

IN MEMORIAM LAJOS LIGETI (1902–1987)

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A review of the life and work of Lajos Ligeti proves to be both an easy and a challenging task.¹ It is rendered easier by the fact that Ligeti published the fundamental principles of his future scholarship 80 years ago. In 1932, he saw his *A magyarság keleti kapcsolatai* [Eastern connections of the Hungarian people] in print as part of the Minerva series, one which may now be unfamiliar to many. In it, he outlined his scholarly plans. In 1986, one year before his death, he published his magnum opus, *A magyar nyelv török kapcsolatai a honfoglalás előtt és az Árpádkorban* [The Turkic connections of the Hungarian language before the Conquest and during the Árpád dynasty]. Seemingly, therefore, one need do little else but compare his plans and the culmination of his work 54 years later. But everyone who has examined the life's work of a scholar knows that between two points in a career it is not a straight line that forms the shortest path. Indeed, Ligeti's significance as a scholar cannot be understood merely by contrasting the plan and its realisation. We must examine how this young man from the small town of Balassagyarmat arrived at his great conception, how he prepared for his career, what formed the basis for his unquestionable international renown, and how he became a leading figure in Hungarian academia for decades – and not only in Oriental Studies. Indeed, he was a vice-president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for an exceptionally long time, and perhaps it would be appropriate at this point to mention a fact that is only known to a few: Ligeti was also the acting president of the Academy for a brief time. Yet no description of such a career would be complete without including the personality of the scholar and the

¹ A slightly changed and edited English version of a lecture given at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2002 and published in Hungarian in 2006 in co-operation with the Turkological Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the University of Szeged.

characteristic features of the teacher. It is also nearly impossible to do so, however, because the academic field which he studied so meticulously is an incredibly broad one. It covers geographic areas from China to Hungary, scholarly subjects from linguistics to history, and historical periods from ancient times to the contemporary; it examines spaces, cultures, languages, and disciplines. In fact, Ligeti's scholarly findings – as tends to be the case with true scholarly findings – can only be understood properly by those who themselves are deeply knowledgeable in the subject and are familiar with the current state of international scholarship and research methods.

It perhaps becomes clear, then, that a worthy and complete summary represents a nearly impossible task, one which certainly ought not to be undertaken by one person. I therefore admit at the outset that I will be subjective in several respects. I will pass on my own views of Ligeti's life's work and endeavour to achieve some sort of completeness, although the description will be condensed at times and at other times more detailed. I will also talk about human characteristics that may soften the stony, statue-like quality of the image that we may have.

Lajos Ligeti was born on 28th October 1902 in the town of Balassagyarmat in northern Hungary. Brought up in a very modest family, he attended local schools. Interestingly, as an adult, he was very consistent in avoiding any discussion of his childhood and family even during the friendliest conversations. We naturally respected this, and we are unsure even to this day whether his father was a master bootmaker or not. Not that this is something that could not be researched but because it was his express wish that we should not go into it. With straight *As* on his school-leaving exams and the recommendation of one of his teachers, young Lajos Ligeti submitted his application to Eötvös College in Budapest in 1921. After the usual line of questioning, the committee were about to inform him that he was to be admitted when he confessed that there was a problem. The head of the school-leaving examination board had voided everyone's exam results because some cheating had been uncovered and thus his results were not valid either. In the autumn of the same year, then, he repeated his exams and was naturally admitted to university with his results in hand. If he had told the admissions committee beforehand, he would have lost a year and he felt that he had no time to waste.

In 1921, he enrolled in classical studies at Pázmány Péter University in Budapest, and there are perhaps not many who know that he earned a teaching degree in Latin and Greek in 1925. Certainly, philology – the appreciation of original texts – and a classical education accompanied him through his entire life, but the deciding influence on this extraordinarily open-minded young man during his first years at university was Zoltán Gombocz. Gombocz had moved from Kolozsvár (Cluj in present-day Romania) in 1919, where he soon became professor of Hungarian linguistics,² but he taught a number of other subjects at Eötvös College. For example he held French classes for freshmen. And it was during Ligeti's first French course with

² Zoltán Gombocz was a professor of Altaic Studies in Kolozsvár. The name of this discipline at the time signified what we now call Uralic and Altaic Studies. The Department of Altaic Studies as an educational unit was not relocated to Budapest but to the University of Szeged, which was being formed at the time.

