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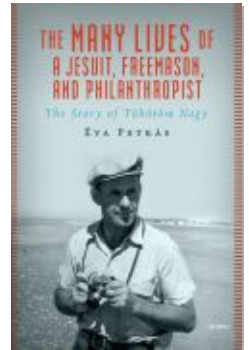
## Foreword

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## FOREWORD

*“Time becomes human time through the interweaving of history and fiction. [...] History reinscribes the time of narrative within the time of the universe.”<sup>1</sup>*

Töhötöm Nagy was a Jesuit whose life, full of fateful twists and turns, unknowingly became one of the great epochal witnesses of the twentieth century. His name has found its way into history books, most often in connection with the National Association of Catholic Agrarian Youth Organizations (KALOT) since, along with Fr Jenő Kerkai, he led what became one of the most successful Catholic corporative movements of the last century. But Nagy’s historical relevance does not begin and end with KALOT: He crossed no man’s land in late 1944 to ensure KALOT’s survival by negotiating directly with the Soviet Red Army; and crossed multiple borders again in 1945–1946 to relay news between Rome and Hungary, the Vatican and the Hungarian Catholic Church. Less known, although certainly more monumental, he used these visits to hold secret talks on a possible *modus vivendi* between the Holy See and the Soviet Union on behalf of Pope Pius XII and the Soviet occupation forces in Hungary.

Thus, Nagy’s role far surpassed that of an influential Jesuit with a socially directed mission. His ecclesiastical diplomatic hand in the appointment of József Mindszenty as Archbishop of Esztergom is noteworthy; however, this connection would become problematic for him later in life. In an ironic twist of fate, Mindszenty would go on to convince Jesuit leaders not to allow Nagy to return to Hungary from Rome in late 1946. From the eternal city, Nagy’s path led instead to South America, where, despite

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1 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 180, 181.

continuing his social work, he could not help feeling that he had been exiled. Nagy's personal difficulties catalyzed his professional crisis, ultimately causing him to leave the Society of Jesus in 1948 and wed in Argentina. Following that, he joined the Freemasons in 1952.

The next decade would see Nagy thrust into the tides of history again: He assisted in surveying the slums of Buenos Aires, and being on good terms with the Argentinian Jesuits, was able to bear firsthand witness to the social mission of the South American Church. His book *Jesuitas y Masones* (Jesuits and freemasons), published in Spanish in 1963, and in Hungarian two years later as *Jezsuiták és szabadkőművesek* brought him even wider recognition. He remained restless, however, even in his new life, which saw him return to Hungary with his family, a move for which Nagy paid a heavy price: He was recruited by the Hungarian State Security Service in 1966 and employed as an undercover agent until his death in 1979.

The present work is the first attempt at a comprehensive biography of Töhötöm Nagy and represents an updated and extended English version of the work published by the same author in 2019 in her native Hungarian.

The musicologist, Alfred Einstein, commenting on the fragmentary nature of biographies remarked that:

History is not a science in the strict sense. History is always “giving meaning to the meaningless.” We never know all the evidence, and we always run the danger of interpreting falsely even that which we really know. We do this in fifty cases out of a hundred. And all biographical writing is even more questionable. We never know a person, his motives and his background, completely. He may be an accomplished hypocrite, and that may be reflected in all his letters and remarks, [...e]ach was given a costume, a mask. We see through the mask, we know only too well the discrepancy between self-portrayal and truth, between mask and face.<sup>2</sup>

Those researching Nagy, or the intrigued reader immersed in this book, are confronted with a similar dilemma. We do not and cannot comprehend all the man knew and experienced, even less so owing to the shape-

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<sup>2</sup> Einstein, *Greatness in Music*, 101–102.

shifting nature of his life. Fortunately, the multitude of sources available do allow a nuanced biography of him to be written.

A good place to begin is by asking several questions: Who was Töhötöm Nagy? A Jesuit? Or a Hungarian freemason living in Argentina as Alejandro Nagy Varga, using his middle name and his mother's maiden name, and who even bequeathed his ashes to his fellow freemasons? Or perhaps was he the agent reporting under the aliases of "Sándor Kőműves"<sup>3</sup> and "Franz Kirchenbauer"<sup>4</sup> who constantly affirmed his left-wing commitment to his case officer? Or perhaps he was someone else? Or all of the above? In this book no attempt is made to answer these questions, but rather, to support curious readers in crafting answers of their own.

