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The Theme of Decline in Hungarian Historiography and Historical Thinking in the First Half of the 20th Century¹

Abstract

Decline was the fundamental issue in Hungarian historiography and historical thinking between the two world wars. This paper primarily analyzes the views of historian Gyula Szekfű, writer and poet Mihály Babits, literary historian and writer Antal Szerb, writer and essayist László Németh (and Dezső Szabó), and those of philosophers Béla Hamvas, Lajos Prohászka, Lajos Fülep and György Lukács.

In this period the so-called spiritual history (*Geistesgeschichte*) prevailed in Hungarian intellectual circles, in which the theme of decline and even fall was fundamental. From the most important representatives of "*Geistesgeschichte*" Spengler, Ortega, Huizinga, Croce and Maritain had significant influence on the authors mentioned above. Historians were ready to refuse the ideas of these thinkers regarding the criticism of culture and rather followed the power and state centered streams of "*Geistesgeschichte*", conceived by Ranke, Troeltsch and Meinecke. It is also true, on the other hand, that the decline and generation theory, developed by the historian Gyula Szekfű (e.g. in his book *Three Generations*) is one of the most original interpretations of modern Hungarian history. It was shared by many Hungarian intellectuals of the period. Paradoxically, the theme of decline also appeared in the views of the so-called "*Századok*" (Centuries) circle, mainly in the writings of historian István Hajnal. He rather followed the social-history-oriented French *Annales* School, even attempting to offer a solution to the problem of the so-called "third way" alternative.

Almost all of the above-mentioned conceptions were tied in the later political discourse to the so-called right-wing tradition of Hungarian political-historical thinking, but the author also touches briefly upon the decline conception of the leftist (Marxist) tradition of György Lukács, whose ideas had an impact on the beginnings of the Frankfurt School.

The subject of the following study is "The Theme of Decline in Hungarian Historiography and Historical Thinking in the First Half of the 20-th Century". In this context one can confirm that to speak about/discuss decline was paramount - as it turns out from the relevant literature - in the main intellectual/cultural trends of this period, from the spiritual history ("*Geistesgeschichte*"), through f.e. the different streams of Catholic thinking, until the so called "populists", even to the Marxists the steady mentioning of the decline/crisis theme was fundamental. It is enough to mention in this respect such well known and respected names in Hungary as the philosopher Lajos Prohászka and Lajos Fülep, the poet and writer Mihály Babits, Antal Szerb, Gábor Halász, or another philosopher Béla Hamvas, the historian Gyula Szekfű, the populist writer and thinker László Németh and Dezső Szabó, the ancient historian Károly Kerényi, the art historian Károly Tolnay and many others. [This list could be of course completed with several other names, such as. f.i. János Kodolányi, Miklós Bánffy, Tibor Joó, Gyula Kornis, but the theme appears in the circle of the political publicists, enough to recall in this respect the book, rather a collection of articles by István Milotay, with the title "Ethnic crisis - Ethnic Hungary", written in the 30-s.]

In the followings I would like to point out from this voluminous literature three emblematic figures, the historian Gyula Szekfű, the writer László Németh and (maybe a little bit surprisingly) the philosopher Georg/György Lukács, completing them briefly with some other representatives from the above list, the most outstanding works of whom can be surely linked with the decline theme. The interpretation/analyses, the juxtaposing of their works and even the comparison in this context can be revealing for the understanding of our problem/of the crisis theme in the Hungarian contexts of the indicated period.

In the Hungarian historical thinking and writing between the two World Wars the name and oeuvre of Gyula Szekfű is the most striking in evoking the theme of decline. Particularly, one of his major books (according to many the most outstanding),

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entitled "Three Generations"², written immediately after the end of the First World War, respectively of the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy, of so called "historical" Hungary, the subtitle of which ("The History of a Declining Age") suggests clearly the fact that the narrating ("emplotment") technique of Szekfű relating to 19th-20th century Hungarian history was conceived in terms of topic decline and decadence.