Gombocz that the young man came to like the professor, especially his wry humour. ‘Now look, young man’, Ligeti would quote Gombocz, ‘while *fenêtre* may in fact mean “door” under certain circumstances and under certain conditions, it does have a tendency to mean “window”.’ We heard this more than once when we would mis-translate a word during our first classes. Soon, however, Ligeti started taking other courses held by Gombocz. In 1922, he registered for Gombocz’s class ‘The History of the Hungarian Vocabulary’, and this determined the path of his academic career. In short, he learnt method, scholarly criticism, and approach from Gombocz, while he studied Turkology under Gyula Németh, who was his senior by only 12 years (or by one animal cycle, as he used to say). As of 1919, Németh had been professor of Turkic Studies at the department established by Ármin Vámbéry.³

Although Ligeti received a teaching degree in classical studies in 1925, he also earned a doctorate the same year with a concentration in Turkology and with Hungarian linguistics and Eastern languages, specifically Manchu and Chinese, as his secondary areas. He studied the latter under Vilmos Pröhle – who was made head of the Department of East Asian Studies because of his abilities as a polyglot rather than due to his scholarly achievements. Ligeti was granted the coveted Regent’s ring on receiving his doctorate. As many know, this ring was awarded to those who had earned *As* in all their subjects both in secondary school and at university. He was the last one – as he would half-jokingly complain – to receive an iron ring instead of the usual golden one due to the lean economic times in Hungary after the First World War.

At that time, the recipient of the ring was offered the choice between a permanent post and a fellowship abroad. Ligeti chose the latter and travelled to Paris in the autumn of 1925. (He returned in 1926 for the conferral of his doctorate.) In Paris, he studied Chinese, Mongolian, Tibetan, and Turkic linguistics. Of his teachers in Paris, the names of four must be mentioned here. First of all, Paul Pelliot, who had become not only his teacher, but also a role model and unquestioned authority. Pelliot was a world-famous professor of Sinology who had taught at the Collège de France as of 1911 and whose name marks a paradigm shift within the field. While the study of Inner Asia had formerly been seen as peripheral by scholars who studied the great river valley civilisations, specifically the Chinese, Indian, and Iranian cultures (Wolfram Eberhard had later even referred to the peoples of Inner Asia as the *Randvölker*), Pelliot turned Inner Asia into an independent research field as ‘Haute Asie’, which Ligeti would Hungarianise to ‘Belső-Ázsia’ (Inner Asia). For researchers of Inner Asia, it is essential to know Chinese, Tibetan, Indian, and Iranian cultures and sources because they explain and document the linguistic and historical processes of Inner Asia. Thus, for these researchers, it was Sinology and Indology that now became the ‘auxiliary disciplines’.

Ligeti also studied Chinese language history under Henri Maspero, Tibetan, especially the recently discovered Old Tibetan language, under Jacques Bacot, and the history of the nomadic peoples and the steppe under René Grousset. It would be most

³ Gyula Németh’s appointment as full professor was dated 31st December 1918.

rewarding to examine the impact of these four great French scholars on Ligeti's life-work, but this would be a task for another time and place.

At the end of these three years' of study in Paris, Ligeti was offered a post in the French capital, but he chose the uncertainty of Hungary and returned permanently in 1928. For a short period, he held classes part-time at Eötvös College, but, as he saw that there was little chance of securing a post, he applied for and won a fellowship to China with the support of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Ministry of Education. He conducted research in Inner Mongolia and Manchuria for three years. He then offered a gripping description of the fieldwork he had conducted in China in his popular *Sárga istenek, sárga emberek* [Yellow gods, yellow people] (1934). A portion of his scholarly findings was published in his book *Rapport préliminaire d'un voyage d'exploration fait en Mongolie chinoise 1928–1931*.

When Ligeti returned to Budapest in the autumn of 1931, he believed that he was adequately prepared for the career he had chosen. However, conditions had hardly changed since 1928. Permit me to quote from his unpublished autobiography⁴: 'I returned to Budapest from my first journey to Asia in the autumn of 1931, but I did not manage to find a post for years, and it was only because of my understanding alma mater, the Eötvös College, which rushed to my aid with room and board, that I was able to survive those lean times and managed to continue my scholarly work. On 1st December 1931, I was selected for a post as an unpaid instructor at the Faculty of Arts and Letters at the University in Budapest, and, at the same time, I was also entrusted with lecturing on the ancient history of Inner Asia, also gratis.' In 1932, Ligeti completed his habilitation thesis in Mongolian linguistics and was named a *privat-docent* (somewhere between senior lecturer and reader in Britain today) – though the conditions of payment remained the same.

The turning point came in 1934. Having been informed of his woeful situation, his friends offered him not only a permanent post at the Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes, but also French citizenship and a fellowship to Japan. The Hungarian education ministry learnt of this from Paris and decided to take action. Ligeti was made a teaching assistant with the National Committee for Unemployed Graduates effective 1st July 1934, and, as of 1st October, he was named a Class 2 Lecturer at the Department of East Asian Studies within the Faculty of Arts at the University in Budapest and placed in Pay Scale Category 8. At that point, Ligeti was to make a truly human decision. He returned the French citizenship application forms untouched to Paris and chose the dimmest of Hungarian hopes over a far more tempting future in France. He often pondered this decision in difficult moments during his later life.

Since that time, his academic career would be marked by variable but significantly improved circumstances. In 1936, he was elected a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, was promoted in 1939 to *professor extraordinarius* (half a step below full professor), and established the Institute for Inner Asian

⁴ The curriculum vitae was dated 1st July 1945 and consisted of two single-spaced pages. The copy I received from Ligeti is a Xerox copy. Most likely, he had prepared the original for a wave of 'identity checks' in 1945.

