796, Dobrovský came to the conclusion that the Fenno-Ugric languages represent an independent group, whose characteristic features are the absence of the gender, postpositions, and the replacement of possessive adjectives by suffixes denoting the possessor. He also found that Magyar displayed much greater differences from Lappish than Sajnovics had admitted and that it was nearer to Votyak, Permian, and particularly to Vogul than to Lappish. In this last point Dobrovský shared the views of Schlözer expressed in the *Allgemeine nördische Geschichte* in 1771, but he laid greater stress than the latter on grammatical peculiarities of the Fenno-Ugric languages, attempting their ingenious classification, which was an approach unknown as yet to Schlözer. Dobrovský manifested here a fine feeling for the comparative aspect of the problem and a capability of performing a deeper linguistic analysis, taking into account not only lexical relations but also the grammatical structure of the languages in question.

Apart from the work *Reise nach Schweden und Russland* Dobrovský commented upon the Fenno-Ugric problems frequently also in his letters to Durych, Ribay and others. The most significant of them was in this respect his letter sent to Ribay on February 8th 1793, i. e. shortly after his return from his journey to Sweden, Finland, and Russia undertaken in 1792. In this communication Dobrovský writes about the affinity of Magyar and Finnish, supplementing his endeavour to grasp the general features — such as the absence of genders in the Fenno-Ugric languages — with a keen and concrete comparative acumen (the similarity of infinitive suffixes in Magyar, Permian, and Votyak). By advocating the idea that one single sentence is of more value for the comparative linguistic research than a hundred words Dobrovský parted from the purely lexical comparative philology, and demanded from a research worker striving to discover linguistic affinities a good knowledge of the syntax, structure, and specific grammatical features. Quotations from this letter of Dobrovský to Ribay were reprinted in 1794 in the periodical *Bécsi Magyar Hirmondó*, which gave the Magyar poet and philologist Ferenc Verseghy an impulse to get into touch with the prominent Finnish scientist and adherent of the Enlightenment Movement Henrik Gabriel Porthan. Verseghy's letter to Porthan of May 13th 1794 is believed to have played a great role in the development of the Magyar-Finnish co-operation in matters of culture and in bringing the linguistic affinity of the two nations to public knowledge.

The most important outcome of Josef Dobrovský's interest in the Fenno-Ugric Studies was his commenting review of Gyarmathi's work "Affinitas linguae hungaricae cum linguis fennicae originis grammaticae demonstrata" (Göttingen 1798). The review was published in Jena in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* in 1799, and in it Dobrovský expounded his analytical approach to the problems of the Fenno-Ugric linguistic kinship, demonstrating the principles which he had expressed in his *Reise nach Schweden und Russland*. In this article Dobrovský estimated with clear insight the relations of the Fenno-Ugric languages to other linguistic units, particularly to the Slavic languages, but also to the Germanic, the Turkish and Tartar tongues as well as to others.

Apart from the lexical connections he pointed out a number of basic phonological laws of the Fenno-Ugric group (e. g. the fact that the -m affix of 1st per. sing. has existed longer than the -n affix, the alternation of h and of the more ancient k in Finnish, Magyar, and Lappish, etc.). An altogether new piece of observation was his stressing the significance of the Samoyed languages for those who try to get acquainted with the original phonological system of the Fenno-Ugric languages. Dobrovský's critical review of Affinitas betrayed not only a mind possessing an extensive stock of knowledge of the Fenno-Ugric problems, but also an exceptionally fine sense for comparative linguistic study, enabling the research worker to find his way in complicated questions he has to face when comparing languages of widely differing structure. There is no doubt that success in his undertaking implied both great erudition and deep insight.