It should be noted at the same time that the decadence theme emerged with Szekfű not after the war, as he had chosen in one of his other famous/ill-reputed works, in the "Rákóczi in Exile" which stirred a tremendous scandal, the emigrated or rather expelled Rákóczi as his main hero. That means (cf. the critique by Sándor Domanovszky) not the Transylvanian prince at the peak/climax of his power, but the - in Szekfű's portrayal - almost pitiful "daydreamer", who was ready to ally himself with every vicious and suspect/dubious force (Turks, pirates, Russians) in order to accomplish his main goal, the regaining of his principal throne in Transylvania.

But the motif of decline is one of the main ingredients of Szekfű's synthesis about Hungarian history (which can be regarded really as his main work, Bálint Hóman being his co-author), of between 1928-34 published "Hungarian History" too³, where he, in many respects, extends his theory developed in his "Three Generations" to the whole of Hungarian history. According to his concept the positive messages of the Hungarian history were epitomized by the Catholic, Europe and Habsburg oriented, Transdanubien "great Hungarians" - represented by the line of Tamás Nádasdy, Péter Pázmány, Miklós Eszterházy, Sándor Károlyi, Ferenc Kazinczy, István Széchenyi, Ferenc Deák, Gyula Andrássy, etc. who allied themselves/cooperated with the Habsburgs (see the Compromise in 1867, but the Peace Treaty of Szatmár in 1711 also) and instead of the empty slogans of non-realistic independence, revolutionary wars/uprisings, concentrated on the peaceful, slow, conservative but creative work.

This line is opposed - following Szekfű - by the line of the so called "little Hungarians" (Protestants, Cisdanubians, Turkish/Eastern oriented, nationalists, later racists) - epitomized by János Szapolyai, István Bocskay, Gábor Bethlen, Ferenc Rákóczi, Lajos Kossuth, Kálmán Thaly, etc., - who, with their nationalistic phraseology, with their daydreaming of unrealistic national independence, neglect acute social reforms (land reform or the questions of democracy and franchise, problems of national minorities) and finally they prepared, with their cited behaviour, the decadence and dissolution of historical Hungary.

It should be pointed out that the theme of decline is paramount, even overwhelming in the later works of Szekfű too, although not always and not exclusively, as he harshly defied/repudiated in the 30-es the views of Spengler and Lajos Prohászka f.i. A clear proof for it is his book, entitled "After the Revolution"(1947)⁴ [the first chapter of which appeared as a series of articles with the title "Somewhere We Have Lost Our Way" - in the newspaper "Magyar Nemzet"[Hungarian Nation] in 1943-44, . Here Szekfű explores the causes, that led to the catastrophe of 15th October, 1944, which means the terrific rule of the "Arrow Crosses", the outrageous atrocities, the cruel and extreme antisemitism, the terror and dictatorship of Ferenc Szálasi. He found them in a deviation from the centralist ideas of JózsefEötvös-László Szalay- Móricz Lukács, etc. , which means a lack of or at least the shortcomings of the development of the civil society, the omnipotence of the state and totalitarianism (which were the tragic consequences of the policy of "little Hungarians" as described).

Paramount is the decline theme in one of the main spiritual-political streams in Hungary between the two world wars, in the thinking of the so called populist writers. The basic tune was given - the fact is well known in the Hungarian scholarship - by the novel entitled "The eroded village"[Az elsodort falu, 1920]⁵ by Dezső Szabó. According to the here developed and later (in the 30-es) also represented and even "deepened" view of Dezső Szabó, first and foremost the originally foreign (mainly German, but also Jewish and Czech) middle/intellectual class was responsible for the dissolution of the historical Hungary, for Trianon and - consequently - for the revolutions in 1918/19 (in a strict contrast to the interpretation of Szekfű), making for example the Compromise with the Habsburgs in 1867 happen. This stood strictly in contrast with the interest of the Hungarians (instead of Széchenyi and Deák he preferred Kossuth), the tragic consequence of which was the fact, that the Hungarians during the First World War had to waste their best forces in Galicia (that was totally indifferent to the Hungarian interests), while they didn't have enough power to defend the vital Hungarian interests in Transylvania, against the Romanian penetration. In the fundamentalist program of Dezső Szabó, instead of the guilty/sinner "city"(mainly Budapest, which is the lifespace of the above mentioned foreign middle/intellectual class) rather the Hungarian peasant, the village and f.e. the protestant religion epitomize/preserve the Hungarian traditions and values. That's why the radical land-reform, the peasant-democracy and the

² Cf. Szekfű Gyula, *Három nemzedék. Egy hanyatló kor története*. [Three Generations. The history of a declining Age.]Budapest. 1920.