Studies in the same year, where he first taught Mongolian and where, as of 1942 (the 100th anniversary of Kőrösi Csoma's death), he began teaching Tibetan as well. In 1941, he became a *professor ordinarius*, or full professor. In the same year, he was made assistant director of the Institute for Hungarian Studies at the university. As of 1942, in addition to his own department, he headed the Department of East Asian Studies, where in 1943 he received the *venia legendi*, or 'right to teach', in the areas of Chinese and Manchu linguistics. He became a full member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1947.

In 1949–1950, Ligeti played a role in the re-organisation of the Academy. As an internationally respected member of the old Academy, he was elected a vice-president of the new one. It is not my task to evaluate the history of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences – although I hope that a frank assessment of the past of that institution will be conducted by those more able than I at some suitable time. I would just like to mention a few events that are closely related to Ligeti's academic career.

In late October 1956, during the Hungarian revolution, István Ruzsnyák, then-president of the Academy, resigned and fled to Sweden, only to return in early 1957. In the meantime, Ligeti took over as acting president. Although on 26th January 1957, a few members of the Academy asked Ruzsnyák to return to his post, it was only in December of that year that he was re-elected as president.

In 1950, Ligeti founded *Acta Orientalia*, which has become an internationally acknowledged journal in the field to this day. He played no small role in establishing the Oriental Library at the Academy. The first young researcher paid by the Academy was meant to become a member of the Department of Inner Asian Studies effective as of 1956, but this actually did not come to pass before 1957. This step planted the seed for the later Altaic Studies Research Group at the Academy, which operated in conjunction with the Department of Inner Asian Studies at the University in Budapest (having by now taken on its current name of Eötvös Loránd University). After Gyula Németh retired in 1964, Ligeti took over as chair of the Department of Turkic Studies, a post which he held until 1971. In 1969, he also re-organised the Kőrösi Csoma Society and played a key role in introducing Oriental Studies to Szeged, donating his personal library during his lifetime. At the same time, he was always against the formation of an Institute of Oriental Studies that would be divorced from higher education.⁵ He retired in 1972.

When describing the far-reaching results of his scholarly career, one is best advised to do so in thematic groups. At the same time, I must admit that Ligeti's topic areas are all built on and reinforce one another. He became involved in Sinology, Tibetan Studies, Mongolian Studies, and Turkology, as he observed in 1932, in order to learn and provide a firm basis for the Eastern background of the early history of the Hungarians.

⁵ Ligeti thought that, at least in the humanities, there should be no 'official researchers' hired. A scholar's duty was to teach. That was what he was paid for. However, one could only teach with a scholarly research background, and, therefore, the place for academic research was the university.

I will begin with his work in Tibetan Studies – and not only for personal reasons. (My first encounter with Ligeti was during my studies of Tibetan.) Although the founder of international Tibetan Studies was Sándor (Alexander) Csoma de Kőrös, we know that he worked in India and died there. The founder of Tibetan Studies in Hungary, however, is Lajos Ligeti. It was during his studies in Paris that he learnt about the new discoveries then being examined, the Old Tibetan manuscripts from Tun-huang and Turfan (7th–11th centuries). The first to publish the Paris manuscripts of the Old Tibetan Chronicle and the Annals, both so famous today, was Jacques Bacot, who had taught Tibetan to Ligeti. The Kingdom of Tibet, having grown into a world power in the 7th century, not only defeated China and entered into an alliance with the Arabs, but also left a rich set of contemporary source materials. These make mention of Inner Asian peoples and languages that are important in researching the Eastern background of Hungarian history, such as the Pechenegs. Ligeti worked with original manuscripts first hand (Tibeti források Belső-Ázsia történetéhez [Tibetan sources for the history of Inner Asia]. *Kőrösi Csoma Archivum* 1936, pp. 76–103).⁶ In addition, he also outlined the basics of a Tibetan language history. Practically nothing of this research, with which he created completely new perspectives, was ever published. His influence can be detected first and foremost through his students, of whom I would mention the late Géza Uray, who achieved renown internationally as a researcher of Old Tibetan sources.

Ligeti's work in Sinology was restricted to two areas within this enormous field. One is the Chinese historical sources. Understandably, the Chinese showed interest in the northern and western barbarians and collected everything they could find on them as required for affairs of state. Moreover, China had been partly or fully conquered by Inner Asian peoples a number of times. These were almost exclusively speakers of Turkic, Mongolic, or Manchu-Tungusic languages, i.e. Altaic languages. These Chinese-language sources, therefore, represent a treasure trove of information about the Altaic peoples. In fact, one cannot write a scholarly study on the early or middle Turkic peoples, the era prior to the Genghisid Mongols, or the age of the Mongol invasions without understanding the Chinese sources. The majority of these have been published and are available in French, German, and, increasingly, English translation. There is perhaps no need to stress, however, that no translation can replace the original text. Not to speak of the special difficulties presented by the Chinese texts, which can only be overcome with a thorough knowledge of Sinology. Expertise in Sinology becomes particularly important in dealing with onomastic material. As will be familiar, Chinese uses a writing system which is complex, which contains both semantic and phonological elements, and which developed out of picture-writing. A huge separate chapter in the study of Sinology centres on the question of how a Chinese ideogram that has remained practically unchanged for 2000 years was pronounced before Christ or in the 7th, 10th, 14th, or 17th centuries. Yet another research

