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Entangled traditions of race: Physical anthropology in Hungary and Romania, 1900-1940

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Abstract

This article discusses the relationship between race and physical anthropology in Hungary and Romania between 1900 and 1940. It begins by looking at institutional developments in both countries and how these influenced the most important Hungarian and Romanian anthropologists' professional and research agendas. Drawing from a wide range of primary sources, the article reveals the significant role the concept of race played in articulating anthropological and ethnic narratives of national belonging. It is necessary to understand the appeal of the idea of race in this context. With idealized images of national communities and racial hierarchies creeping back into Eastern European popular culture and politics, one needs to understand the latent and often unrecognized legacies of race in shaping not only scientific disciplines like anthropology, but also the emergence and entrenchment of modern Hungarian and Romanian nationalism.

Keywords

eugenics; Hungary; nationalism; physical anthropology; race; Romania; scientific racism

This article discusses the relationship between race and physical anthropology in Hungary and Romania between 1900 and 1940. First, I outline the institutionalization of anthropology in both countries in order to understand its trajectory in terms of professional struggles for scientific legitimacy and public acceptance. Hungarians were exposed earlier and more frequently to anthropological thinking than their Romanian counterparts; yet this institutional asymmetry was quickly compensated by conceptual symmetry and an analogous interest in racial sciences. As physical anthropologists in Hungary and Romania increasingly placed their scientific knowledge in the service of the nation-state, the national community became central to the anthropological imagination of both countries. In this regard, the Hungarian and Romanian examples should give a sense of what an eclectic and multifaceted national project physical anthropology was during this period. The history of physical anthropology and race is, after all, not only widely varied in itself, exhibiting continuities and discontinuities; it is also a part of the European culture as a whole—at times a highly influential part—as well as a receptacle influenced by a specific national culture.

Second, I intend to outline some of the nationalist debates that centered on race, and how these debates ultimately shaped the evolution of anthropology between 1900 and 1940. I further argue that the model of a closed, politically neutral professional caste governed by scientific objectivity was a rhetoric which, however serviceable to some anthropologists, corresponded only tangentially with reality. Official state politics sanctioned Hungarian and Romanian physical anthropology, and anthropological texts should also be read in this light. At a time when the political map of Central and Eastern Europe changed drastically,

anthropology as a discipline became strongly committed to the project of national engineering envisioned by the state. An even cursory examination of the main anthropological publications during this period demonstrates that many physical anthropologists in Hungary and Romania became committed nationalists, notably by generously defending the ideological foundations of official propaganda. It is thus all the more important to insist that the politicization of physical anthropology was not a fortuitous ideological process, but the logical culmination of a series of reflections on the nation's historical destiny.

Institutionalization

In order to understand the evolution of physical anthropology in Hungary and Romania one must evoke the individuals and institutions involved in maintaining the boundaries of the discipline, determine how these individuals regulated relations with one another and with other scientific communities, how they initiated new members and, finally, how they established their scientific priorities. The history of physical anthropology in Hungary and Romania is a complex one about which we still know much too little. What I attempt in this section is but a brief overview.

The widespread support anthropology received in Hungary during the second part of the nineteenth century was endorsed internationally during the Congress of Prehistoric Archaeology and Anthropology, which convened in Budapest in 1876. One significant outcome of the congress was the creation in 1878 of the National Archaeological and Anthropological Society. Shortly thereafter, in 1881, the Department of Anthropology was established at Pázmány Péter University in Budapest,¹ and its first chair was the leading Hungarian craniologist Aurél Török (1842–1912). In 1882, Török launched the journal *Anthropological Notebooks* (*Anthropológiai füzetek*), and eventually succeeded in establishing the Anthropological Museum in 1884 (Bartucz 1932, 1942). Concomitantly, János Jankó (1868–1902), Antal Herrmann (1851–1926), and Pál Hunfalvy (1810–1891) established the Hungarian Ethnographical Society in 1889 and the following year its journal *Ethnography* (*Ethnographia*). Both journals were theoretically bound together by varieties of cultural determinism and biological reductionism, but otherwise representative of European anthropology and ethnography of the time (Balogh 1939b; Hofer 1984; Sozan 1977).

Ethnic diversity was a popular topic among Hungarian anthropologists and ethnographers. A typical expression of this preoccupation is Antal Herrmann's comment occasioned by the millennium festivities in Hungary in 1896: "From an ethnological point of view," he noted, "[the Hungarian nation] consists of seven elements which perhaps contain each as many ethnographical shades or variation." Yet the heterogeneous character of the Hungarian nation did not preclude, according to Herrmann, the emergence of a certain ethnic homogeneity among Hungary's communities based on the idea of "the common fatherland, the common natural and biological relations, the continual contact with one another, the mixture of blood, and the innumerable reciprocal influences of culture, which make themselves felt not only in places of mixed population and on the frontiers of languages, and peoples, but press in from the circumference on the more solid and apparently unmixed elements in the centre" (Herrmann 1897: 390ff).