³ Hóman Bálint – Szekfű Gyula (szerk.): 1935–1936. *Magyar történet*. [Hungarian History] I–V. Második, bővített, teljes kiadás. Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda.

⁴ Cf. Szekfű Gyula, *Forradalom után*. [After revolution.] Budapest: Cserépfalvi. 1947.

⁵ Cf. Szabó Dezső: *Az elsodort falu* [The eroded village] (regény, [Budapest, 1919](#))

cooperation with the neighboring East European nations, the making familiar each other's culture (instead of the stupid "cultural superiority" program of count Klebelsberg) signify the actual political-social-cultural agenda - according to Szabó.

László Németh, another writer (originally a physician) conceived the ideas of the populists at the highest level. Németh possessed an immense European erudition and culture and according to his interpretation the Hungarian problems can be analyzed and solved only by comparison with the whole European context itself. It should be noted that Németh was a busy lecturer of the European decline literature and f.e. the classical figures of spiritual history/"Geistesgeschichte" (read more scarcely by Szekfü) - Dilthey, Spengler, Ortega, Huxley, Pirandello, later Toynbee - were not only read diligently by Németh but he reviewed and commented them regularly in his one-person journal/periodical, "Witness." (Tanú, 1932-36.) Partly adapting this spiritual history rhetorics he conceived his famous, at the same time ill reputed, in many ways misinterpreted notions about the opposite souls of "superficial/diluted"(non real) and "deep/eternal"(real) Hungarians, mainly in his well known essay (stirring also a tremendous whirl) "In Minority"(1939)⁶.

In this essay the Hungarian writer/thinker outlines a sketch about the whole development (rather decadence, deformation, dérapage) of the Hungarian literature from the 18-th century. According to this the real values/the real achievements were accomplished by the true, "deep" Hungarians (Csokonai, Berzsenyi, Kemény, Vajda, Ady, Móricz, Dezső Szabó), who represented and conveyed in their political-intellectual program the true/real interests of the Hungarians (peasantry, democracy, populists culture, protestantism, radical social reforms, Eastern Europe), but ended in a tragic/ill fate, with unsuccess, unpopularity, collapse, failure and wreck. In opposition to them the other line of the Hungarian soul/development, the superficially assimilated, "diluted"/surface Hungarians (Kazinczy, Jókai, Hatvany, Ignóty, Babits, Szekfü) who were in the ruling/conducting positions in the literal/spiritual (and political) world, but were mostly unproductive, only impressarios and organizers with their indifference towards the real Hungarian questions/fate, with their superficial optimism, the snob emulation for the West-European values, (they translated only this Western literature) they lacked the genuine creative abilities. Finally they caused/prepared the dissolution/the decadence/the decline of the Hungarian society/culture/state, forcing "in Minority" the "deep" Hungarians, ruling them out from the leading position of the Hungarian cultural and political life, which was specifically dangerous in the shadow of the approaching catastrophe/world war.

In another essay of Németh, written also in the 30-s (cf. "The Hungarians/Hungary and Europe", 1936)⁷ this decadence/decline lasting from the Enlightenment is not a unique/specific feature of the Hungarian history itself, but it characterizes - and here follows the theory of spiritual history, the application of the thoughts of Spengler, Ortega, Huizinga, Huxley - the Western European development as a whole. As the latest (he distinguished four big cultural boom/flourishing periods in its development/history, recalling somewhat the theory of St. Simon about the altering changes of the "organic" and "critical" periods in history), in the 19-th but mainly in the 20-th century (the world wars and the revolutions clearly prove it) lost its creative cultural forces, its earlier productive resources has been emptied, became slowly a flat and dry, unproductive civilization stimulated/functioned by materialism, harsh self-interests, capitalism self-reproducing/repeating technique. For Németh - it goes without saying - the Hungarians shouldn't follow the East-European (Soviet) pattern either (although he highly appreciated the Russian literature even translated them in the 50-es), which embodies in many respects the opposite sides of the Western values, such as collectivity, community, religion, socialism, tradition, irrationality, etc. which in its actual form epitomizes much more the state totalitarianism, the disappearing of the creative individual forces, disarray, unproductibility, lack of freedom and frozenness.

