1 Introduction

The aim of the here presented paper is to outline and interpret the evolution of psychical research, metapsychical research and parapsychology in Hungary, and to understand the historical, political and scientific influences that determined the development and institutionalisation of the above-mentioned disciplines. In the second half of the 19th century, like in other European countries, spiritualism and thus-connected modern occult cultural phenomena caused remarkable stir in Hungary. In the 1870s the growing number of spiritualist séances and mediums, the popular practice of animal magnetism established institutionalised spiritualism and later attracted attention to the necessity of scientifically oriented research in the field. However, spiritualism in Hungary was much closer to religion than to science, therefore in the eyes of most of its representatives the objective, systematic research of the nature and validity of spiritualistic occurrences remained marginal. Nevertheless, there were several efforts to establish scientifically oriented spiritualism in Hungary that proved to have far-reaching consequences. The objective of the paper is to give a detailed overview of the process of institutionalisation of parapsychology in Hungary by outlining the evolution of spiritism, scientifically oriented spiritualism, early psychical research and metapsychical research in Hungary. A further objective of the paper is to highlight the specific cultural and political influences that limited the development of Hungarian parapsychology. Besides, a particular focus will be on those researchers, societies and efforts that represented outstanding contributions to the international network of psychical research and early parapsychology.

2 Spiritism in Hungary from the 1870s on

When the first spiritualistic society, the “Budapest Association of Spiritual Investigators” (“Szellemi Bűvárok Pesti Egyelete”), was founded in Hungary in 1872, the representatives of the Association aimed at researching spiritualistic phenomena
in the framework of historical, psychological and natural sciences.¹ Similar to the representatives of spiritualistic movements in Europe and the United States, their primary purpose was to augment the evidences of the resurrection of the human spirit after bodily death. However, the objectives of the “Budapest Association of Spiritual Investigators” were accompanied by strongly emphasised moral elements: they were convinced that the acceptance and investigation of spiritualistic occurrences would lead to the moral perfection of humanity.²

Although the idea that spiritualism will contribute to the moral evolution of humanity and thus to the introduction of a new spiritual and humanistic worldview was rather typical of several branches of Western spiritualism, too,³ the much emphasised moral framework led to specific consequences in Hungary. Firstly, compared to German, English or American spiritualistic societies, the scientific experiments on spiritualistic phenomena were less emphasised in the activities of the “Budapest Association of Spiritual Investigators”. Secondly, the aim of moral perfection could easily be linked to religious contents and practices. These contents in Hungarian spiritualistic circles originated primarily from the kind of spiritism described by Allan Kardec.⁴ The founders of the “Budapest Association of Spiritual Investigators” – such as the medium Baroness Adelma Vay (1840–1925), her husband, Baron Ödön Vay, and the physician Adolf Grünhut (1826–1906) – were deeply influenced by Kardec’s works.⁵ The strong religious, Christian elements of Hungarian spiritualism had far-reaching consequences; spiritualism in Hungary was soon identified as “evangelistic spiritism”.⁶

¹ National Archives of Hungary, ID number: 18441 (K-150, 7/8, 55462, 1357, n.a.).
³ See Doyle: The History; Lachapelle: Investigating; Monroe: Laboratories; Owen: The Place.
⁴ Allan Kardec is the pseudonym of the French educator Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail (1804–1869). He is the author of the “Spiritist Codification”, a set of books allegedly dictated by spirits to Kardec between 1857 and 1868.
⁵ See Grünhut: Essays; Pataky: Introduction.
⁶ Although in Hungarian everyday language the word spiritism referred to both spiritism and spiritualism, it was Adelma Vay who – following Kardec’s theory – illuminated the true content of Hungarian spiritism quite early: it was a philosophy emphasizing immortality, reincarnation, the divine mission of Jesus and the unity between living people and the world of spirits (see Vay: Aeons). The term ‘evangelistic spiritism’ refers to the claim that true spiritism is based on the gospel of Jesus Christ. The religious background of spiritists in Hungary was not emphasized in their activities (Adolf Grünhut was Jewish, Adelma Vay Catholic by origin); all of them followed the interpretations of the Gospel communicated through the trance-mediums of the Society (e.g. medium Eszter). As elsewhere in Europe, the Catholic Church attacked spiritism in Hungary, too. Even Adelma Vay was assaulted: as a result, she gave up Catholicism and joined the
After two German-language journals had been published by the Association – the “Reflexionen aus der Geisterwelt” (“Reflections from the World of Spirits”) which was published from 1873, followed by the “Reformierende Blätter” (“Reforming Papers”) in 1878 – the Association started its popular Hungarian-language journal, the “Heavenly Light” (“Égi Világosság”) in 1898, and continued to publish it uninterruptedly until 1944. The editors of the journal – e.g. Adolf Grünhut⁷ or Titusz Tóvölgyi (1838–1918) – published mainly mediumistic messages based on the accounts of several well-known trance mediums. Reports on scientific experiments concerning spiritualistic phenomena were rather rare in the journal, although the editors often referred to the results of Western spiritualism revealed by Albert von Schrenck-Notzing or Carl du Prel.