For Herrmann, like others of his generation, anthropology primarily meant collecting information about the various ethnic groups inhabiting the Habsburg empire. In a

¹The year 1881 also witnessed the publication of the first book on anthropology in Hungarian, namely Paul Topinard's *L'Anthropologie* (1876), translated by Aurél Török.

programmatic text from 1889 he assigned the ethnographer the role of curator of certain artifacts, objects that “are the relics of the domestic life of the people, to be preserved with reverence; they are the petrified witnesses of their past, like geological layers of the evolution of their cultural soil” (Herrmann 1890: 19). Tamás Hofer has described this attitude as the “stratified model of folk culture,” one that “was used in Hungarian ethnography because its political task was to articulate the peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic state, an image of contemporary Hungary which could be accepted—as they hoped—simultaneously by Hungarians, Slovaks, Romanians and the rest” (Hofer 1995: 68). Within the imperial Habsburg system, physical anthropology supplemented the popular liberal opinion on assimilation and integration, wielding images of peaceful ethnic co-existence (Frank 1999; Lafferton 2007; Turda 2007c).

The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in 1918, and the subsequent emergence of the new Hungarian state, played a decisive role in reconfiguring this style of anthropological reasoning. On one level, physical anthropology displayed a remarkable sense of continuity. The discipline’s main tenets were still defined in terms of essentially the same set of principles set by the liberal anthropologists in the 1890s: social fraternity, ethnic toleration, and political patriotism. On another level, however, these principles came under criticism. Mihály Lenhossék (1863–1937), for instance, demanded the creation of a national anthropology, separated from ethnography, one reflecting the historical conditions of the new Hungarian state and focusing exclusively on the Magyar race. He also wanted to broaden the array of subjects considered worthy of anthropological inquiry. Going beyond the *ersatz* cultural assimilation that had been the mantra of the pre-1914 political discourse, Lenhossék’s arguments fittingly came studded with a new representation of the nation and race. Physical anthropology was to become part of a general concern with health, hygiene, demography, and eugenics perceived as requirements not only for the interwar regeneration of the national community, but also for ensuring that future generations benefited from an appropriate biological environment to prosper and expand numerically (M. Lenhossék 1915, 1918).

The adaptation of physical anthropology to new developments in national politics was aided by the relocation of Hungarian universities—after World War I—from Kolossvár (Cluj) and Pozsony (Bratislava) to Debrecen and Pécs, respectively. The appointment of Kunó Klebelsberg (1875–1932) as the minister of Religious Affairs and Education in 1922 marked the beginning of a new cultural policy, devoted to strengthening Hungarian research, coupled with financial investment in institutes of research. Klebelsberg was equally successful in his efforts to attract external sources of funding, such as the Rockefeller Foundation, and in his attempts to implement educational reforms. This new cultural management was refracted through the prism of István Bethlen’s conservative government (prime minister from 1921 to 1931), which, in turn, created a favorable environment for new anthropological ideas of race and nation to emerge (Bartucz 1931). The appointment of zoologist and racial thinker Lajos Méhely (1862–1953) as the head of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Budapest in 1920—in 1926 he (together with Frigyes Verzár) also became a member of the German Society for Blood Group Research (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Blutgruppenforschung*)—further accentuated this trend.

This development was further enhanced by the rise of sero-anthropological studies in Hungary. Frigyes (Fritz) Verzár (1886–1979), professor of experimental pathology at the University of Debrecen, was one of the first Hungarian scientists to make use of the discoveries made by Karl Landsteiner (1868–1943) and Ludwig Hirschfeld (1884–1954; see Hirschfeld 1919) on ABO blood groups, and their application to racial groups, especially the Roma (Verzár and Weszeczky 1921/22; 1922). That these new ideas were viewed as capable of offering better anthropological results was illustrated by Endre Jeney (1891–1970), then

assistant at the Institute of Pathology at the University of Szeged, in his 1923 review of racial biological research in Hungary (Jeney 1923; Rosztóczy and Jeney 1933). This insistence on biology and heredity is precisely what physicians and biologists, in Hungary and elsewhere, contributed to the new scientific foundations of anthropology after 1918. The pioneering serological reflections of physicians like Verzár provided physical anthropology with a new biological framework from which to extract arguments to reinforce its bid for scientific credibility.

The relevance of physical and sero-anthropology for the preservation of Hungarian national traditions was further promoted by Lajos Bartucz (1885–1966), Mihály Malán (1900–1968), and János Nemeskéri (1914–2000). In 1922, Bartucz established an Anthropological Section within the Hungarian Ethnological Society and resumed the publication of Török's *Antropológiai füzetek*. In 1931, Bartucz became a lecturer in anthropology at the University of Budapest, and in 1940 the head of the Department of Anthropology at Horthy Miklós University in Szeged. Malán, having completed his studies with the German race-hygienist Eugen Fischer (1874–1967), established an anthropological laboratory at the College of Physical Education in Budapest in 1930, which he supervised until 1942. Recognizing the importance of anthropological research for the new national politics formulated after the return of neighboring territories to Hungary, a Department of Anthropology was established in 1940 at the Ferenc József University in Kolossvár (Cluj) in Transylvania with Malán as its chair.