With all of these the Hungarians and the nations/peoples of Eastern/East-Central Europe, face a historical moment and task when they are able to show a new pattern to the whole Europe itself, an example, an alternative for the solving/mastering of the European crisis by the synthesis of the two basic, opposite, sketched cultures, the Western and Eastern values, the so called "third way"/"third road" theory. This synthesis is conceived by the (for the Hungarian audience well known) notions/terms of Németh's ideas such as: new nobility, cooperatives (instead of farms and state farms), quality socialism, the synthesis of physical and intellectual work, etc.⁸

⁶ Cf. Németh László. Kisebbségben. [In Minority.] In Németh László: *Sorskérdések*. 408-482. Budapest, 1989.

⁷ Németh László, A magyarság és Európa. [Hungary and Europe.] In Németh László: *Sorskérdések*. 252-336. Budapest, 1989.

⁸ It should be noted here, that László Németh (via István Bibó) practiced a considerable impact on the professional historiography too, particularly the work of Jenő Szűcs, entitled "Sketch about the three regions of Europe" is usually pointed out, from a much later period of course.

It has been less known (or stressed) that László Németh (and the populist theory of history) affected deeply from the historians between the World Wars István Hajnal, several studies of whom although appeared after the War in the periodical of the populist writers, in "Válasz"(Response).

It can not be particularly surprising that the decline/crisis motif is an important/organic tenet of the Marxist historical thinking, which was anyway in quite a marginal position between the two World Wars in Hungary. The Marxism/historical materialism appeared in Hungary at the end of the 19-th century, in Ervin Szabó's theoretical-historical works, later in those of Jenő Varga, (and of some bourgeois radicals' such as Pál Szende, etc.) Elek Bolgár, Jenő Czóbel, József Révai and Erik Molnár. Although they continuously complained about the decline and crisis of capitalism - basically following the formation theory they regarded capitalism as a necessary stage in the general /and abstract scheme of a linear/theological development, the final goal of which was the advent of communism/socialism. Georg Lukács's view, being the best-known and most outstanding Hungarian Marxist theorist, essentially differs from the above said. In his youth, Lukács oriented himself much more towards the somewhat conservative spiritual history/"Geistesgeschichte", in the rhetoric of which the decline question is fundamental and this (despite all the modifications and changes further on) persists in Lukács's whole oeuvre. His most relevant views in terms of our theme (decline, crisis) were developed in his also famous/and at the same time much criticized book, "*History and class consciousness*"⁹. His book – similar to the partly above mentioned works of Szekfű, Dezső Szabó and Mihály Babits – also draws the theoretical consequences of the revolutions in 1918/19 (not exclusively) in Hungary, of course, from different points of view and with differing conclusions than the above mentioned ones. In this book (rather being his most important volume of essays, since it's a collection of studies) Lukács gives an analyses of the development of modern capitalism, being brilliant in many respects and exerting a huge impact on the not much later established "Frankfurt School" (1923), even though in the end he adapted only the Marxian models and properly remained within the framework of the notion-system of the "Capital". According to Lukács - and to the Marxist theory of course - the main contradiction (this is of course a simplified account) of capitalism (and the modern world) is the dichotomy of production value and exchange value of the goods (generated, first of all, by the market). This means that the productions are released not because of their "real" values, but the value determined by the law of supply and demand, (being the main principle of the market.) This is a properly antihuman declaration form (rather main cause) of the process of the so called "alienation"/"rationalization", which is the proper characteristic feature of capitalism (and the modern world). Even the main representatives of the „bourgeois” philosophers starting from Vico and Kant, Schiller and Kleist through Hegel until Nietzsche, Spengler and Max Weber have realized this fact. The main shortcomings of the "bourgeois" philosophy were the followings: its analyses were not scientific enough, i.e. the opposition of "culture" and "civilization" - in the work of Nietzsche, Spengler having a long tradition in the German historical/philosophical thinking (going back at least to Schiller, Kleist, Herder and Kant). According to this opposition after a certain time a "breakdown" occurs in every culture when the culture loses its creative forces, and the superficial optimism, the mere and mechanistic/materialistic rationalism, the Nietzschean analytical/philological scholarship come to the fore. According to Lukács this interpretation of the opposition of culture and civilization is a myth in many respects leading itself to the mystification that the breakdowns are an unchangeable, eternal law of historical development (and finally contributing to the alienation portrayed). According to Lukács - he follows here naturally besides Marx, Hegel and Vico - all this (I mean the "alienation") should be depicted as a result of creative process of the mankind (using the notion of becoming instead of being) in its concrete historical reality. The Marxist theory has the same line of thinking regarding this process as not an eternal necessity but - applying the "scientific" categories of economics - linking it to a historical social/sociological formation (capitalism) produced by human beings. This concrete analysis offers the possibility to overcome these basic contradictions, to extinguish the "alienation", to celebrate the liberty of the humanity/mankind. Namely, the historical-social subject should be in