Interestingly, from 1905 onwards the leadership of the Association was taken over by trance mediums. The Association was governed by József Merényi (known as medium József), Andor Havas (the editor of “Heavenly Light”) and Béla Rohay (known as medium Béla) until 1925. When Andor Havas died in 1925, Pál Pátkai (known as medium Pál) became the editor of the journal and the secretary of the Association until his death in 1942. In the 1940s a split emerged in the Association: the followers of medium Béla and the group of medium Eszter (Mrs. Mihály Böhm nee Eszter Papp) separated.⁸ Medium Eszter proved to be a decisive figure of the Association; her mediumistic messages were extremely popular. The messages of the “Anonymous Spirit” who communicated through medium Eszter were published in several volumes aiming at influencing both spiritists and sceptics:

Do not expect either scientific explications or religious philosophies; do not wait for sunshine, but a small pinking oil lamp, filled with the oil of the eternal light, giving enough light for the rambling, errant spirit to find the peace of his heart and a mustard-seed of his faith in eternal life, which – if he develops and feeds it on his own will – will grow into a giant tree by the experience.⁹

Calvinist Church (Pataky). However, her Calvinist background was not specifically emphasized in her spiritist activities.

⁷ Adolf Grünhut (1826–1906) was a Hungarian physician and spiritist and – along with Adelma Vay – is called the founding father of Hungarian spiritism. During the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence in 1848–1849 he was serving with the army as a military surgeon and used animal magnetism for his practice. Inspired by his experiences with animal magnetism, he later turned to spiritism and founded the “Budapest Association of Spiritual Investigators”. He was the editor of the journals “Reflexionen aus der Geisterwelt”, “Reformierende Blätter” and “Égi Világosság”.

⁸ Pataky: Introduction.

Pál Pátkai wrote an enthusiastic preface to “The Manifesto of the Anonymous Spirit” of 1929 – a fairly clear expression of the moralising tendency in Hungarian spiritism:

This is a nutriment for starving and thirsty souls, for those who are worrying about their own fallibility, imperfectness and inclinations towards different kinds of sins. For those who wish to become a better person today compared to who they were yesterday, and a better person tomorrow compared to that who they are today; for those who are on their way to the recognition that there is only one true value in the world, one goal, one happiness: serving the principle of Good, of Christ; anything else is only an episode, an intermediate station for the purpose of gaining experience leading to the recognition of this only goal.¹

Pátkai’s words reveal very precisely the basic endeavor of the “Budapest Association of Spiritual Investigators”: the moral perfection of humanity in a unified Christian faith. This moral, religious feature of the Association had far-reaching consequences regarding the emergence and evolution of psychical research or parapsychology in Hungary, which will be shown hereinafter. Furthermore, several spiritists connected the original questions of survival and spirit communication with ethical and psychological topics, therefore spiritualistic practices became less emphasised. Numerous self-development groups emerged during the 1900s with the aim of moral and psychological perfection, using the ideological framework of evangelistic spiritism. This process was especially emphasised after 1949, when the minister of home affairs decided to dissolve the Association and confiscate its properties; thus spiritists were forced to operate in secret.¹¹

However, there were other representatives of Hungarian spiritualism who were not entirely satisfied with the Christian, ethical framework of evangelistic spiritism and therefore initiated a split and urged for controlled, systematic experiments with spiritualistic occurrences. One of them was the retired chief-chemist of Budapest, Elemér Chengery Pap.

3 Elemér Chengery Pap and the “Hungarian Metapsychical Scientific Society” in the 1930s

Elemér Chengery Pap was born in 1869 in a rather religious family. His father, Károly Chengery Pap, was a clerical writer and an evangelical reformed reverend in Budapest; he was also strongly connected to the “Budapest Association of Spi-

¹ Anonymous Spirit: Manifesto, 5.
¹¹ See Pataky: Introduction.
ritual Investigators”. It was he who, under the pseudonym Mátyás Balogh, first translated the “Kundgebungen des Geistes Emanuel” (“Emmánuel szellem nyilatkozatai”; “The Manifesto of Spirit Emanuel”), a well-known spiritist volume, from the German into the Hungarian language.¹²

Chengery Pap was introduced to the realm of psychical occurrences by his relatives in 1897; he got acquainted with Adolf Grünhut in 1898.¹³ Although he was a writing and speaking medium himself,¹⁴ his name became famous not because of his mediumistic performances but because of his experiments on mediumistic phenomena. He published several accounts of his experiments in “Heavenly Light”,¹⁵ representing the so-called scientific research on mediumistic occurrences. Chengery Pap was not satisfied with the religious, moral framework of the “Budapest Association of Spiritual Investigators”, which in his opinion did not support scientific research. His aim was to conduct controlled, systematic research in the field of spiritualistic occurrences; he later turned to metapsychical research, using the term ‘metapsychical’ after Charles Richet. According to his account, he visited the metapsychical institutes of London, Munich, Graz and Paris in the summer of 1928; these were his first encounters with physical mediums, which proved to have far-reaching consequences for his life.¹⁶

Chengery Pap’s most famous experiments were dealing with a form of physical mediumship: apport phenomena. One of his mediums, Lajos Pap (not a relative of his) had extraordinary capacities as an apport medium, which were documented by Chengery Pap in a rather exhaustive way. His methodology was based on trying to follow the most objective way of researching spiritualistic occurrences, following the footsteps of metapsychical and psychical researchers.¹⁷ His experiments with apport phenomena achieved remarkable international acclaim: well-known psychical researchers such as Theodore Besterman¹⁸ and Nándor Fodor¹⁹ investigated the genuineness of Lajos Pap’s performances. However, according to their verdict, none of the phenomena produced by him could be considered supernatural; some of them were fraudulent, others were not convincing enough.