During the 1930s and 1940s the symbiotic relationships that linked physical anthropology to other disciplines like biology, sociology, and geography and, more broadly, the various conceptual incarnations of the idea of the nation, determined the making and remaking of various ethnic communities perceived as important to the quest for specific Hungarian racial characteristics (Nemeskéri 1938). It is within this context that many physical anthropologists in Hungary were equally interested in eugenics.² The main issue was how to harmonize the interests of the state and the nation with the interests of individuals and families. In the name of a healthy nation, eugenics served as a mechanism with which the state and the church were able to orchestrate its demographic policies, encouraging large families while protecting Hungarian racial qualities (Farkas 1988).

Such eugenic and racial strategies were facilitated by the Heredity Section of the Hungarian Psychological Society and the Eugenic Section of the Hungarian Union for the Protection of the Family, as well as the Hungarian Institute for National Biology, founded in 1940, especially its section on Heredity, Racial Biology, and Eugenics. Under the aegis of the Stefánia Organization and the Society of Public Health, these associations endeavored to restore Hungary to its former demographic and political position in the region by promoting racial and serological research, population genetics and transfers as well as natalist policies. By 1940, when Hungary recovered some of the territories lost in 1918,³ the twin forces of nationalism and politics were fast transforming both physical anthropology and the larger texture of Hungarian cultural life. Distorted and manipulated by agile nationalists, the anthropological theories of the 1920s and 1930s were recast as ideological arguments in partisan disputes over contested territories, as the case of Transylvania during the 1940s clearly indicates. But this was not a sudden eruption of nationalist feelings among physical anthropologists; nor was it confined to Hungary. As the example of Romania suggests, physical anthropologists were often attracted to the new nationalist technologies of race

²It is important to note that the International Committee for Standardization of the Technique of Physical Anthropology was established in 1934 under the auspices of the International Federation of Eugenics Organizations.

³In 1938, Hungary annexed Southern Slovakia from Czechoslovakia and, in 1940, Northern Transylvania from Romania.

developing in Europe at the time, contributing expertise and guidance to government policies on population control and management.

In contrast to Hungary, Romania experienced a rather protracted institutionalization of anthropology. Although the Geographical Society in Bucharest had a Section of Ethnology since 1875, the first course in anthropogeography and ethnography only began in 1909, and was taught by the geographer Simion Mehedin i (1869–1962). Other Romanian scholars, like the art historian and founder of Romanian Folk Art Museum Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcas (1872–1952), also contributed to the popularization of ethnography. Both authors subscribed to an organic ordering of mankind in cultures and peoples, and practiced an understanding of ethnography as the science of gathering and exchanging information about customs, traditions, and rituals. Human geographical differences were codified culturally not racially.

One of the first anthropological and craniological surveys of Romanians was attempted by the physician Mihail Obedenaru (1839–1885), who presented three skulls to the Anthropological Society of Paris (*Société d'Antropologie de Paris*) in 1874—one of which, he asserted, was “Dacian,” as it “resembled the Dacian figures represented on the Trajan Column” in Rome (Obédénare 1874). Obedenaru’s incipient craniological research was further developed in his 1876 *Romania (La Roumanie)*, where he suggested that the Romanians were “brachycephalic” (short-headed). It was no accident that one of the first Romanian anthropologists readily adjusted his craniological research to reflect the current national preoccupation with ethnogenesis and historical continuity. The debate over the Romanians’ racial origins would become the defining context for anthropological narratives developed in Romania until World War II and beyond.

But it was the creation of Greater Romania in 1918 that gave physical anthropology its long-awaited impetus. Like in Hungary, demands were put forward for the creation of a national anthropology, one reflecting Romanian traditional values and the correspondingly specific racial characteristics (Preda 1924). Yet the first chair in Anthropology and Palaeontology was established at the University of Ia i only in 1930, and given to the paleontologist Ion G. Botez (1892–1953). The position was disbanded in 1938, but re-established in 1943 under the sociologist and anthropologist Ion Chelcea (1902–1991). Olga Necrasov (1910–1200), a former student of the German racial psychologist Egon von Eickstedt (1892–1965), also lectured there on anthropology during this period. Like her colleagues in Transylvania, Necrasov was particularly interested in the racial composition of Romania’s various ethnic groups. She focused on those inhabiting the eastern regions, like the Gagauz of southern Moldavia and the Ukrainians in the Bukovina (Necrasov 1940, 1941, 1943). Chelcea (1932, 1944), for his part, became interested in the evolution of the Roma communities and their traditions.