⁶ He returned to this topic in a later study: A propos de « Rapport sur les rois demeurant dans le Nord ». In: Macdonald, A. (ed.): *Études tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou*. Paris, 1971, pp. 166–189.

area entails identifying the various proper nouns known from Western, e.g. Greek or Latin sources, with Chinese names. Naturally, part of a critical study of a source is to see if a particular Turkic or Mongolic personal name or place name is the same when mentioned several times in several periods in several sources. For this, besides a solid understanding of Sinology, one must know the linguistics of the particular Turkic or Mongolic language involved. One portion of Ligeti's work in Sinology was focused on this type of critical approach to sources. He enriched the field by identifying numerous Turkic and Mongolic peoples, tribes, and individuals.

The other, closely related area is Chinese language history. The written records of Chinese date back to the emergence of the Chinese writing system in the 3rd millennium BC. Despite the wealth of written sources, research is rendered difficult by the variations in the ideograms already noted before. Sinology has collected a wealth of tools to assist in the reconstruction of historical sound changes in Chinese. These include rhyming dictionaries, Chinese words which represent early borrowings into other languages (in Sino-Japanese, Sino-Vietnamese, and Sino-Korean records), and, of course, non-Chinese written records of Chinese. Ligeti made an outstanding contribution to this area as well. Of his numerous works, I would highlight a Chinese record written in the 'Phags-pa script (*Le Po kia sing en écriture 'phags-pa. AOH 4, 1954, pp. 1–52; see also Le chinois en écriture 'phags-pa. In: Actes de XXI^e Congrès International des Orientalistes. Paris, 1949, p. 262; Načal'nye smyčnye i affrikaty Cejunja i drevnemandarinskogo v transkripcii kvadratnoj pis'mennost'ju. In: Očerki po fonologii vostočnyh jazykov. Moskva, 1975, pp. 305–319*). The 'Phags-pa script was named after Lama 'Phags-pa, who was court priest to Kublai Khan. Kublai Khan, the first ruler of the Mongol Yuan dynasty, which ruled over all of China, ordered his court lama to develop a writing system with which every language spoken in the empire could be put down and read. The lama practically created an alphabet based on a version of the Tibetan script which had undergone centuries of independent development from the original Sanskrit.⁷ This was used to put down Chinese texts as well. Familiarity with this rich material is key to the reconstruction of Chinese sounds. Knowing the Tibetan background and the Mongol use of the script, Ligeti managed to solve some of the disputed issues in the history of Chinese sound changes.

Ligeti, however, was truly at home in the Turkic and Mongolic language sources which had been transcribed into Chinese script. Today, Ligeti is primarily known and respected internationally as a Mongolist. Every academic field has its key texts. In Mongolian Studies, one of these is the *Secret History of the Mongols*, written in the mid-13th century. This historical source, often written in beautiful poetic language, begins the history with the ancestors of Genghis Khan and closes it with his sons. This text is an historical, literary, and linguistic record in one. For a Hungarian, this

⁷ 'Phags-pa script is in fact a transition between syllabic and alphabetic writing. If a letter signifying a consonant is followed by the vowel /a/, the writing system does not indicate the vowel. The symbol for the consonant in this case is also a symbol for a syllable, but it behaves like a letter in all other cases. With a few exceptions, 'Phags-pa spelling follows Tibetan spelling, which in turn follows that of Sanskrit.

would be akin to having a twelve-chapter chronicle written in Hungarian from, say, 1040 on King Stephen and his ancestors.

The *Secret History of the Mongols* survived in a Chinese transcription since it was used as a text to practise in Chinese schools for translation. So much has been written about this text that it could easily fill a library, yet Ligeti's transcription⁸ remains indispensable internationally. Now, this translation was published in Hungarian.⁹ According to a familiar story, when Igor de Rachewiltz published certain excerpts of the English translation of the *Secret History* in Australia, Ligeti extended his congratulations but also expressed his surprise. The Australian professor, who, despite his name, is of Italian descent, honestly admitted that he had had Ligeti's work translated into English by Hungarians living in Australia and that many of his solutions were based on Ligeti's work. In the end, the Australian would demonstrate fairness by acknowledging this in the final edition of his English translation.¹⁰