¹² Manuscript Collection, National Széchényi Library (Analekta 10, Bu-Csek, 36/1534); see Forsboom: The Manifesto.
¹³ Ibid.
¹⁴ Chengery: From the Field.
¹⁵ E. g. Chengery: How did; Chengery: From the Occult; Chengery: Occult Physical.
¹⁶ Chengery: Towards.
¹⁷ Chengery: Levitation; Chengery: The Rules; Chengery: Towards.
¹⁸ Besterman: Report.
¹⁹ Fodor: The Lajos Pap.
Chengery Pap was an important figure of the “Hungarian Metapsychical Scientific Society”, which was founded in 1932 for the purpose of investigating spiritualistic, magnetic, and connected phenomena. The draft of the statutes was prepared by the lawyer and metapsychical researcher János Toronyi already in 1925. The aims of the Society were to conduct experiments and publish theoretical studies, to collect data in the field, to organise meetings and presentations, to publish journals and books on metapsychical research and to establish a library. Although in the early years of the Society the latter goals were only partially reached, some Hungarian metapsychical researchers won remarkable fame in and beyond Hungary. The foundation of the Society achieved significant international acclaim: István Strém (a founding member of the Society) reported about the foundation of the Society in “Light”, a popular American spiritualist journal. Celebrities like Oliver Lodge, Charles Richet and Nándor Fodor welcomed the establishment of the Society. Several members of the Society had international experience in the field of metapsychical research; thanks to the growing international reputation, János Toronyi represented the Society at the “International Congress for Psychical Research” in Oslo in 1935.

One of the most prominent representatives of the Society was Vilmos Tordai (1880–), originally an officer of the Royal Ministry of Justice. He started historical and practical investigations with spiritualistic phenomena already in the early 1900s. He was among the founding members of the “Hungarian Theosophical Society” (“Magyar Teozófi Társulat”) in 1907, and he retained this involvement in theosophy later on. In 1916 and 1917 he was the co-editor of the journal “Theosophy”, together with Alfréd Reisch. However, his most important works are those written in the field of metapsychical research. He was the editor of a series entitled “Spiritual Phenomena” (“Lelki tünemények”) in which he wrote enthusiastic books on suggestion or clairvoyance.

Furthermore, he gave remarkable accounts on Poltergeist phenomena in Hungary (in Kecskemét and Karcag) and thus was a pioneer in the field of researching telekinetic phenomena. According to Tordai’s observations in Kecskemét, a mysterious conflagration and the movement of several different objects

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21 Ibid.
22 Hans Driesch, Oliver Lodge, Charles Richet and later Nándor Fodor became honourable members of the Society.
23 See Tordai: Otherworld.
24 Tordai: Suggestion.
25 Tordai: Is it Possible.
26 Tordai: Introduction.
occurred connected to the presence of a 14-year-old boy. As the adolescent revealed, he had foreseen where and when a fire would break out. In Karcag a 15-year-old girl was at the centre of the Poltergeist phenomena and was supposed to be responsible for them through her metapsychical power. According to her, it was an invisible black rabbit that moved the objects. Based on his observations of telekinetic phenomena, Tordai concluded the following:

After this account I think it is not immodest to declare that the only acceptable explanation for the cases in Kecskemét and Karcag is the metapsychical explanation. The physiological disturbances emerging in adolescence triggered somnambulistic-medial states in the children. In these states, telekinetic powers emerged, working in accordance with yet unknown natural laws, mostly like electricity; that is, psychical, telekinetic powers emerged in them, setting the houses on fire.²⁷

Tordai’s conclusion illuminates fairly clearly the basic objectives of the “Hungarian Metapsychical Scientific Society”: conducting systematical research on spiritualistic and connected occurrences and placing the question of spiritualism into a rational framework. Besides Chengery Pap, Tordai was one of the leading figures of the Society – that is why his case with the famous Hungarian fraud medium László László significantly damaged the reputation of Hungarian metapsychical research.²⁸ However, in spite of the vehement and often ironic attacks,²⁹ the members of the Society did not give up seeking for evidences of metapsychical phenomena.

4 Metapsychical research vs. evangelistic spiritism in the 1920s and 1930s

Although metapsychical research could have established institutionalised parapsychology in Hungary, evangelistic spiritism often and easily overshadowed the efforts of metapsychical investigators. Even though they were committed to well-controlled methodologies, the religious tradition of evangelistic spiritism could unobtrusively influence them. In 1922, for instance, a new metapsychical scientific journal entitled “New Pathway” (“Új Ösvény”) was published, edited by the

²⁷ Ibid., 26.
²⁸ See Rátai: The Adventures.
²⁹ See Karinthy: Cotton Wool.
metapsychical researcher Ödön Nérei. According to the editor’s statement, the aim of the journal was the “revelation of truth” by an objective research of spiritism, mediumism, somnambulism, clairvoyance and telepathy, as well as the presentation of ideas related to the problems of existence and the immortality of the soul. However, the aim of objective research was soon overshadowed by religious spiritualistic accounts; neither scientific experiments nor critical investigations were published in the journal. In 1927, it ceased to be published because of financial reasons. The “Journal of Metapsychics” (“Metapsyhikai Folyóirat”), which was founded in 1932, had a similarly brief history. The chief editor of the journal was János Toronyi, the head of the “Hungarian Metapsychical Scientific Society”, while its publisher was Elemér Chengery Pap. The last issue was published in 1936; but the journal was already intermittently published in 1934.