In 1933, the Society of Anthropology was founded in Cluj due to the efforts of a handful of hygienists and physicians affiliated with the Medical Faculty and the Institute of Hygiene and Social Hygiene. Active members included the anatomist Victor Papilian (1888–1956), the eugenicist Iordache F c oaru (1897–?), and the physiologist and pharmacologist Constantin C. Velluda (1893–1978), as well as the ethnographer Romulus Vuia (1887–1963). The Society existed until 1940, providing institutional context for promising Romanian anthropologists like F c oaru and Chelcea to present their research through professional seminars and public lectures (F c oaru 1973).

The circulation of key individuals from Cluj to Bucharest further encouraged these developments. The Transylvanian statistician Sabin Manuil (1894–1964), for instance, organized a section on Demography, Anthropology, and Eugenics at the National Institute of

Statistics in Bucharest in 1935. A section of Bio-Anthropological Studies was established at the National Institute of Statistics in 1936 and given to Focșani in 1941. The Romanian Institute of Anthropology was established in Bucharest by Francisc Rainer (1874–1944), professor of anthropology and biology at the University of Bucharest, and officially inaugurated in 1940 (Turda 2007a, 2007b).

Although dispersed geographically, Romanian anthropologists worked on a common corpus of topics, including racial morphology, serology, racial psychology, as well as social hygiene and eugenics. That they were also unified by their efforts to demonstrate that anthropology was a respected science in Romania became clear in 1937, when the Seventeenth International Congress of Anthropology and Prehistoric Archaeology was organized in Bucharest. On this occasion, official patronage coupled with extensive media coverage brought renewed significance to Romanian anthropology. Presided over by the Swiss anthropologist Eugène Pittard (1867–1962), the congress was used by Romanian anthropologists to inform foreign scholars of their achievements in such diverse disciplines as paleontology, archeology, folklore, serology, and eugenics (Turda 2009a).

By the early 1940s, for all its geographical diversity, Romanian and Hungarian physical anthropology supported a single narrative of national identity. In some measure, political developments, increased institutional networking and institutional trends imposed this discursive homogeneity. Conversely, one must understand these anthropological narratives in their own conceptual terms. Thus physical anthropology, in both countries, exhibited a number of practical and theoretical strata, and these intersecting layers must be appropriately contextualized in order for the disciplinary matrix of Hungarian and Romanian anthropology to be revealed.

Universal epistemologies: Neighboring areas of research

The discussion so far has focused on institutions and the individuals associated with them. This section explores some areas of research where Hungarian and Romanian anthropologists were particularly active. Despite the similarities between the two professional groups, there were also important differences. Crucially, nationalist cultures in both countries were frequently antagonistic. This was inevitable given the political disagreement over territories like Transylvania (Case 2009; McMahon 2009). There was, therefore, a certain amount of interaction between nationalist cultural activities and anthropological research, although the interaction was qualitatively different in the 1920s and 1940s. In this sense, anthropologists and anthropological societies were indirectly instruments of state policy.

Craniology was one field in which both countries excelled. At the beginning of the nineteenth century two important Hungarian scholars, József Lenhossék and Aurél Török, were particularly active in this field nationally and internationally. In 1875, J. Lenhossék, for instance, published his acclaimed study of human craniology, and was the first Hungarian anthropologist to study artificial cranial deformation (J. Lenhossék 1875, 1878). Another direction of research was to focus on cranial differences. Török (1882) offered one of the first detailed investigations of cranial characteristics of Romanians in Transylvania.

Around 1900 a growing skepticism about the utility of cranial research for racial purposes led many leading anthropologists to question its scientific credentials. It was Török who produced one of the simultaneously most comprehensive discussions and substantial critiques of craniology in 1890. His main scientific opus, *Principles of systematic craniometry* (*Grundzüge einer systematischen Kraniometrie*), is arguably the most detailed craniological analysis of a single skull in the history of craniology, including an astounding

5,371 measurements. Notwithstanding this admirable professional dedication, Török (1890) reached conclusions unfavorable to craniology. Ultimately, he argued that the cephalic index was irrelevant to racial differentiation, that there was no scientific possibility of proving the existence of a “pure” dolichocephalic or brachycephalic race.

Such somber assumptions about the usage of craniology did not deter physical anthropologists concerned with racial cartography from further elaborating schemes of racial classification. In 1911 the Hungarian anatomist Jenő Davida (1884–1929), for instance, published his extensive craniological research (Davida 1911); and even Bartucz never abandoned craniology in his anthropological studies (Bartucz 1917, 1935). A similar devotion to craniology characterized the first treatise on racial anthropology published in Romania after World War I, Alexandru Borcescu’s 1919 *Notions of craniological anthropology* (*No iuni de craniologie antropologic*).