In the historical conception of István Hajnal the motif of decline, respectively the critic of the modern European "development" were paramount/essential as well. His views were basically influenced by the German sociology (besides Comte and positivism), mainly the conceptions of Tönnies, Vierkandt, Wundt, Ipsen and H. Freyer can be detected in his works (besides the fundamental Max Weber).

István Hajnal analyses/explores the modern development in applying the well known notion of "Gesellschaft"(society) in contrast to the model of "Gemeinschaft"(community) which prevailed mostly in the Middle Ages. During the modern era (in the era of "Gesellschaft") - according to this conception – dominate much more the business, the self interest, the "rationality", the quantity and "causality" contrasted harshly with the traditionalism of the Middle Ages, when - f.e. in the crafts (in opposition to the manufactures/fabrics – the quality, the creative human being, the pleasure felt within the creative work (which didn't concentrate primarily on the end product of this work) played the most important role, and when the interests of the individual were in a peaceful harmony with the "community". (Another big contradiction of the modern development is in the views of Hajnal the twist between the physical and intellectual work.)

We should underline at the same time that Hajnal in turning down/rejecting the West-European development conceives the harsh critic of the Eastern/East-European way as well, from which is lacking the personal motif, the individual freedom, the creative initiative that is promoter of the further development.

His views were culminated also in a so called "third path" theory (that is a synthesis of the individual and collective principals, respectively the physical and intellectual works f.e.) which can be epitomized/accomplished by the so called small European/East European nations (He urges not by chance the close cooperation of the historical writing of the small/periferic European nations.)

⁹ Cf. Lukács György: *Történelem és osztálytudat*. Budapest, 1978. [Georg Lukacs *History & Class Consciousness 1920* [In English: Translator: Rodney Livingstone; Merlin Press, 1967]

the focus of any search, whose "interest" is to extinguish the contradiction (referring to the opposition between the production and exchange values) depicted above. This subject - according to the Marxist theory - is the working class, the social class not possessing anything, being in no use to maintain the manipulation of the market and constituting – on top of all that – in its tendency the majority of a society, therefore being the harbinger of real democracy.

As it turns out from the literature dealing with Lukács, with all this the Hungarian philosopher only recalls the main theses of Marx in many respects – however his main concern is that how the social/socialist revolution is possible to happen in Eastern Europe, since Marx conceived his theory analyzing the West European developments (predicting the revolution, the advent of a new social form there). Lukács's answer is that – from here follows the notion of "*class consciousness*" - the concrete social/economical circumstances should not have been developed such an extent as Marx predicted. It's enough if such an (ideological-political, spiritual-intellectual) body exists realizing that this is the main, universal, general, necessary way ("law)/requirement of social development (irrespective of national and geographical differences, or cultural diversity) as well as that the Party actually - it goes without saying – is the communist one. The social revolution can be also part of the agenda everywhere where the Party exists (even, and first of all, in Eastern Europe, of course).