Nagy did not view history from a detached perspective, nor did he live it from below; he lived it, rather, simply as it unfolded around him. It is our hope that the reader will not only gain relevant information on his life and the historical backdrop against which it transpired, but also observe how history was altered, even incrementally, by his actions.

We are helped considerably by the fact that Nagy began regularly documenting his experiences in the late 1920s. Thankfully, he was a gifted and skilled writer, making his diaries,<sup>5</sup> notes, correspondence,<sup>6</sup> and other writings precious sources, not only of his own life, but also that of the twentieth century Hungarian world, and its ecclesiastical history. His personal archive, meticulously preserved and spanning several decades, was purchased during his lifetime by the National Széchényi Library. The collection grew and shrank as Nagy travelled between Budapest, Rome, and South America, with its final home being the Manuscript Collection of the National Széchényi Library in Budapest. These documents, more than any other, serve

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- 3 State security often assigned their agents or sources telling or clever cover names. In this case "Sándor Kőműves" means "Sándor Mason" (with Sándor the Hungarian version of Alexander) and was likely an allusion to Nagy's freemason identity.
  - 4 Similarly, Nagy's other cover name, "Kirchenbauer," means "church builder" in German.
  - 5 A selection of his diaries, edited by András Keresztes was published in 2019 (Töhötöm Nagy, *Napló*). In addition, the Hungarian Electronic Library has made fragments of Nagy's early diaries available (covering 1937–1940), also edited by András Keresztes. As these were not available to the author at the time of the original publication, in the following chapters, the primary sources are referenced as opposed to these publications. Most of Nagy's reports to the Holy See were selected in a source edition volume in 2020 (cf. Ickx, Keresztes and Somorjai, *Útközni*).
  - 6 Cf. Keresztes, *Kerkai Jenő*. Similar to the situation with Nagy's diaries, all successive notes reference primary sources as opposed to those published in 2019 by Keresztes.

as this biography's superstructure. Even though personal documents (diaries, notes, correspondence, etc.) are the most prevalent materials found in the Széchényi Library's collection, these are complemented by identification papers, official documents, KALOT material, church and masonic documentation, and manuscripts of his various works. Töhötöm Nagy used this collection when writing *Jezsuiták és szabadkőművesek* (Jesuits and freemasons).

Despite the wealth of available materials, there are numerous discrepancies between the sources found in Nagy's personal archive, his published works and unpublished manuscripts. On multiple occasions, Nagy demonstrates a tendency to blur the lines between fact and fiction, to say nothing of the various legends and myths surrounding his past! As a rule, while reconstructing certain events from Nagy's life, it is necessary to look beyond his narrative, and instead rely on more balanced primary sources that are chronologically approximate to the event. After all, even a contemporary diary entry is, by its very nature a construct.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, we sought to compare documents and recollections with a control source in each case, as well as using contemporary historical literature to verify particular periods, places, and topics throughout the process of interpreting sources. Footnotes and this book's source and reference lists offer some indications of the lengths the author went to in pursuit of diligence vis-à-vis source criticism and philology.

In addition to Nagy's personal collection, we have used documents of the Society of Jesus available in copy from the Archives of the Hungarian and the Argentine-Uruguayan Provinces of the Jesuits (Budapest and Buenos Aires). Sources in the Historical Archive of the Secretariat of State, Section for Relations with States and International Organizations (Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati - ASRS) in Vatican City and the Historical Archive of the Pontifical Gregorian University (Archivio Storico della Pontificia Università Gregoriana - APUG) in Rome preserved precious related documentations. The Primate's Archives of Esztergom offer further materials relevant to Nagy's life. The National Archives of Hungary and its Nógrád County branch office contain precious collections regarding Nagy's activity and personal life. Archives, such as those in the United States (National Archives and Records Administra-

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7 On interpreting autobiographies see Z. Varga, *Önéletírás*.

tion), Prague (ABS) and Bucharest (A.C.N.S.A.S.) provide a wealth of material pertaining to Nagy's work with American, Czechoslovak, and Romanian intelligence and state security services. An extensive array of sources pertaining to and reflecting Nagy's work can also be found at the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (ÁBTL), but require careful use owing to their sensitive nature.