In fact, craniology continued to provide a conceptual framework for physical anthropology throughout the interwar period, as exemplified by research into differences between Romanian and Hungarian cranial characteristics. In 1928, Davida researched the cranial collection housed by the Hungarian University of Cluj (Kolozsvár) prior to 1919, within which he thought to have found “pure” Hungarian and Romanian crania. The Hungarian came from largely Protestant communities, while the Romanian crania were collected from Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic communities. Davida (1928) did, in fact, refuse to accept Török’s condemnation of “pure” racial characteristics, thus reinstating craniology to its former scientific status and suggesting that its methodology was commensurate with post-1920s nationalist narratives.

The Romanian anthropologist Ion Chelcea endorsed this view in his 1935 study “Types of Romanian skulls from Transylvania: An anthropological study” (*Tipuri de cranii române ti din Ardeal: Cercetare antropologic*). Chelcea based his analysis on the crania collection held at the Museum of Natural History in Vienna, assembled by the Austrian anthropologist Augustin Weisbach (1836–1914) in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although he did not subscribe to Davida’s idea of racial purity, Chelcea suggested the existence of a dolichocephalic “Dacian racial type” concentrated among the inhabitants of the Apuseni (western) Mountains in Transylvania (Chelcea 1934/35).

Racial and sero-anthropologists repeatedly singled out methodological deficiencies associated with craniology (Steffan 1932). Some doubted craniology’s scientific validity while others preferred to tackle the issue from a different angle (F c oaru 1934; Fehér 1942). During the interwar period racial terminology was fluid and undermined by divergent interpretations. Race, especially, was severely criticized for its conceptual laxity (Romsics 2010). Accordingly, Hungarian and Romanian physical anthropologists struggled to formulate a definition of raceable to encompass both the latest developments in racial science and local, nationalist traditions. Race was a physical entity, described by French anthropologists Joseph Deniker (1852–1918) as being the “sum-total of somatological characteristics once met with in a real union of individuals, now scattered in fragments of varying proportions amongst several ‘ethnic groups’, from which it can no longer be differentiated except by a process of delicate analysis” (Deniker 1900: 8). It was also a historical entity, both physical and spiritual, the result of specific geographical conditions (Topinard 1879, 1885).

There was no consensus on what a race actually constituted, and anthropologists could hence not agree on how many races populated Europe. Attempts to work through this problem are detectable in the effort to standardize racial cartography. Here, three models of racial mapping competed for prominence. The first was proposed by Joseph Deniker, who

identified six primary races: Northern, Eastern, Ibero-Insular, Western or Cenevole, Littoral or Atlanto-Mediterranean, and Adriatic or Dinaric; along with four sub-races: sub-Northern, Vistulian, North-Western, and sub-Adriatic. Another model was outlined by the American racial cartographer William Z. Ripley (1867–1941), who insisted that there were only three European races: Teutonic, Alpine (Celtic), and Mediterranean (Ripley 1899; Winlow 2006). The German racial anthropologist Hans F. K. Günther (1891–1968) suggested that there were five European races: Nordic, Western, Dinaric, Eastern, and Baltic (Günther 1926).

Importantly, all three authors considered the cephalic index to be a reliable instrument for classification, meaning that cranial capacity ultimately differentiated between races: some were dolichocephalic (mainly the Northern and Ibero-Insular); others were brachycephalic (the Eastern, Western and Dinaric); and, finally, some were mesocephalic.⁴ It was assumed that the closer such measurements and indexes of racial type corresponded to the arithmetic average value, the more a given racial type could be understood as “pure”; conversely, the more a racial type diverged from this ideal average, the more “cross-bred” it was (Turda 2006).

But according to Mihály Lenhossék as a science craniology failed to harmonize the “sterile trend” and “the anthropology of the Hungarian people” (M. Lenhossék 1915). In other words, the focus had to account for both the importance of human interdependencies and the complexities of human actions that took place within social and institutional structures, as well as emphasize the particularity of a given nation’s biological capital. As Lajos Bartucz insisted in his 1938 *The anthropology of the Hungarians (A magyarság anthropológiája)*, anthropology’s task was “the planned and systematic investigation of the inhabitants of our country according to geographic and political regions from anthropometric, ethnographic and demographic perspectives” (Bartucz 1938: 94). Furthermore, the main principle guiding physical anthropology in Hungary should be a description of “the medium type of the Magyar race” and how it underwent changes due to the mixing of the blood among groups of peoples and nationalities living with or next to the Hungarians” (Ibid.). Indeed, it was this attempt to describe the Hungarian and Romanian racial specificity that led physical anthropologists in Hungary and Romania back to craniology for scientific evidence. Cranial methodologies that had characterized European anthropology during the last decades of the nineteenth century were thus being revived and replicated in Hungarian and Romanian anthropology (Turda 2008).