It is not by accident that the scientifically oriented branches of spiritism and metapsychical research faced serious obstacles. Evangelistic spiritism created such a strong tradition that it could easily expel other branches of spiritualism. Its power and popularity was expansive already in the late 1800s. In 1897 Baron János Mikos founded a new journal entitled “Uncanny World” (“Rejtélem Világ”), with the aim of establishing scientific spiritualism. However, he could not compete with the growing popularity of evangelistic spiritism, although his work could have laid the foundation of psychical research in Hungary:

We assert in advance for the purpose of informing the lay and the scientific public that our aim is not to serve dogmatic spiritism, and nothing is further from us than to catch followers for that group led by fanatic leaders who demand blind faith in their teachings. On the contrary, in the Uncanny World the reader will get to know a spiritism based on critical common sense, which gets its main power from religion and science, and its proud aim is to fulfil the as yet insurmountable gap between religion and empirical science with a superior, majestic and logical theory, and force the spirit of humanity to follow the way designated by the practical evidences of the theory.

According to the introduction by Mikos, the journal was meant to deal with the research of the phenomena of hypnotism, somnambulism, telepathy and clairvoyance – similar to the general aims of psychical researchers. Furthermore, as Mikos pinpointed, the journal was aimed primarily at sceptics, not spiritists.

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30 The founders of the journal, Alajos Wajditsch and Béla Babós, were emigrated Hungarians living in Cleveland, United States.
31 The subtitle of the journal was “Towards the Revelation of Truth”.
32 Mikos: Foreword, 1.
33 Ibid.
However, in the following years Mikos’s original aims tarnished, and the influence of evangelistic spiritism was more and more detectible in the articles. The journal also had to cope with serious financial difficulties which led to its termination in 1900. During these years, “Heavenly Light” was the only journal which managed to preserve its popularity. However, while dealing with serious obstacles, it was still the “Metapsychical Scientific Society” that represented early parapsychology in Hungary.

Interestingly, it was the psychoanalysts, and especially the father of the “Budapest School of Psychoanalysis”, Sándor Ferenczi (1873–1933), who mostly urged for well-controlled scientific research of the paranormal without any religious, spiritistic or ethical commitments.³⁴ Ferenczi was deeply interested in spiritualism and the paranormal. Although his teacher Freud asked him several times not to publicly support the research on mediumism or telepathy, Ferenczi’s ideas on the possible functioning of thought-transference, his observations and experiments with mediumistic performances proved to have a significant influence on and even beyond psychoanalysis.³⁵ Ferenczi was involved in Hungarian spiritism already in his early years in the late 1890s;³⁶ his first scientific publication dealt with spiritism and the importance of genuine scientific investigation into mediumistic occurrences. Ferenczi was convinced that the objective exploration of spiritualistic phenomena would contribute to the understanding of the most important psychological questions, namely those related to the unconscious, altered states of consciousness, hypnotism and suggestion.³⁷

Several spiritists and spiritualists were aware of Ferenczi’s endeavours in Hungary. When his article entitled “Spiritism” was published in the journal “Therapeutics” (“Gyógyászat”) in 1899, a detailed appreciatory review was pub-

³⁴ The relationship between psychoanalysis and the so-called occult has always been an attractive but also controversial topic for the theoreticians and practitioners of psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud himself was deeply interested in the possibility of thought-transference, although his ambivalence regarding the question created serious obstacles to the psychoanalytic research of the paranormal. Freud was ready to accept the existence of thought transference; he was, however, worrying about the scientific reputation of psychoanalysis and therefore held back the public embracement of telepathy. Interestingly, several of his disciples were significantly involved in the question of the so-called occult, which proved to be rather intriguing for Freud (see Devereux: Psychoanalysis; Fodor: Freud; Forrester: Psychoanalysis; Freud: Psychoanalysis, Dreams; Keeley: Subliminal; Gyimesi: Psychoanalysis; Gyimesi: Why ‘Spiritism’; Rabeyron/Evrard: Historical; Evrard/Massicotte/Rabeyron: Psychoanalysts, etc.).
³⁵ See Bálint: Notes; Ferenczi: Spiritism; Ferenczi: The Clinical; Gyimesi: Sándor Ferenczi; Hollós: Psychopathologie; Rickman: Obituary, etc.
³⁶ Ferenczi: My Friendship.
³⁷ Ferenczi: Spiritism; Ferenczi: The Phenomena; Ferenczi: An Attempted; etc.
lished on it in “Uncanny World”. Furthermore, numerous representatives of scientifically oriented spiritualism in Hungary welcomed the encounter between spiritualism and psychoanalysis. Even the editors of “New Pathway” supported the psychoanalytic research of spiritualistic occurrences. In 1924 Pál Óriás published an enthusiastic paper on the significance of psychoanalysis on the understanding of mediumship in the journal:

If any science has the legitimacy to dive into this great obscurity, it can only be psychoanalysis, which brought extremely significant, quasi revolutionary changes in the field of science and psychological phenomena; it shed light on psychological mechanisms that were entirely unknown so far. Freud, Breuer and Jung totally reshaped psychology and not only solved problems with their analytical method, but showed the only genuine way of healing neuroses. [...] Psychoanalysis recognised mediumism as a problem waiting to be explored, but unfortunately it treats it only as a symptom of neurosis. [...] The method of psychoanalysis is able to give total solutions in this question, too, and we hope that it will give them soon.

Several other psychoanalytic papers were published in Hungarian spiritualistic or metapsychical journals in the 1930s. Despite the rational, reductive framework of psychoanalysis, the scientifically committed representatives of Hungarian spiritualism were ready to reconcile spiritualistic research with psychoanalysis.