[I don't have space and time to do a more profound analysis of Lukács's views, enough is to mention that he already puts a bourgeois revolution before the socialist-communist revolution in the first half of the 20s – cf. his "Blum-theses". This act denotes a more democratic alternative, declaring the cooperation with the bourgeoisie in order to remove the feudal remnants in this society (this is a forerunner of the later "People's Front idea with all its implications). Finally we should note that the decline theme is fundamental in his main work, the "*Destruction of Reason*"¹⁰ written in the 50s, being in a persistent relation with his earlier theories. Although he does not speak about the decline of Western Europe and capitalism/Bourgeois democracy in his book, but about the decay/about the "Sonderweg", the decline of Germany and about the disarray of the German development from the "rational", Western, bourgeois road embodied by the gradual spreading over of irrationalism. I note that here he also uses the notions/rhetorics of the "Geistesgeschichte" in many respects as Lukács portrays a decline in the field of ideology and philosophy, evoking and heavily attacking the ideas of Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Spengler, Max Weber and Rosenberg.]

It is legitimate to ask what the common features are in these different decline-interpretations and in the last analyses/finally how the views, briefly sketched above, can be interpreted?

Before trying to answer these questions I would like to confirm that this period for the Hungarian culture, especially in terms of the historical writing and thinking - mainly if we compare it with the developments of "Gleichschaltung" after 1945, respectively 1948 - can be evaluated as a kind of Golden Age, including a certain paradox, as we speak about decline, crisis, decay, disintegration literature in this respect (this constitutes here the paramount sujet/subject) at the same time the spiritual/intellectual life, the literature and historical scholarship flourished (was at its peak and in many respects of European level/keeps pace with the European standards, even somehow the adaptation/application of the decline literature constitutes the pillars of this keeping pace with the European trends. It is enough to mention in this regard such (already evoked/cited) names as Dilthey, Ortega, Spengler, Madariaga, Keyserling, Meinecke, M. Scheler, B. Croce, M. Weber, Huizinga, J. Maritain. I. Ziegler, Frobenius, Papini, Tönnies/Vierkandt, etc. who epitomized the avantgarde of the European intellectual life¹¹, - they were all well known in Hungary in that period. This list, at the same time, indicates my basic idea: the so called spiritual-history, in German "Geistesgeschichte" had the main effect on the Hungarian decline-literature, and to my mind the thoughts/figures mentioned/depicted/portrayed earlier in this lecture can be interpreted and evaluated within this framework. There are and were of course heavy discussions about the term and theory of this spiritual/intellectual history and "Geistesgeschichte" (in Hungary too) in the relating literature (unfortunately the term of this fundamental school - because of the dominance of the social history and social historical theories – is lacking in many synthesis in historiography published even recently) - but it seems quite arguable, that the main ideas of the spiritual history can be discovered/detected in the Hungarian decline-literature, such as: the opposing of the social/cultural sciences/scholarship with the natural sciences, the ruling/reigning of the interpretative and hermeneutic approach ("Verstehen" instead of laws and "Erklärung"), the theory about the ontological priority of the ideas ("Weltanschauungen" with the Diltheyan terms), the opposition between the notions of "culture" and "civilization" (respectively the harsh critique of the "modern"), the skeptical view about the mass phenomena of modern civilization, but also the dominance of the so called "cultural history", contrasted to the traditional political and event history, but also to the positivist social history (in the vein of the "Annales", etc), but even a certain - sometimes even striking - political

¹⁰ Cf. Lukács György: Az ész trónfosztása. Magvető Kiadó, Budapest, 1978. (5.kiadás)[In English: „The Destruction of Reason”, London 1980, Atlantic Highlands 1981.

¹¹ Even if - it goes without saying - their works are discussed/sometimes harshly disputed up to this day and if sometimes can join them such dubious/suspect names as the Italian Julius Evola or the French Guénon

conservatism, elitist and estheticist/somewhat aristocratic world view - all these can be revealed in the rhetorics of the Hungarian crisis-discourse.

I would like to point out especially in all of this the decisive role of history, that means partly the importance/significance of the historical/historicist arguments, the dominance of the genetic point of view/aspect - almost all of the authors place their view in a historical framework/context/narratives/perspective which may include an overexpectation, an - paradoxically - optimistic (nowadays scarcely shared) illusion about the possibility of the big/grand historical narrative/"masternarratives"(even if its decline theme form.)