Ligeti's other major work was a practically complete edition of the Middle Mongolian records with a new, unified approach. He had published Mongolian records of great value independently and for the first time (for example the Istanbul Glossary), worked much on the Mongolian part of the Rasûlid Hexaglot, published recently by P. B. Golden and edited by G. Kara,¹¹ but Ligeti's great achievement is the critical edition of all the linguistic records with a unified approach. This came out in two series, the first being the preliminary version, the second being the final one. He edited the main volumes of the *Mongol Nyelvelméltár* [Collection of Mongolian linguistic records] and the *Monumenta Linguae Mongolicae Collecta*, but a number of his students also worked on several volumes in this excellent series, each of which Ligeti edited with great care. For each text edition, he himself prepared (or had others prepare) a full lexical index for that linguistic record (*Indices Linguae Mongolicae Monumentis Traditorum*). Unfortunately, these volumes are difficult to access, but, fortunately, all the outstanding foreign researchers in the field have received or obtained a copy. The bigger problem, however, is that Ligeti had intended these volumes to lay the groundwork for a larger project. The magnum opus which was to deal with the Middle Mongolian language was never completed, and only sections of it came out. The difficult phase of the work is ready, but one need not be a fortune-teller to see that the fruits of this labour will be enjoyed by others.

⁸ *A Mongolok Titkos Története* [The secret history of the Mongols] edited by Lajos Ligeti. (Mongol Nyelvelméltár III.) Budapest, 1964. Also very important: *Histoire secrète des mongols. Texte en écriture ouigoure incorporé dans le chronique Altan Tobči de Blo-bzai bstan-'jin*. Budapest, 1974.

⁹ *A Mongolok Titkos Története* [The secret history of the Mongols]. Translated from Mongolian by Lajos Ligeti. The poems were translated by Géza Képes. Budapest, 1962. It must be noted that Képes gave the final form to the poems based on Ligeti's raw translations. This resulted in inaccuracies in a few cases, which Ligeti was not always able to correct.

¹⁰ Igor de Rachewiltz: *The Secret History of the Mongols. Papers on Far Eastern History* 4, September 1971, p. 116.

¹¹ Peter B. Golden: *The King's Dictionary. The Rasûlid Hexaglot*. Leiden–Boston–Köln, Brill, 2000. – Ligeti's unpublished work on this theme, edited and amended by G. Kara, appears in this fascicule of *AOH*, pp. 137–222.

Ligeti placed critical text analysis in Mongolian in the service of his research on Mongolian language history. Nearly all of his publications could be labelled as ‘Blueprints for a New Mongolian Language History’. All the outstanding scholars who studied Mongolian language history before Ligeti or as his contemporaries used a retrospective method and attempted to reconstruct the history of Mongolic languages from present-day Mongolic languages though they also considered certain early Mongolian records. Ligeti also dealt with contemporary Mongolic languages, especially during his journey to Afghanistan in 1936–37,¹² but he was also aware of the fact that early Mongolian records provide an excellent timeframe for examining language changes. Besides these linguistic records, he made use of others as well. These included the foreign-language transcriptions of Mongolian texts as well as loan words from Mongolian into other languages and from other languages into Mongolian.

At the same time, he was sceptical about the relatedness of the Altaic languages. He saw clearly that the relatedness of the three language families considered to be Altaic – Turkic, Mongolic, and Manchu-Tungusic – could only be examined after the mutual effect between them had been set apart. I would mention two of his works related to this topic, which are relevant even today. One is his study of the Mongolian elements of the Manchu language, published in French in 1960 and in Hungarian a year later. He clarified a number of mysteries behind the historical sound changes in both languages. The other is his research on Jurchen. The language of the Jurchen people, who established a dynasty in 1114 and ruled until the Mongol period, was the closest to Manchu. It is preserved through its own texts and glossaries written in Jurchen script, which has thus far been virtually indecipherable,¹³ and through texts in Chinese transcriptions. Written with incredible thoroughness, Ligeti’s articles on Jurchen actually examine the ways in which Mongolian loan words reflect the Mongolian language before Genghis. (Note préliminaire sur le déchiffrement des « petits caractères » jou-tchen. *AOH* 3, 1953, pp. 211–218; Les inscriptions djurtchen de Tyr. La formule om mani padme hūm. *AOH* 12, 1961, pp. 5–26).¹⁴

In 1927, Ligeti published his article *Kitaj nyelv és nép* [The Kitay language and people] in the journal *Magyar Nyelv*. He was deeply passionate about the Kitay language, which he examined and researched until the very last moments of his life. The Kitay were a people who spoke a Mongolic language, occupied the northern part of China approximately at the same time as the Hungarian Conquest (896), and founded a dynasty there which happened to be overthrown by the Jurchen mentioned previously. Although Kitay was one of the central issues of Ligeti’s research, his findings

¹² Ligeti’s engaging travelogue was entitled *Afgán földön* [In the land of the Afghans]. Budapest, 1938. See also his *Afganisztán mongol és török nyelvei* [The Mongolic and Turkic languages of Afghanistan]. *MTA Nyelv és Irodalomtudományi Osztályának Közleményei* 3 (1953), pp. 231–248; the same in Russian: *AOH* 4 (1954), pp. 93–117; see also *Le lexique moghol de R. Leech*. *AOH* 4 (1954), pp. 119–158.

¹³ See Kiyose, G. N.: *A Study of the Jurchen Language and Script. Reconstruction and Decipherment*. Kyoto, 1977; Kane, D.: *The Sino-Jurchen Vocabulary of the Bureau of Interpreters*. Bloomington, Ind., 1989.