Furthermore, Ferenczi was much more involved in spiritualistic practices than his published works suggest. Although he himself was obviously neither religious nor spiritualist, he considered spiritualistic phenomena to be psychological phenomena which must be discovered and understood. Therefore he attended several séances, made self-experiments with automatic writing, and on many occasions expressed his strong conviction that mediumistic phenomena must be investigated with the methods of natural science. He observed mediums whenever it was possible and developed very promising theories on the functioning and psychoanalytic significance of telepathy. Several spiritualists often treated him as an expert on the threshold of spiritualism and science. When one of the most famous mediums in Hungary, Mrs. Jelenek, died in 1912, it was Ferenczi who was interviewed on spiritualism, as he had made observations on the medium. When the well-known soothsaying medium Boriska

38 Sincerus: Sober-Mindedness.
39 Óriás: Mediumism, 52.
40 E.g. Fodor: On the Separation; Wassilko-Serecki: The Appearance.
41 See Gyimesi: Why ‘Spiritism’?
42 Fényes: On the Occasion.
Silbiger was charged with divination, among others, it was Ferenczi who was summoned to testify that the medium did not deal with divination but graphology.\(^4\)\(^3\) Ferenczi also pointed out to the absence of genuine scientific research on mediumistic phenomena in evangelistic spiritism.\(^4\)\(^4\) In sum, he was a true psychical researcher in a country where psychical research had no real tradition and faced serious obstacles. However, his involvement in psychical research was not enough to facilitate its institutionalisation in Hungary.

Nevertheless, there were scholars who, representing mainstream academic science in the early 1900s, made valuable efforts to understand the psychological mechanisms of mediumistic performances.\(^4\)\(^5\) A prominent figure of Hungarian experimental psychology, Pál Ranschburg (1870 – 1945), conducted far-reaching experiments on animal magnetism. In his conclusion he rejected the theory of magnetism; however he pointed out to the enormous significance of hypnotism and suggestion in the emergence of spiritualistic phenomena.\(^4\)\(^6\) However, in general the leading figures of Hungarian academic psychology were against spiritism and metapsychical research, therefore their interest in spiritualistic and connected phenomena were limited to the aim of debunking spiritism.\(^4\)\(^7\) For them, it was suggestion and hypnosis that usually explained spiritualistic and other debatable phenomena – the possibility of further parapsychological explanations were thus ignored. Even the physician Ferenc Völgyesi (1895 – 1967), who was deeply involved in the experimental research of spiritualistic and related phenomena, narrowed the scope of his interpretations to hypnosis and suggestion after the László László incident.\(^4\)\(^8\) In such a scientific environment Ferenczi’s ambition to establish true psychical research in Hungary signified pioneering efforts. Unfortunately, Ferenczi’s death in 1933 prevented the formation of psychoanalytically oriented psychical research in Hungary.

### 5 Racial and political issues during the 1940s

The influence of growing anti-Semitism and other political tendencies had far-reaching consequences for the evolution of early parapsychology in Hungary. The receptive, liberal, open-minded features of spiritistic ideologies were much

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\(^{43}\) Magyar Országos Tudósító 11.06.1930.

\(^{44}\) Ferenczi: Spiritism; Ferenczi: Sombamulism; Ferenczi: Essays.

\(^{45}\) E. g. Reuter: Spiritism.

\(^{46}\) Décsi/Ranschburg: Psychotherapies.

\(^{47}\) E. g. Donáth: Hystero-epilepsy.

\(^{48}\) Völgyesi: Everything.
less emphasised by the 1930s. The methods of exclusion were often marked by an emphasis on Christian features that was merged with a strong nationalism.

In 1944, under János Toronyi’s leadership, Jews and freemasons were excluded from the “Hungarian Metapsychical Scientific Society”. The process had started back in 1941, when Toronyi proposed to open a session of the Society with a short prayer. This proposal was refused by Vilmos Hennyey, the current chair of the session. This was followed by a stormy reaction. One of the members, Domokos Holló later fulminated: “I cannot let the Society be led in a freemasonic and Jewish spirit!” As a result, Holló’s membership was terminated by Hennyey. After the incident Holló and his partners initiated the exclusion of Jews and freemasons in the Ministry of Home Affairs. According to the petition, Holló claimed the following at the session:

I have been apprehensively watching the changes in the membership of the Hungarian Metapsychical Scientific Society for years and saw it becoming the seed-plot of freemasonic-Jewish spirit. Dr. Vilmos Hennyey was a member of the dismissed freemasonic lodge and did all he could in order to compromise the belief in the immortal human soul; he slowly filled the society with Jews, freemasons and alienated theosophists; the precious Christian element was thus completely overshadowed, and many of us dropped away [...] Since then the Society has been split in two, and these two groups are convincing expressions of that difference in world-view that separate the members from one another. The representatives of the Jewish-freemasonic spirit and those whose basis is intransigently national and Christian have separate sittings.