It holds true however that the concrete/empirical/("proper" for using the notion of Alun Munslow) and ruling historical scholarship - in Hungary too - was quite/very cautious/skeptical towards this generalizations [even in the case of Szekfű this is the least appreciated phenomena in his "Three Generations"] and its figures were not rarely marginalized, refuted/repudiated as dilettants, non "scientific". But this is also a general feature of the European or East European spiritual history - cf. the Romanian case with E. Cioran and M. Eliade.)

All this means, at the same time, that the Hungarian decadence/dissolution/decay literature cannot be interpreted exclusively by the cathacisms /catastrophes of the Hungarian history, namely the defeat in the First World War, the dissolution of the Monarchy, and Treaty of Trianon, (notwithstanding - of course - their major impacts), as its not underestimable part appeared before the first world war (partly during it, when its consequences were not to be foreseen). F.i. Szekfű's "Rákóczi in Exile" that is even with its psychologism a par excellence spiritual history /"Geistesgeschichte" work was written in 1913 and portrays the declining/decaying Rákóczi (=Hungary) who is already over the climax of his power. On the other hand this motif appears in the newly created "winner" nations in Europe/East Central Europe as well (Cf. the triad of Cioran-M. Eliade-Noica in the Romanian intellectual life, but several other representatives of the Romanian historical thinking can be mentioned in this respect - from L. Blaga to the great N. Iorga.

[All this remarks can be related respectively to the German case too, it is often argued, that the spiritual history/"Geistesgeschichte" [even its hardly translatable name indicates the fact] is a German invention and spread all over in the world war also looser Germany between the two world war. This holds but partly true, because the English Toynbee, the French Maritain, the Dutch Huizinga, the Russian Berdiaev, the Spanish Ortega etc. can also be regarded as representatives of spiritual history. On the other hand: how its much wider European impact can be explained if it would limit itself [I mean spiritual history] one-sidedly to Eastern Europe; the much wider impact referring to f.e the postmodern [which is a genuine Western European and non German - rather Anglo-Saxon and French- phenomenon] reaching back in many respects to the rhetorics of spiritual history and raising again its paramount subjects, f.e. about decline, disintegration and decay.]

Finally I would like to make a remark being in the closest connection with the orientation of spiritual history/"Geistesgeschichte": from this - to my mind - mainly by the dispositif (Foucault) of "Geistesgeschichte" generated tableau's , interpretations of decline are basically lacking the racist-biological approach, which can be exclusively explained by the way of the interpretation of "Geistesgeschichte" (as most of their representatives saw even the appearance of the racist-biological views as one of the most striking signs of the general decay.) That means that they understood the decline not (not even László Németh) by the mixing, by the dilution of the superiour and inferiour races (in the vein of Gobineau, Chamberlain and Evola), although this can be found in the Hungarian - non "Geistesgeschichte"!!! - historical/ideological literature abundantly, from István Milotay, to Ödön Málnási and Lajos Méhely.

But the lasts were never honoured by the "Geistesgeschichte"/intellectual history etiquette they even considered the "Geistesgeschichte", respectively its outstanding figures as one of their main enemies - or simply traitors and deceivers - f.e because of their - allegedly - too elitist, too abstract, too conservative and not rarely aestheticist ideas. With it receives the "Geistesgeschichte"/spiritual history a basically positive/humanistic feature and message this can be but the subject of another lecture in this conference, which elaborates the racist decline theory of the extreme rights in Hungary of the relevant period.

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Erős Vilmos: A hanyatlás témája a magyar történetírásban a 20. század első felében

A fenti tanulmány a két világháború közötti magyar válság-elméleteket elemzi. Megemlíti ezek közül például Babits Mihály, Szerb Antal, Hamvas Béla, Prohászka Lajos ezzel kapcsolatos műveit, de főként a történész Szekfű Gyula, a népi író Németh László (és Szabó Dezső), valamint a filozófus Lukács György műveit állítja az elemzés középpontjába. A szerző megállapítása szerint, bár alapvető különbség van a szóban forgó gondolkodók elméleti-teoretikus megközelítéseiben, a korábban említettekkel közös jellemvonásuk az ún. “szellemtörténet” (Geistesgeschichte) gondolati mezőjében való értelmezés. Ez a Trianoni döntés következtében kialakult felbomlással együtt gyakorolt alapvető hatást szellemi-politikai helyzetértékeléseikre.