Our intention is to offer a historical biography that coherently frames Nagy's various experiences, fully taking into account his life's fragmentary and disjointed nature, his many masks, and the extreme differences of the worlds he inhabited. This coherence is achieved not by proceeding from the hypothesis of a static permanence of personality or, in contrast, by positing that this personality evolved over time, but, paradoxically, from the permanence of change. In this fashion, Nagy morphs into a typical representative of an era, the "short twentieth century," embodying the relationship between the individual and history.<sup>8</sup>

To some readers, it might occur that Nagy's life, in more ways than one, bears several similarities to that of Ignác Martinovics.<sup>9</sup> Apart from their powerful intellects, ambition, and mastery of the art of self-representation, both also possessed a seismographic awareness of and familiarity with social and intellectual movements during a period of social upheaval—the twentieth and the eighteenth centuries, respectively—along with a church career, later abandoned, a fascination with Freemasonry, and secret service connections. There is also some similarity in how the two of them left this world. Even though Nagy was not executed at Vérmező (at Buda) as was Martinovics, he wrote of his situation as if, in some way, he had been. Like Martinovics, Nagy's legacy is ambivalent, with the only thing those familiar with it able to agree on being the multitude of different opinions concerning it.<sup>10</sup> In his biography of Martinovics, Vilmos Fraknói writes: "I know the duty of the historian 'not to tell falsehoods,

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8 A book of studies has been published recently on the methodological issues of the historical biography. Cf. Vonyó, *Személyiség és történelem*.

9 Ignác Martinovics (1755–1795) was a Hungarian Franciscan, writer, philosopher, secret agent, freemason and one of the leaders of the Hungarian Jacobin movement. He was executed in 1795 for plotting a revolution against the Habsburg Empire.

10 The figure and historical role of Ignác Martinovics has been the subject of considerable controversy in Hungarian historical literature and historical-political thought since his beheading. Presented in detail in Romsics, "Martinovics."

not to fear telling the truth', but I do not acknowledge his right to deviate from the truth on the inspiration of 'caritas'.<sup>11</sup>

This biographer of Töhötöm Nagy has also adhered to this principle, doing its utmost to allow everyone to form an independent opinion. We are convinced that, in this way—namely, through the telling of his story—it becomes possible to understand something more of Nagy's personality and motivations. Although the reader—if he or she pays attention to this sort of thing—can learn a great deal from our book about the psychological aspects of Nagy, this biography is not a psychobiography. After all, history was what Nagy lived and breathed, being not only as determined by it, but also as a determiner of it. This, more than anything else, has guided us in preparing a historical biography of his life.

Writing Nagy's biography has been a challenging task for the author. So even if including acknowledgements of gratitude in a foreword is a happy duty, it should not be considered a mere formality in this case. Without the aid and support of my family, friends, and colleagues, this book would not have seen the light of day, or, perhaps less pessimistically, would not have been of the same quality as that which you now hold. I have truly experienced that "[n]o man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main..."<sup>12</sup> Therefore I would like to thank the following colleagues, friends, and people interested in or devoted to the life of Töhötöm Nagy: Frigyes Back, Margit Balogh, István Bandi, Gábor Bánkuti, Duncan Bare, György Gyarmati, Judith Kesserű Némethy, Róbert Kis-Kapin, Zoltán Koronkai SJ, József Mészáros, Vladimír Petrilak, Attila Pók, Krisztina Slachta, Viktor Attila Soós, Ferenc Szabó SJ, Róbert Szabó, Nóra Szekér, Gábor Tabajdi, Krisztina Tóth, and László Vári.

I wish to acknowledge the loving support of my husband and our three children, which was a real source of energy for me. I am constantly grateful for your love, Julcsi, Marci, Misi, and Marcell Mártonffy.

I would like to also acknowledge the support of my publisher and of everyone who believed it was worthwhile to give this work a chance, and I would like to thank the daughter of Töhötöm Nagy for the times when she made herself available.

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11 Fraknói, *Martinovics élete*, 6.

12 John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*. Meditation 17.