As a reaction, Hennyey cancelled the membership of Holló and Jenő Hillebrand (1884–1950). The latter was a well-known archaeologist and also an enthusiastic spiritist; he made remarkable observations with the famous medium Mária Irtzl from Óbuda. According to Hillebrand, Mária Irtzl proved to be a very reliable medium with outstanding mediumistic capacities: telekinetic and apport phenomena, spirit drawings and possession, and several materialisation phenomena occurred during the séances, which Hillebrand reported in detailed protocols. However, his works bear witness to his deep emotional involvement in spiritism rather than to objective investigations. The lack of objective research was probably connected to the fact that Hillebrand represented a strongly religious branch of spiritism for which spiritistic phenomena were the results of a
superior, divine intervention. He summarised the close relationship between spiritism and divine intervention in the case of Sister (sic!) Mária Irtzl in the following way:

Due to God’s special grace we observed several unprecedented spiritistic manifestations, which a man of mould could hardly have experienced. Unfortunately, I cannot publish some of these yet, because of a superior spiritual restrain. But in those souls, which due to God’s extraordinary grace experienced these manifestations, these unique miraculous occurrences were so deeply engraved that neither time nor the spirit of denial will be able to erase them! Let us bless the Lord for this great mercy, with all his Saints, and all the lovely ‘domestic spirit sisters and brothers!”

The strong religious content of Hillebrand’s words easily clarifies why the members of the “Hungarian Metapsychical Scientific Society” insisted on starting the sessions with a short prayer: their practice was much closer to spiritism than parapsychology, and closer to religion than science. It is very likely that in the 1930s and 1940s the religious, Christian content of spiritism often joined with anti-Semitism, identifying Jews not only as enemies of the nation but also as enemies of true spiritism. In 1941, when Domokos Holló laid a complaint against the Jewish members of the Society, it was Hillebrand’s prominent figure that made the case even more serious:

I am lodging an inspectoral complaint to the Hungarian Royal Minister of Home Affairs against the Judaized Society also because the Caucus – against the statutes of the Society – has cancelled the membership of Dr. Jenő Hillebrand, the pride of Hungarian science, a full and honorary member of several national and international scientific societies, the Director of the Hungarian National Museum, because he along with me dared to protest against the long ago overruling spirit of freemasonry in the Society.

The reported problems obviously underlie that the Hungarian Metapsychical Scientific Society cannot accomplish its objectives under the current circumstances because of the composition of its membership, since it has been split into two, due to the above-mentioned incident, and the Christian-national element is in the minority now. Besides the exponent representatives of the Jewish spirit, there are several other representatives of the Society whose citizenship is dubious and only want to use the Society as a cover for the purpose of propagating their destructive worldview. An assembly of these elements under the aegis of the Society is undesirable.

54 Ibid., 5 – 6.
55 National Archives of Hungary, ID number: 10455 (K 150, 7/5, 180443, 6193, Ma_Nyu).
Hillebrand also added a short notice to the petition in which he supported Holló’s statements. By 1944, all Jews and freemasons were excluded from the Society.\textsuperscript{56}

In the 1940s a similar process evolved in the “Metapsychical and Subsidizing Association of Dés”\textsuperscript{57}. The Society was founded in 1942, for the purpose of creating a forum for the scientific investigators of the immortal soul, the as yet unknown phenomena of nature; for the purpose of illuminating the problems of life, death, and human destiny; reconciling science and religion; conducting metapsychical and metaphysical experiments and compare their results with the results of science. The further aims of the Association were to develop the benevolent, altruistic spirit by the embrace of the poor, orphans, the sick, the abandoned and the desperate, to evolve mercy and meekness through the protection of animals; and to demonstrate that the immortality of the soul implies responsibility for our acts. In this Association, metapsychical research was closely connected to humanitarian goals, which proved to be just as irritating in the eye of authorities as being Jewish or popularising foreign ideologies. In 1944 it was dissolved for the reason of “its dangerous nature regarding warfare, the public and state security.”\textsuperscript{58} According to the petition of a Hungarian Royal Police councilor:

The members of the Association were mostly Romanians and Jews at the time of its foundation, with only a few Hungarians. Recently, after the deployment of the Jews\textsuperscript{59}, the Association turned into the meeting point of Romanian-minded people [...] they are practicing their own national propaganda that is against Hungarians at the same time. The Association also practices spiritism, conducts séances and thus increases the already exaggerated anxiety among the population, which may influence public security and order.\textsuperscript{60}

The above-mentioned examples highlight that anti-Semitism, nationalism and Christianity were strongly interconnected in the spiritualistic and meta-psychical circles of the 1940s, having far-reaching consequences for the development of scientifically oriented spiritualism or early parapsychology. The emphasis on the religious, Christian elements of evangelistic spiritism became a tool of the exclusion of Jews and ‘alien’ ideologies, but also a serious obstacle of objective, well-controlled experimenting with spiritualistic phenomena. The strong reli-

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Today Dés belongs to Romania; between 1940 and 1944 Hungary held Northern Transylvania and Dés.
\textsuperscript{58} National Archives of Hungary, ID number: 10455 (K 150, 7/5, 180443, 6193, Ma_Nyu).
\textsuperscript{59} In 1944 the Jews of the town were sent to the ghetto of Dés and deported to Auschwitz.
\textsuperscript{60} National Archives of Hungary, ID number: 10455 (K 150, 7/5, 180443, 6193, Ma_Nyu).
igious contents of evangelistic spiritism foreclosed the possibility of posing questions, measuring or doubting. Therefore the tradition of evangelistic spiritism not only narrowed the scope of researching the paranormal, but easily served the political tendencies of the 1940s. On the other hand, spiritism and metapsychical research also proved to be an alien, deviant ideology in the eye of those having the power.