The nation’s racial character

Concerns with the nature of the racial character were certainly not Hungarian or Romanian anthropology’s exclusive scientific pursuit. Nonetheless, attempts to define the nation’s racial character were both distinctive and powerful in the Hungarian and Romanian anthropological discourses of the interwar period (Balogh 1939a). Lajos Bartucz, for instance, confessed sternly that: “one of the most difficult problems of anthropology is to establish the characteristics of the Magyar race” (1927: 211). Bartucz further argued that national character was not racial, and that racial typology made the distinction between the homogeneous and heterogeneous either wholly unusable or arbitrary. The racial type hence either fundamentally determines the character of the nation, thereby reducing it to a unique formula (innate characteristics), or it makes national identity seem adventitious (constantly created through cultural mythopoeia). Concretely, this approach had two aspects. First, an investigation into the racial history of the nation, tracing its migrations and contacts with other races. Second, research into the physical and spiritual character of the nation (Rainer

⁴In 1842, the Swedish anatomist Anders Retzius (1796–1860) first used the ratio of width to length in order to distinguish between dolichocephalic and brachycephalic crania, thus establishing a craniological comparative study of racial groups.

1937). In approaching the latter problem, two methods suggested themselves to the anthropologist: a comparative one, based on analogy, and a hereditarian one, which assumed that there were innate characteristics that always survived (Wellisch 1938).

Hungary and Romania's troubled histories confirmed what nationalists repeatedly proclaimed with respect to the national past: only a race superior in its qualities could have survived centuries of dislocations and foreign dominations. Questions as to what constituted that race were subjected to heated debates, as commentators could not agree whether it was Roman, Dacian-Roman, Dacian or Turanic, or Fino-Ugric. Nevertheless, it was a race that the Romanians and Hungarians deemed theirs and that gave them the right to rule over territories where descendants from that race now lived or had lived (Kollarits 1927).

In the late 1930s Lajos Bartucz, for instance, largely concentrated on the typology of the "Magyar racial type" and the "Magyar race." With respect to the first, Bartucz insisted that centuries of interaction between a particular racial type and specific geographical conditions generated a racial fusion. "Is there a Magyar type?" Bartucz asked; and his answer was positive. As a result of the "millenary biological history" a particular racial type emerged, one that was previously named "Mongoloid-Caucasian," and that Bartucz recoined as the "Alföld type (or the type of the Hungarian plain)." The main racial characteristics of the "Alföld type" could be found in other races and in other countries as well. However, there are two essential conditions for the individual to become physically and spiritually "Magyar": the first was to live, physically in Hungary for generations; the second was to become spiritually assimilated by the Hungarian nation (Bartucz 1939a, 1939b).

"Is there a Magyar race?" was the second question Bartucz addressed. In strict, zoological terms (i.e., subspecies), he argued, one cannot speak of a Magyar race. However, if one considered race to be a "biological symbiosis" with a "special racial structure" then those living on a territory for a thousand years formed a "harmonious race," both in hereditary and spiritual terms, a race that is Magyar. As with his emphasis on the Magyar race, Bartucz's description of the "Alföld type" encapsulated the ultimate definition of the "Magyar racial type" offered during this period. This definition was then popularized in articles and books that Bartucz published in the early 1940s, both in Hungary and abroad, especially his acclaimed *Racial question, racial research* (*Fajkérdés, fajkutatás*).

It is important to note that in the highly politicized environment of the 1940s, Bartucz dissociated himself from Nazi racism. He treated the concept of race with skepticism once more, and suggested that the term "national body" was appropriate for describing the racial history of the nation instead. This metaphor implied that the prophylactic measures necessary for the protection of the Hungarian national body had to be the result of specific Hungarian racial conditions:

"The special methods for the protection of the Magyar race could only be established based on the results obtained by Hungarian racial anthropology; otherwise, we would act as the physician who recommends a prescription or medicine to one patient based on the consultation of another patient. This is another argument for the national importance and necessity of racial research" (1940: 317).

Moreover, Bartucz labored to devise a compressed definition of racial character, concluding that the "Magyar national essence is formed from three essential sources: a special physical and spiritual racial structure of the national body; the biological; and the reproductive community, both created by history and the millenary environment of our country" (1940: 318). He concluded by faithfully combining the scientific nature of anthropology with the official narrative about the nation. Bartucz embraced the latter as fully as professionals from other disciplines such as history and sociology did. This metamorphic quality of racial

research meant that the racial type was, in fact, flexible. As Bartucz envisioned it, the problem of physical anthropology was not simply one of explaining national identity. Rather it rested on the need to recognize that perhaps no conclusive consensus on what the nation represented would arise, apart from the anthropological term of “racial type.”