¹⁴ See also *Les joutchen « sauvages »*. *Altorientalische Forschungen* 13 (1986), pp. 110–122.

are barely available (see his book review on Sanžeev's work in *Nyelvtudományi Közlemények* 57, 1955, pp. 293–300).¹⁵ I have long lived in the hope that there might be an unpublished manuscript hidden somewhere, but there are no traces of it anywhere.

Certainly, he made valuable comments about the Kitay language scattered in various articles. His 1970 piece on the Tabgach language remains essential to this day (*Le tabgatch, un dialecte de la langue sien-pi*. In: Ligeti, L. (ed.): *Mongolian Studies*. Budapest, 1970, pp. 265–308).¹⁶ This is the oldest Mongolic language that we know today, and it has remained because this people had established a dynasty in northern China under the name Wei and ruled between 386 and 535.

Of Ligeti's work in Mongolian Studies, Hungarian linguistics is most influenced by his important paper *Mongolos jövevényszavaink kérdése* [The question of supposed Mongolian loan words in Hungarian] from 1935, in which he consistently proved that Hungarian contains no loan words borrowed directly from Mongolian in the period preceding or during the time of the Hungarian Conquest. This was significant in part because of the matter of the Avar language, to which he would return a number of times.

Not many people know that Ligeti is also considered to be the founder of modern Mongolian literary history. Walther Heissig, the most outstanding modern Mongolian literary historian of his day, once said that he was motivated by Ligeti's related research to choose his career and field. Some of Ligeti's relevant publications, such as his commentaries to the Geser epic¹⁷ and the catalogue for the collection of the Mongolian sacred writings known as the Kanjur, also bear mentioning (*Catalogue du Kanjur mongol imprimé*. Vol. I. Budapest, 1942–1944).

As for Ligeti's work in Turkology, it began with a piece on Chuvash: his first article, published in 1924, deals with Endre Deskó's work in Chuvash–Hungarian contrastive linguistics.¹⁸ Further, his oldest, oft-cited article is a study on the ethnonym *Kyrgyz* from 1925.¹⁹ Ligeti would later note with some bitterness in his voice that this article was cited by many without an acknowledgement that he had long changed his view. His work in Turkology can be divided into two groups with some simplification. The first group contains his articles in pure Turkology which have no bearing on Hungarian – but of course we know that whenever Ligeti wrote about something, he always had both in his head and in his work the question of Turkic–Hungarian connections.

I would note two areas in his research in 'pure' Turkology. One of these would be the Sino-Turkic glossaries, the most important of which is the Chinese–Uyghur glossary from the Ming Dynasty, which was published in three parts and is as long as

¹⁵ In Russian in *Voprosy jazykoznanija* 1955, No. 5, pp. 133–140.

¹⁶ A Russian version can be found in *Narody Azii i Afriki* 1969, No. 1, pp. 107–117.

¹⁷ Un épisode d'origine chinoise du « Geser-qan ». *AOH* 1 (1950–1951), pp. 339–357.

¹⁸ Deskó Endre csuvas–magyar nyelvhasonlítása [Endre Deskó's Chuvash–Hungarian contrastive linguistics]. *Kőrösi Csoma Archivum* 1 (1921–1925), pp. 319–320.

¹⁹ Die Herkunft des Volksnamens *Kirgis*. *Kőrösi Csoma Archivum* 1 (1921–1925), pp. 369–383; the same study was published in Turkish in the same year in *Türkiyat Mecmuası* 1 (1925), pp. 235–249.

a short book.²⁰ The other area would be the findings from his fieldwork in Afghanistan. His survey of the Turkic and Mongolic languages of that country, written in Hungarian and published in 1953, is still in use today. His most important publication here is his article on the language of the Afshar in Afghanistan written in 1957 (Sur la langue des afchars d’Afghanistan. *AOH* 7, pp. 115–156). Gyula Németh, who rarely offered his opinion on the work of his colleagues in Turkology – and then usually with some sarcasm – was enthusiastic in drawing our attention to this paper. It is also of interest that one of the greatest discoveries of Turkology, the existence of Ancient Turkic long vowels in Proto-Turkic, stems from the independent work of three scholars: besides Polivanov and Räsänen, Ligeti is the third. His article was published in Hungarian and French in 1938 in *Journal Asiatique*.²¹

Ligeti firmly believed that only scholars with a thorough and up-to-date knowledge of Turkology could validly contribute to the study of the Turkic connections of the Hungarian language. He stressed this in particular in a study he wrote about Gombocz as a Turkologist (Gombocz mint turkológus [Gombocz as Turkologist], *Magyar Nyelv* 73, 1977, pp. 395–401). At the same time, an expertise in Turkology in itself does not guarantee accurate solutions. It is also necessary to know Hungarian language history and to be in possession of a scholarly critical thinking, which Ligeti learnt from Gombocz especially and then developed further himself.