Dobrovský played the role of a pioneer also in the investigation of the Magyar-Slavonic linguistic points of contact. His views greatly influenced the Magyar philologists István Sándor and Sámuel Gyarmathi as well as the Hungarian historian J. Ch. Engel. Sándor, Gyarmathi, and Beregszászi were the most prominent Magyar scientists on the threshold of the 19th century, who, finding in the work of the Czech 18th cent. grammarians, in Pallas's Comparative Dictionary of 1786, and in Dobrovský's views their starting points, discussed in detail in a number of studies the problem of words of Slavic origin in Magyar. A similar investigation was undertaken, likewise in accord with Dobrovský's standpoints, also by the Slovaks Juraj Ribay and Štěpán Leška, the author of the well-known work *Elenchus vocabulorum Europaeorum imprimis slavlicorum magyarico usus*, Budae 1825.

The journey to Finland and Russia in 1792 induced Dobrovský to confront also Finnish with the Slavonic languages, especially with Russian. In a list, which unfortunately remained a manuscript and was probably compiled in 1795, he correctly identified as many as 31 Finnish words of Slavic origin, i. e. the highest hitherto ascertained number (prior to this collection there existed only six words of this class identified by Thunmann, and besides it was just Fogel who pointed out the Slavic origin of the Finnish word *lusikka*). It is very probable that Dobrovský had informed the Finnish professor Porthan about the results of his investigation, for the latter included in 1801 in one of his studies 21 Finnish words of Russian origin, most of which were contained in Dobrovský's above-mentioned manuscript. Dobrovský did not restrict his study of the Finno-Slavic linguistic relations to lexical phenomena only, being interested also in the phonetical problems; thus he traced e. g. the Russian full-voiced sounds back to Finnish origin.

When trying to evaluate Josef Dobrovský's place in the development of the Fenno-Ugric Studies we must admit that it is no minor contribution. Similarly as in the Slavonic Studies also here Dobrovský figurates primarily as Schlözer's pupil, yet, he surpassed his teacher in laying stress on the grammatical structure of the Fenno-Ugric languages; in this respect he shared Sajnovics's attitude (rejecting, however, his mistaken identification of Magyar with Lappish), and paved way for Gyarmathi. Dobrovský's endeavour in this field culminated in his critical review of Gyarmathi's *Affinitas*, this article containing his most extensive analysis of Fenno-Ugric problems and applying at the same time in concreto the basic criteria expressed by him in his work *Reise nach Schweden und Russland*.

Of extraordinary value and, as to the comparative linguistic Finno-Slavic investigation, we may even say of a world-wide significance, is his pioneering analysis of questions concerning the mutual relation of the Slavonic and the Fenno-Ugric languages. While in the Fenno-Ugric studies proper Dobrovský's contribution did not outreach the Mid-European boundaries as to significance, the most characteristic expression of this effort being his stimulative impulses addressed to Magyar experts in Fenno-Ugric studies (Gyarmathi, Sándor), his investigation concerning the Slavonic words in Finnish has opened altogether new prospects in the research of these problems. Here very likely he influenced also Porthan, and it is only due to the fact that these views of his had not been published in his lifetime that this pioneering merit of Dobrovský has remained unknown to the scientific world to the present day.

Josef Dobrovský laid the foundation stone for the Czech Fenno-Ugric studies. It is true that the first Czech to express his interest in the Fenno-Ugric languages was Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius), but Dobrovský was the first in our country who

put this search for knowledge on a scientific basis. He determined the specific features of the Fenno-Ugric languages trying to fix their proper place among other languages, and knew how to substantiate his argument that they should be studied by Slavic research workers because of their significance for the study of Slavonic languages. And quite particularly he stressed the importance of the Magyar language and of some of its problems for the Czech environment arguing at the same time that these questions must be dealt with on a wider basis of the Fenno-Ugric Studies, just as the Czech linguistic problems, on the other hand, require the Slavic Studies for their indispensable background.