The law professor István Csekey (1889–1963) reinforced this view when he commented that: “Race is therefore something constant, but the people and the nation vary frequently. The race is what is hereditary” (Csekey 1939: 111). In addition, Csekey rejected the idea of racial purity and commended that the Hungarian race was racially heterogeneous:

“It is precisely in her particular racial composition, resulting of the quantity and the quality of the racial elements represented in her that this Hungarian nation differs from all other nations of the world. And as such, one can indeed call it ‘a unique and solitary branch.’ In this sense a Hungarian race exists. It is a mosaic, a mixture that itself cannot be found anywhere in the world” (1939: 114).

It was exactly this ethnic mosaic that physical anthropology hoped to disentangle. Even those Hungarian and Romanian anthropologists who specifically rejected theories of racial supremacy and ethnic purity were too deeply engaged with the nationalistic milieu of the 1930s and 1940s not to be affected in great measure by the intellectual persuasiveness of national idealism (Lahovary 1929; Marót 1940).

The impact physical anthropological research had on public consciousness and official political discourses in Hungary and Romania needs further study, but here we can at least glimpse the wider meanings of race, and how they influenced certain scientific agendas. Imbedded within the Romanian and Hungarian obsession with certain territories, like Transylvania, was the characteristically amorphous concept of national identity: an identity created in order to deepen the historical character of a country, region, community, and landscape. Anthropologists were supposed to do more than just catalogue skulls and record physical differentiations among groups and individuals. They were supposed to create new foundations for political decisions. As Iordache F c oaru declared, “In our national politics, anthropology has the role to clarify some of the most important issues concerning our political rights over the territory we possess and over territories we do not possess” (1938: 358).

The mapping of the race’s somatic characteristics was based on the wider assumption that it was legitimate to categorize ethnic groups through varying forms of measurement and that it was equally legitimate to represent these measurements graphically. Visual representations of the race, such as craniology, were thus accepted as examples of racial differentiation and environmental determinism. As noted, both Hungarian and Romanian anthropologists used craniology until the late 1930s to produce a narrative of descriptive anthropology that could be utilized for nationalist purposes. Paralleling this trend was one that drew its vitality from serology and blood group research. It was assumed that blood groups could offer more accurate means for classifying human races.

According to Lajos Méhely (1934), for instance, blood group research was necessary for “the strict protection of racial borders.” This view was also advocated by the Romanian eugenicist and racial anthropologist Petru Râmneanu (1902–1981), who argued that “blood is the real, perhaps the unique, source which remained untouched by the vicissitudes of time” (Râmneanu and David 1935: 40). In a series of articles and books published during the 1930s and 1940s, Râmneanu applied this theory to his research on the ethnic groups in Transylvania, especially Romanians, Hungarians, Szeklers, and Csángós, in order to demonstrate their racial origins. The conclusions Râmneanu reached reflected his passionate nationalism when he insisted that the Szeklers were in fact Magyarized

Romanians, and the Csángós racially Romanians. This was only one symptom of a wider process of racial appropriation in which the biological structure of an ethnic group was actively reinvented for nationalist purposes. János Gáspár (1944), for example, had similarly argued that the Ruthenians in the sub-Carpathian Ukraine preserved ancient Magyar racial elements, thus distinguishing them from the Slovaks and other Slavs. Unhesitatingly, both Râmneanu and Gáspár condensed a variety of racial ideas into the concept of Romanian and Hungarian national identity, respectively. Theirs was not an ordinary anthropological classification of ethnic communities but an anthropologically inclined political technology of re-establishing connections between territory and identity. As Râmneanu explained:

“The application of the serological investigations in the populations is one of the most important achievements for anthropology. In this way, based on the variations among fixed limits of the classical blood groups, we are able to determine to which nation belongs every population nucleus. We are convinced that the distribution of the blood groups gives better indication about the extension of an ‘ethnie,’ than the language, the culture, and the customs” (1939: 329).

It should come as no surprise that claims made by Romanian physical anthropologists and serologists about the racial origin of the Hungarian communities in Transylvania reverberated particularly painfully in Hungary.⁵ Although many Hungarian scientists and politicians considered the loss of Transylvania unjust, the Romanians argued that the region was ethnically part of Romania. It was within this polarized context that physical anthropology was assigned a new mission in both countries: to provide the nation with a corresponding racial narrative (Turda 2007a). Most fundamentally, at a time of war and accelerated nationalism, when the politics and significance of territory were actively recomposed, anthropology was deployed to interrogate the racial coexistence of Hungarians and Romanians (S. Manuil 1924; S. Manuil and Popoviciu 1924). Hungarian anthropologists and geneticists like Mihály Malán (1900–1968) and Lajos Csík (1902–1962) serologically examined the filtered ethnic composition of northern Transylvania after its return to Hungary in 1940, only to argue that the traces of Romanian rule had left were only ephemeral memories on the retina of the Transylvanian Hungarians’ nationalist imagination (Csík and Kállay 1942; Malán 1940).