6 Further efforts towards the institutionalisation of metapsychical research during the 1930s and 1940s

Under the aegis of spiritism even the prosocial tendencies of spiritualism or metapsychics could easily be declared to be irritating and harmful. However, despite the general reluctance, in 1936 an interesting petition was submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs, in which a group of spiritists applied for the governmental acknowledgment of the “Hungarian Spiritist Party”. The representatives of the proposed party aimed at spreading the divine mission of spiritism by founding a party, thus enjoying the government’s support. According to the petition, the main objective of the party was the practical realisation of the teachings of Christ by following the Ten Commandments. The leader of the party was supposed to be Jesus Christ himself: “Our main objective is practicing the eternal, divine rules – earthly rules should not contradict them, because until these do not correspond, there will be no happiness, no truth and no love on Earth. Not quasi-peace, but eternal conflict and an infinite series of wars.”

The petition was rejected by the Minister of Home Affairs; according to the ministerial counselor Alfréd Sárkány, such a party would harm the interests of the legalised religious denominations.

It is remarkable that in 1944 the “Budapest Association of Spiritual Investigators” was reorganised under the name of “Hungarian Society for Psychical Research” (“Magyar Pszichikai Kutató Társaság”). The articles of association of the “Hungarian Society for Psychical Research” were almost entirely identical with those of the “Budapest Association of Spiritual Investigators”; in 1945 the Ministry of Home Affairs accepted the request of the Society to continue

61 National Archives of Hungary, ID number: 10786 (K 150, 7/5/c, N/A, 3871, N/A).
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
Nevertheless, the new denomination did not signify new ideologies in the Association. Except for some isolated personal efforts, the “Hungarian Society for Psychical Research” did not introduce genuine psychical research in Hungary.

However, in 1941 and 1942 two promising volumes were published in the series of the so-called “Seminar of Psychical Research”, aiming at representing early parapsychological research. Interestingly, these volumes were obviously not connected to the “Hungarian Society for Psychical Research” or the “Budapest Association of Spiritual Investigators”. The head of the “Seminar of Psychical Research”, Kornél Szirmai, was truly against spiritism and saw himself as a metapsychical researcher. In the first volume published by the “Seminar of Psychical Research”, entitled “Occultists – mediums, deniers – frauds”, he presented a vehement attack on mediums and spiritism. His account was extremely emotional, aiming at debunking mediumism. The second volume was written by Béla Petrovics and was mainly based on an interview given by Szirmai to Petrovics. According to the account by Petrovics, the “Seminar of Psychical Research” was founded in 1936 when all the authorities of the “National Medium Examiner Committee” were delegated to Szirmai, who had been working in the field for 30 years. Petrovics admits that they did not publish too much of their experiments: perhaps this is why the “National Medium Examiner Committee” and the “Seminar of Psychical Research” did not gain remarkable fame. However, they analysed the phenomena produced by Mária Irtzl from a metapsychical point of view, asserting that it was not the spirits of the deceased but the extraordinary metapsychical capacities of the medium – such as her enormous teleplasm – that generated the unusual occurrences. If we are to believe Szirmai and Petrovics, they represented the third wave of metapsychical research in Hungary after the physician Elemér Tóvölgyi and Elemér Chengery Pap. The latter was also interviewed by Pertrovics in the volume, thus supporting the metapsychical framework used by Szirmai.

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64 National Archives of Hungary, ID number: 21919 (XIX-B-1-h, N/A, 134949, 1, N/A).
65 Szirmai: Occultists.
66 Petrovics: Discovering.
After 1949, when the Ministry of Home Affairs decided to dissolve the renamed “Budapest Association of Spiritual Investigators”, spiritists were forced to practice in secrecy. As a result, neither spiritism nor psychical research or parapsychology could evolve for a long time. Only in 1964, when two books were published by the Soviet parapsychologist Leonid Vasiljev, a shift towards the institutionalisation of parapsychology could start. Interestingly, these two books – “The mysterious phenomena of the human psyche” and “Telepathy” – were almost immediately translated into Hungarian. Although the framework of scientific materialism excluded not only spiritualistic but also wider parapsychological interpretations in Vasiljev’s works, he gave a convincing summary of the scientific proof of the existence of telepathy, thus providing a good introduction for those who were interested in parapsychology in this period.

However, due to the political atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s, academics were very cautious about choosing research areas that were not in congruence with the ideology of communism. The fear of breaking the written and unwritten laws of the communist regime created serious obstacles to the emergence of parapsychology. Nonetheless, by the 1970s it turned out that the members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party were not against parapsychology, indeed they were sympathetic towards the issue. The real opponents of parapsychology were some powerful academics who saw the limits of scientific psychology in the theory of hypnosis, and they did not intend to further pursue the question. The members of the Central Committee did not want to fight these academics, and thus parapsychology remained neglected during these decades.

The only scholar dealing with parapsychological questions in this period was József Király, conducting mainly historical research into spiritism, spiritualism and occultism. Experiments were rather rare in his practice, and they usually aimed at debunking mediumistic practices. It was the physicist Zoltán Vassy who introduced genuine parapsychological research in Hungary in the 1980s. He started to work at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest in 1989, holding courses on parapsychology; he conducted his first parapsychological experiment.

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67 The main theses of the following chapter are based on interviews conducted by the author with György Egely, Tamás Paulinyi and Zoltán Vassy. The author gratefully acknowledges their help and suggestions.

68 The author gratefully acknowledges Zoltán Vassy’s suggestions regarding the evolution of parapsychology during the communist regime.