In 1977 and 1979, Ligeti published a new printing of his relevant earlier articles under the title *A magyar nyelv török kapcsolatai és ami körülöttük van* [The Turkic connections of the Hungarian language and what surrounds them]. In his introduction to this volume, Loránd Benkő writes: “In his research on loan words, he carries on and further develops the legacy of Zoltán Gombocz, not only in his thematic analysis, but also in his approach and method. His writing in this area is characterised by his thorough knowledge, the maximum use of available sources, the rational treatment of the data, a strong critical sense, a strict methodological approach, and a keen inventiveness. It is equally characterised by solid results. Indeed, we can say with confidence that an explanation of a Turkic loan word that has undergone Lajos Ligeti’s critical assessment truly cannot and should not be questioned. These studies are among the best works of the research on Hungarian loan words and, in a broader context, of the literature on Hungarian etymology” (Benkő, L. foreword in Ligeti L.: *A magyar nyelv török kapcsolatai és ami körülöttük van* [The Turkic connections of the Hungarian language and what surrounds them]. 1977, pp. III–IV).

When surveying the Turkic etymologies discussed by Ligeti in various contexts, we are unlikely to find even one that he was the first to claim as being Turkic. We find many words, however, that Vámbéry and/or Munkácsi or other scholars considered to be Turkic but which then were refuted in later critical assessments by

²⁰ Un vocabulaire sino-ouïgour des Ming. *Le Kao-tch’ang-kouan yi-chou* du Bureau des traducteurs. *AOH* 19 (1966), pp. 117–316; Glossaire supplémentaire au vocabulaire sino-ouïgour du Bureau des traducteurs. *AOH* 22 (1969), pp. 1–49, 149–243.

²¹ A török hosszú magánhangzók [Turkic long vowels]. *Magyar Nyelv* 34 (1938), pp. 65–76; Les voyelles longues en turc. *JA* 230 (1938), pp. 177–204; published in Russian as well in 1985.

Budenz or later Gombocz or others. Nevertheless, based on a careful and thorough investigation, Ligeti still found these loan words to be Turkic. He followed in Gombocz's footsteps in this regard as well since there was practically no Hungarian word in Gombocz's famous book from 1912 (*Die bulgarisch-türkischen Lehnwörter in der ungarischen Sprache*. Helsinki, 1912) whose Turkic origin had first been declared by Gombocz.

Ligeti's etymologies are characterised first and foremost by the fact that he displayed a keen sense for noticing the various problem areas in a particular etymology, the links between the data, or the fact that there is no link, all appearances to the contrary. I would mention only a few examples: one such problem arose in the case of the Hungarian plant name *gyopár* 'cudweed, *Gnaphalium*'. There was a question of whether the Turkic corresponding form could only be found in Ottoman Turkish, whether the Turkic plant was fragrant, and if the Hungarian word had originally signified a flower with or without a fragrance. This word had not been considered of certain Turkic origin based on previous research precisely because, from among all the Turkic languages, it was only known from Ottoman Turkish. Therefore, it was seriously problematic to deem it a loan word from the era before or during the Hungarian Conquest. Furthermore, in researching names of flowers, colour and fragrance represent significant elements and these had proved contradictory in the various data. In his article published in 1969 (A jószagú gyopártól a havasi gyopárig [From the fragrant cudweed to the edelweiss]. *Magyar Nyelv* 73, 1969, pp. 136–144), Ligeti thoroughly examined the plant taxonomy behind the word in question, then reviewed all the Hungarian language sources, and concluded that the Hungarian word *gyopár*, which had originally denoted a fragrant plant, had become the Hungarian name for the genus *Gnaphalium* (a genus of flowering plants commonly called cudweeds in English) only at the end of the 18th century through efforts to Hungarianise botanical names on the part of Hungarian botanists, such as S. Diószegi and his colleagues. As a second step, Ligeti demonstrated that the Turkic word had not only remained in Ottoman Turkish and explained why the other data were unfamiliar to the researchers. Finally, he pointed out that the word exists in Old Turkic records but that this presents a newer problem. These words did not, in fact, signify a plant at all, but 'musk' or the 'odour of musk'. He solved this problem too since the change in meaning from 'fragrance' > 'fragrant thing' > 'fragrant plant' could be proved based on the data. Finally, he analysed the morphological structure of the Turkic word and demonstrated that the Turkic etymon *yipar* is related to the Turkic word *yid*, meaning 'smell', and therefore is well embedded in the Turkic vocabulary. Of course, he also observed that this word was also borrowed from Turkic into Mongolian, in which it is among the very old Turkic elements of the Mongolian language. Thus, he secured the very early chronology of the Turkic word. While *A magyar nyelv történeti-etimológia szótára* [The Historical Etymological Dictionary of the Hungarian Language]. Vol. I. 1967, p. 1132 considers the Hungarian word *gyopár* as only 'probably of Turkic origin', the *Etimologisches Wörterbuch des Ungarischen* (1993, p. 498) lists it among loan words that are certainly of Turkic origin, based on Ligeti's argumentation and new data.