It was as early as in the time of Dobrovský that Czech readers had opportunities to get acquainted with the existence of the Fenno-Ugric world, e. g. in the Czech translation of Guagnin's *Moscow Chronicle*, republished after its first 18th cent. edition (by Veleslavín) once more in 1786, in the description of the life of the Lapps, printed in 1807 in the periodical *Hlasatel český*, and from other sources. This shows that the Fenno-Ugric question had already been given some publicity, and that also Dobrovský's research along this line could rely on some response among the Czech public.

When evaluating Dobrovský's scientific contribution to the sphere of the Hungaristic and Fenno-Ugric Studies the author discusses his general outlook and view of life, confronting the same with the leading personality of the Magyar linguistic revival Ferenc Kazinczy. He outlines the main features in the development and mutual relations of the Czech and the Magyar national movements on the threshold of the 19th century, the time at which the most prominent representatives of the two cultures were just Josef Dobrovský and Ferenc Kazinczy. Characteristic features of both these men were strong antipathy against political absolutism, tolerance in national questions springing from adherence to the Enlightenment Movement, dislike of radical nationalism, sympathy for Kant and his conception of enlightenment, moral enthusiasm, belief in the significance of the ethical attitude in striving for scientific truth, and respect of one's own conscience. Both of them remained true in the reactionary period of Francis II. to the spirit of enlightenment of the Josephinian period, fighting in their contributions to periodicals as early as from the eighties of the 18th cent. for a greater freedom of spirit and against fanaticism and violent suppression of political and cultural rights of small nations residing in the Habsburg Monarchy.

Kazinczy, in contrast to Dobrovský, had no immediate contact with the representatives of the Czech national movement, having, as a matter of fact, unpleasant recollections of our part of the country, for he had been obliged to spend there four years of imprisonment for his participation in the Jacobinic conspiracy. Nevertheless, neither this Kazinczy's involuntary abode in a Czech region was quite fruitless, for it was just this time of seclusion during which he could fully develop his ideas and plans of a linguistic revival, that is to say, of cultural uplifting the nation passing through a period of political oppression and bondage. In his prison diary (published until 1931) he gladly remembered the help of the Czechs, about whom he was informed also later in the letters of his friends Gábor Döbrentei, József Csehy, and of his brother László Kazinczy.

An investigation of the political character of Josef Dobrovský and its comparison with Ferenc Kazinczy brings us face to face with a few deeper problems of the relation of the Enlightenment Era to the Josephinian Period, which, though bearing some specific marks of the enlightenment spirit in the Austrian environment, got, nevertheless, in its bureaucratic form in the service of an absolutistic state into many a conflict with the fundamental enlightenment ideals. The assertion of a supreme state authority in the spirit of the Josephinian interpretation of Shaftesbury's moral philosophy enabled those who professed this theory to interfere in all spheres of public life and to proclaim the subjection and adaptation to the state to be the highest virtue of the citizen. Now, this policy provoked an opposition on the part of all free-thinking adherents of Josephinism, above all the creative representatives of the educated class, who had set great hopes on the social and cultural reforms of Joseph II., and considered the freedom of thinking to be an indispensable condition of practical application of the basic principles of enlightenment. Particularly they defended the indisputable human right to secure an allround development of one's

personality and to make free use of one's reason in building up the commonwealth of all, which standpoint the official Josephinists tried in vain to reconcile with the bureaucratic and authoritative conception of the superiority of the state.

These divergencies help us to understand that which appeared to be incomprehensible at first sight, i. e. the fact that the majority of the Josephinian bureaucracy offered later so easily support to the reactionary regime of Francis II., while the other fraction of the Josephinists gradually assumed a very radical and revolutionary attitude, fusing even with the Jacobinic Movement, as it was the case with a number of former Hungarian Josephinists.