69 Király: What is Spiritism, Experimenting.
in 1968. He also worked as a visiting researcher at the “Psychophysical Research Laboratories”, Princeton, in 1987. During these years his main interest remained the psychological and physical nature of telepathy and the use of random number generators in parapsychological experiments.⁷⁰

In the 1980s and especially after the regime change of 1989 non-academic parapsychology also emerged. While homemade experiments were proliferating, interestingly a TV series entitled “Zero-type encounters” (“Nulladik Típusú Találkozások”), broadcasted in the late 1980s and early 1990s, turned out to be a meeting point of several experts and laymen who were interested in parapsychology. The emcee of the program, the journalist János Déri, brought together many different personalities with diverse interests, such as Carla Galli⁷¹ or György Egely⁷². The main topics of the series were paranormal phenomena, the question of survival after death and UFO phenomena. The program put the works of György Egely on the map; his vitality indicator, the so-called Egely Wheel, gave rise to several experiments, questions and doubts.

In 1989 the “Hungarian Para-Research Scientific Society” (“Para-Kutatási Tudományos Társaság”) was founded with the contribution of Carla Galli, György Egely and Tamás Paulinyi. Unfortunately, the Society did not meet the requirements of scientific parapsychology; its original aims were soon tarnished, and an administrative mistake led to its termination in the 1990s.

The “AION Foundation”, which also aimed at parapsychological research, was much closer to mainstream science, since several of its members were outstanding figures of the Hungarian scientific life. It was established in 1992 for the purpose of investigating the as yet unknown capacities of the human psyche and presenting a rational criticism of the pseudoscientific and mystical ideas of the psyche. The president of the Foundation was László Mérő, a well-known Hungarian mathematician; several prominent figures of Hungarian psychology were present in the Foundation, such as Éva Bánya, Sándor Ilyés or József Király, Zoltán Vassy and Tamás Paulinyi – the latter as a member of the advisory board –

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⁷¹ The publicist Carla Galli became known due to her contribution to the TV-series “Zero-type encounters” and the foundation of the Hungarian Para-Research Scientific Society. Today, she identifies herself as a coach, integrating psychology and esotericism.

⁷² György Egely (*1950) is a well-known figure of Hungarian popular parapsychology, researching the field of UFO phenomenon, psychokinesia and several other paranormal phenomena.
also contributed to the work of the Foundation. The members of the Foundation aimed at working in collaboration with the so-called “Club of Para-Gutters” (“Parajfalók Klubja”), founded in 1996, which also intended to conduct scientific parapsychological experiments. Zoltán Vassy and Tamás Paulinyi were among the founding members of the Club, too. However, neither the “Club of Para-Gutters” nor the “AION Foundation” could fulfill its goals in the long run.

It was Tamás Paulinyi whose efforts in the field of parapsychology proved to be unbroken for a longer period. Already in 1989 Paulinyi established his own parapsychological laboratory where he conducted mostly ESP experiments. His work was recognised and supported by Zoltán Vassy; along with Charles Edwin May they published an essay on anomalous anticipatory skin conductance. Today, Paulinyi’s activities are closely connected to esotericism, parapsychology and literature; he has been the head of the “Synthesis Free University”, an independent institution offering integrative alternative psychological and esoteric training for its students since 1997.

8 Conclusion

In sum, in Hungary it was metapsychical research that primarily represented early parapsychology. Although the investigators of metapsychics themselves shared many different methodological and theoretical viewpoints, in general the framework of metapsychical researchers proved to be eligible to conduct controlled scientific experiments on mediumism and other debatable phenomena. However, it is obvious that the emergence of early parapsychology and psychical research was hindered for several reasons. Firstly, the strong tradition of evangelistic spiritism narrowed the scope of scientific research. Secondly, the political events in Hungary in the 20th century created serious obstacles to parapsychological investigations. Under such circumstances, the efforts of some prominent rep-
resentatives of metapsychical research – such as Elemér Chengery Pap or Vilmos Tordai – to establish scientific research on the paranormal proved to be particularly important.

It is regrettable that the above-mentioned researchers were not able to cooperate with the representatives of mainstream scientific psychology. The leading figures of Hungarian academic psychology were usually against spiritism and metapsychical research, therefore their interest in spiritualistic and connected phenomena were limited to the aim of debunking spiritism. However, the experiments conducted by Pál Ranschburg or Ferenc Völgyesi enriched psychology in general and the theory of hypnosis in particular. It was the psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi alone who, also representing an assaulted field of contemporary science, forced the true encounter of science and spiritualism without any commitments to spiritism, spiritualism or religion.

The above-mentioned problems are obviously the reason why parapsychology evolving in the 1980s also had to face serious difficulties. Although the scientific community of this period was seemingly ready to support the establishment of scientific parapsychology, their motivation was not sufficient for establishing genuine, institutionalised parapsychological research in Hungary. It is very likely that the missing tradition of psychical research made the emergence of institutionalised parapsychology in the 1980s even more difficult. Despite the fact that the influence of metapsychical and psychical research was already present in the early 1900s, the scientifically oriented researchers of mediumistic phenomena had to struggle with financial and political problems all over the 20th century. Interestingly, also the influence of Soviet parapsychology proved to be marginal after WWII. However, the interest in the works of Vasiljev demonstrates the repressed need for parapsychological research during the communist regime.

After the regime change of 1989 the efforts of the non-academic and academic representatives of parapsychology illuminated the possibility of an institutionalised parapsychology in the context of which the investigation of the paranormal could have become a small but significant part of Hungarian scientific life. It is regrettable that their efforts were only partially successful. However, the history of Hungarian parapsychology of the 1980s and 1990s points out to the prospect of a future parapsychology which will hopefully be able to integrate the colorful traditions of metapsychical research, psychology and contemporary science in Hungary.
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