Similarly, the Turkic origin of the Hungarian word *harang* ‘church bell’ had even been supported by Gombocz, and its derivation from the Turkic word *kazan* ‘cauldron’ had also been accepted by the excellent *Historical Etymological Dictionary*, which tends to be especially rigorous with words of Turkic origin, yet it noted no problems with semantics – although it did point to problems with phonetics. Ligeti first dismissed the Mongolian item that G. Bálint had brought into the discussion. This corresponding Mongolian word, *qarangga* ‘a type of large bronze bell’, although it fit deceptively well both in terms of meaning and phonetics in the etymological explanation, is in fact of Tibetan origin (*'khar-rnga*) and a late loan into Mongolian and therefore has nothing to do with the Turkic word or naturally with the Hungarian word (Mongolos jövevényszavaink kérdése [The question of supposedly Mongolian loan words in Hungarian]. *Nyelvtudományi Közlemények* 49, 1935, p. 245). At the same time, even though Ligeti considered the parallel with the Turkic *qazan* ‘cauldron’, he was unable to proceed for a number of reasons. In a later article, he carefully reconstructed the semantic development of the Hungarian word *harang*, which had originally meant ‘small bell’ or ‘cow bell’ and, through a relatively late development, came to mean ‘church bell’. It was first mentioned as a little bell tied to the legs of hunting birds. Thus, of course, any chance of a connection with the Turkic word *kazan*, meaning ‘cauldron’, had disappeared. The proper Turkic etymon can be found in the Old Turkic and in numerous Turkic languages (*kongragu* ‘bell, small bell’ etc. Ligeti: A harang, mint csörgő, csengettyű és kolomp [Church bell as rattle, small bell and cow bell]. *Magyar Nyelv* 65, 1968, pp. 75–78).

I cite these two examples only to illustrate how circumspect Ligeti was in his studies of the Turkic loan words in Hungarian, in the course of which he introduced new findings and was never ashamed to correct his earlier views. Further examples abound.

In the book, which he completed before his death and published in 1986 (*A magyar nyelv török kapcsolatai a honfoglalás előtt és az Árpád-korban* [The Turkic connections of the Hungarian language before the Conquest and during the Árpád dynasty]), Ligeti, however, went a step beyond by introducing a long chapter entitled ‘The influence of the Turkic language on Hungarian’. In this, he first examined the various types of foreign language influences through clear examples, after which he analysed the impact of the Turkic language in the areas of phonology, lexicology and, briefly, syntax. He paid special attention to the areas of calques – both words and expressions. At the same time, in another chapter, he investigated the impact of integration into Hungarian and ways of adaptation in the language and thus also provided valuable data for Hungarian language history as well. Finally, in the third chapter, he discussed the Turkic words that had found their way into Hungarian as being the oldest known records for their respective lending Turkic languages and emphasised that this rich material represents a treasure trove for Turkology as well.

Certainly, those who knew Lajos Ligeti have many different images of him. He was not an approachable man, nor was he open to everyone. And he rarely stepped outside the role he had assumed. Only a few of us had the honour of experiencing his sharing with us his personal concerns. There was a certain anxiety in him that one

might abuse his openness. After all, he had lived in an age that did not favour disclosure. He placed scholarship above everything else. He was famously strict with those – and only with those – whom he respected. Let me mention here one of my personal memories. It was during my fourth year that he spent three-quarters of an hour criticising and pulling apart to the tiniest detail a study that I had submitted as a term paper. After his serious and not particularly encouraging words, I considered looking for another profession. In my dismay, I had only one hope left: if Ligeti had spent so much time on his criticism, it meant that, for some reason, he deemed it worthwhile. So I sat down and re-wrote it several times before I submitted what I had envisaged as my final draft, to which, to my great surprise, he responded with two things: he found the paper worth publishing in *Acta Orientalia* and there was still *one* piece of data that I had not found to support my solution, which I still needed to find. Where this item could be found, he did not say. For two weeks, then, day and night, I re-read all the Old Tibetan texts available at the time, but I did not find a single new item. So I went to Ligeti again to announce that I was giving up. Ligeti told me that there was no such data. He had simply wanted me to re-read the entire Old Tibetan corpus. He said the article was fine and that he would publish it in the next volume of *Acta Orientalia*.²² Others have similar stories to tell.

As we look back on Ligeti's lifework, it must be said that he introduced a complete paradigm shift in researching the East in Hungary. There had been great figures in Hungarian Orientalism before him, but they were isolated and lone stars, such as Ignác Goldziher. Ligeti set a new standard and created an organisational framework; he provided a programme and encouraged innovation; he focused on the essence and shaped a future.²³

²² Róna-Tas, A.: Social Terms in the List of Grants of the Tibetan Tun-huang Chronicle. *AOH* 5 (1955), pp. 249–270.

²³ In commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Ligeti's birth, his students and admirers published a volume in Issues 1–3 of *Acta Orientalia Hungarica* 55 (2002), which had been founded by Ligeti. This also contains a bibliography of Ligeti's work compiled by Ágnes Paulik.