Moreover, and as elsewhere in Europe at the time, Hungarian and Romanian physical anthropologists became supporters of the new developments in genetics and eugenics, and accepted that heredity determined the transmission of pathological and racial characteristics (Biró 1936; Dumitrescu 1927; Ionescu and Ionescu 1930). Accordingly, they struggled to formulate a definition of a racial type, one able to encompass the latest developments in racial sciences on the one hand, and reflect the political developments in their countries, on the other hand (Motru 1941). Ultimately, the “Romanian racial type” (“Dacian” or “Carpathian”) served to produce an ideological counterargument to the “Alföld racial type” advocated by Hungarian anthropology (Kürti 2001). The nation’s racial character thus posed the question of national metamorphosis; that is, the process of viewing national belonging through a two-pronged process where one is internal (classification and differentiation), and the other external (delineating relations to other racial groups). The nation’s (Hungarian or Romanian) uniqueness was accordingly embodied in this ideal racial type, a hypostasis in which national character found its quintessential form in nature, culture, and spirit (A.

⁵One of the few successful models of collaboration between Romanian and Hungarian sociologists and ethnographers is the group of Hungarian intellectuals in Transylvania known as the “Transylvanian Youth.” In the 1930s these intellectuals, grouped around the journal *Erdélyi Fiatalok*, established contacts with the Sociological School of Dimitrie Gusti in Bucharest, and engaged in social and ethnographic research in the Hungarian villages in Transylvania. They believed that the essential qualities of the Hungarian race had been preserved in these villages, protected by their geography and distance from the urban centers of Romania and Hungary (see Hitchins 2007; Venczel 1935).

Manuil 1943). When we move from the level of exclusively Hungarian or Romanian national perspectives, that is, the comparative debates on the racial types of ethnic groups, we find that these two national anthropologies were never seriously interested in engaging with the scholarship produced by the opposing camp. Indeed, when it came to the subject of race, both Hungarian and Romanian physical anthropologies functioned in parallel universes, always concomitant but never interacting.

Conclusions

Between 1900 and 1940, in Hungary and Romania alike, an impressive emphasis was placed on defining race and its connection to biological mechanisms of identification and classification. Physical anthropology, in turn, became associated with all the other processes intrinsic to the discussions on national identity, such as national particularity, historical destiny, and ethnic assimilation. It is for this reason that, toward the end of the 1930s, Hungarian and Romanian physical anthropology more closely resembled a nationalist program than a scientific research agenda. In this convoluted dialogue between science and politics, the same motivations that universalized anthropology also nationalized it; moreover, the same developments that made craniology, serology, and other anthropometric methodologies fundamental to anthropology's central position within the social sciences also gave rise to their championing the contested field of national identity (Bosnyak 1939; Minovici 1939).

The fact that both Romanian and Hungarian physical anthropologists agreed that their nations were racially mixed did not undermine their belief in a racial type, namely a form of racial unit they deemed unique, whether it was Alföld, Dacian, or Carpathian. Even within the shifting boundaries of the international politics of the 1940s, anthropologists' attention was markedly attracted to the physical contours of the nation—physicality they idealized and invoked in their research. Such an idealization of the nation meant that the national community was not interpreted in cultural or political, but in biological and racial terms. Such processes of racial appropriation became popular in the 1940s in Europe, most tellingly in the Nazi research in Central and Southeastern Europe (Turda 2009b).

During World War II, the relationship between race and physical anthropology in Hungary and Romania became a pressing concern because of the need to define the national body in a period where political revisionism reached its pinnacle—both in scientific practices and literary exercises as well as the very substance of national politics. Not surprising, Hungarian and Romanian anthropological research embodied two competing but mutually exclusive nationalist aims. The nationalization of the body politic, on the one hand, and the less successful ambition of two nations to translate their common regional history into a peaceful reality, on the other hand, markedly influenced the development of physical anthropology, before and after World War II.

Although it is rarely openly acknowledged, many of the nationalist narratives produced during communism, especially in Romania, remained deeply connected to the mentalities and styles of anthropological reasoning articulated during the interwar period (Milcu and Maximilian 1967; Malán [1948] 1960; Milcu and Dumitrescu 1958, 1961; Bartucz 1957). The residual importance of anthropological ideas about race discussed in this article are also a potent and neglected element in the resurgent appeal of populist and nationalist strategies devised after 1989. Their evaluation is therefore essential in providing refreshing insights into theories of national particularity centered on the symbolic geography of nation coded into ethnicity and territory. If, as Thomas H. Eriksen claimed, “anthropological knowledge can help in making sense of the contemporary world” (2004: 3), then one cannot assume to

understand the present without considering the past, and with it the politically textured history of physical anthropology between 1900 and 1940.

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Biography

Marius Turda is the author of *The Idea of National Superiority in Central Europe, 1880-1918*, *Eugenism i antropologia rasial în România, 1874-1944* and *Modernism and Eugenics*. His main areas of interest include the history of eugenics, racism, anthropology and nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe, with a particular focus on Hungary and Romania.

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