The development of the Magyar Josephinists from the enlightenment philosophy to sympathies for radical Jacobinism and finally to the movement of the Magyar linguistic revival, essentially identical with the programme of Josef Jungmann and his friends in Bohemia, is very interesting and at the same time it greatly helps us to understand why the so-called non-political and socially reserved attitude of the Czech representatives of the national movement of Jungmann's time was much less an expression of political unripeness than the outcome of conditions prevailing in the Monarchy, where it became imperative after the victorious onset of the Great French Revolution to suppress any revolutionary tendency at any cost. This state of things resulted in persecution and oppression of not only any revolutionary symptoms, but also of all democratic and liberal aspirations surviving from the Enlightenment Era. This development induced both Jungmann and Kazincsy with their fellow-workers to switch their effort over to the linguistic revival and to uplifting the national culture in general, which programme was at the same time felt to be an indispensable preparation for the forthcoming successful political fight, whose continuation was in the Napoleonic Era for the time being impracticable owing to a great restriction of political liberty. In this situation, as we can rightly conclude, Jungmann's endeavour to extend the Slavic vocabulary in Czech as well as his translation of Chateaubriand's *Atala*, introducing to us romantic literature of French provenience, were acts of a wider significance, having also political objects in view, in spite of their apparently purely linguistic and literary character.

The resources of the Czech and of the Magyar national movements, however, were not equally strong. The Magyar cultural and political endeavour found much greater support among the patriotic aristocracy, while the Czech movement had to depend mainly on countrypeople and on the lower classes of the town population. In the Magyar national revival the leadership was from the beginning in the hands of nobility and of the educated class. Greater progressiveness and radicalism of the Magyar national aspirations towards the close of the 18th century were not the outcome of the common people participating in the movement, as it was the case among the Czechs, but the reason was that the Magyars were more closely connected with the international development, whereas the Czechs were able to enter into connection with these factors only seldom, in the Prague center at the best. While the flower of the Magyar educated class gathered round rich and cultured either Roman Catholic or Protestant most prominent noblemen, such as the Széchenyi, Festetics, and Teleki families, who enabled young people to study abroad and to consult extensive libraries, the majority of the Czech intelligentsia was composed of learned men springing up from the ranks of common people, forced often to live and work in remote country districts, and having but little opportunity to extend their education and widen their spiritual outlook.

The Magyars had also an easier access to the western progressive ideology, the mediating factor being not only the German environment, as it was the case with the Czechs, but also the more free and more direct influence coming from Switzerland and Holland. In the Czech-speaking provinces the decisive part was played by local Josephinism, whose Prague center was developing in co-ordination with Vienna, and the spread and growth of Josephinism was here considerably stronger than in Hungary. The enlightenment of the West-European type, the ideas of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Helvetius were spreading since the sixties of the 18th cent. in Hungary mostly among people who were in touch with the Presbyterian noblemen of the Teleki and Raday families as well as in Protestant schools in Debrecen and elsewhere, while they penetrated to our provinces through the mediation of Magyar clergymen and teachers of the Presbyterian denomination who immigrated to the Czech-speaking

regions in a considerable number subsequent to the issue of the Toleration Decree in Austria in 1781.

The difference between the Czech provinces and Hungary was the following: Whereas in Hungary the enlightenment ideas (mostly the original West-European type and not the eclectic and adapted Austrian type) were spreading directly in the Magyar environment, to the Czechs they were imported either from Vienna or through the medium of the Bohemian Germans. Yes, the Prague center of the Enlightenment Movement was itself mostly German, and many of its members were later in favour of violent germanisation. It is no wonder that in this situation some Czech adherents of the Enlightenment Movement, e. g. Dobner and Voigt, endeavoured, as it seems, to get loose from the onesided German influence and tried to establish scientific contact with other quarters, including the Magyars. And this Czech-Magyar co-operation in the field of learning and enlightenment was fully developed by Josef Dobrovský, whose interest in the Hungaristic and Fenno-Ugric Studies thus became an important component of mutual approach of two ethnically and psychologically widely different and yet neighbouring nations, whose concern it has always been to overcome separating tendencies and to find ways how to solve many vital problems in co-ordination, in the spirit of the Enlightenment Era.

*Translated by Samuel Kostomlatský*