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## ACADEMICIAN BORIS DMITRIEVICH GREKOV AND HUNGARY<sup>1</sup>

This article analyses the image of the Soviet academician Boris Grekov and the reception of his scholarly legacy in Hungarian historiography. The study focuses on the period from the second half of the 1940s to the first half of the 1950s, a time closely associated with the processes of Sovietization. Special attention is paid to Grekov's visit to Budapest and Debrecen between 5 and 17 November 1948, his public lectures, and his meetings with Hungarian scholars as well as political and public figures. For the first time, a body of documents from Hungarian and Russian archives has been introduced into scholarly circulation, making it possible to reconstruct the hidden infrastructure of the visit, including its institutional, political, and organisational dimensions. A separate group of sources consists of materials from the Hungarian press, which allow the author to trace the rhetorical strategies used to construct Grekov's public image as a "world-renowned historian" and an "exemplary Marxist-Leninist", as well as the ways in which his scholarly theses were politicised (anti-Normanism, "Russian feudalism", the "second edition of serfdom"). At the same time, the study reveals the limited long-term impact of this symbolic campaign. A comparison of press enthusiasm, official assessments, and subsequent historiographical practice shows that the image of Grekov, artificially constructed in the late 1940s and early 1950s, failed to take root in Hungarian historical scholarship. In the 1960s–1980s, direct references to his ideas and concepts were rarely found in Hungarian historiography. In this way, the article contributes to the study of the mechanisms and evolution of Soviet intellectual expansion in Eastern Europe, to a better understanding of the relationship between propaganda objectives and academic practices and to an assessment of the limits of the transfer of scholarly models within the socialist bloc.

*Keywords:* Boris Dmitrievich Grekov; Soviet historiography; Hungary; Soviet-Hungarian relations; international scholarly contacts; Sovietization

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The name of Academician Boris Dmitrievich Grekov (1882–1953) requires no special introduction, as it is firmly embedded in the context of the development of Soviet historiography. Numerous studies have already been published on his life and scholarly work; nevertheless, significant lacunae remain in his academic biography. Among these is Grekov's international activity in the twilight of his life, during the second half of the 1940s and the early 1950s. By that time, he had attained the status of a leading Soviet historian, a position officially confirmed by several high-ranking administrative appointments. In addition to serving as Director of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, he headed the Institute of the History of Material Culture from 1944 to 1946 and, from 1946 to 1951, also directed the Institute of Slavic Studies. Furthermore, in 1946 Grekov was entrusted with the duties of Academic Secretary of the Division of History and Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences.<sup>2</sup> His works on the history of Kievan Rus', the history of the peasantry, and the history of Slavic law were proclaimed exemplary, while his conception of Russian feudalism became an integral component of the Soviet Marxist narrative.

Grekov's international activity, which developed despite his deteriorating health, was not linked solely to his administrative positions. When it came to exporting Soviet historiography, he was the perfect candidate, being a scholar of the "Old School" who had embraced Marxism while remaining non-party as well as a being proficient in foreign languages and endowed with considerable personal charm. At the same time, one cannot overlook another circumstance. Having remained in Soviet Russia in 1920, Grekov chose adaptation to the new sociopolitical realities as his life strategy. It is appropriate here to cite the words of the historian Leonard Adamovich Derbov, who was Grekov's student in the 1920s: "I fear being unjust, but it seems to me that his advancement was due not so much to his talents as to the conformity characteristic of him."<sup>3</sup> It would seem that this behaviour on Grekov's part had its own grounds and preconditions: his service under Wrangel in Crimea, which was duly recorded in his personal file; his brief arrest in 1930; and his observation of the tragic fates of his colleagues.

Grekov became actively involved in foreign missions, from which he had been excluded during the preceding years.<sup>4</sup> Such involvement was

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2 Н. А. ГОРСКАЯ, *Борис Дмитриевич Греков* (Москва: ИРИ РАН, 1999), 154.

3 Л. А. ДЕРБОВ, *Страницы воспоминаний* (Саратов: Издательство СГУ, 2009), 123.

4 Materials from Grekov's personal file preserved in the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences indicate that the historian did not travel abroad during the 1920s and 1930s.

sanctioned at the highest party and state level. His trips were endowed not so much with scholarly as with propagandistic significance. The geography of his travels is also revealing: it was associated with visits to the countries of Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe that, after the end of the Second World War, had fallen within the orbit of Soviet influence. Between 1945 and 1953, Grekov visited Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. These trips – and especially their outcomes – have so far been studied somewhat unevenly.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, particular interest attaches to an examination of Grekov's visit to Hungary in 1948 and, in connection with this, to his contacts with Hungarian scholars and the reception of his work in Hungarian historiography.

### “A GREAT SPECIALIST” AND “AN EXCELLENT MARXIST–LENINIST”

The initiative to invite Grekov to deliver a public lecture originated at Budapest University as early as 1947.<sup>6</sup> Who, then, stood behind this initiative, considering that Grekov was almost unknown in Hungary and that his works had attracted only occasional references before 1945?<sup>7</sup> It may be assumed that the idea of inviting the Soviet academician to Budapest originated with Professor Gyula Szekfű, who on 15 October 1945 was appointed head of the Hungarian diplomatic mission to the USSR and remained in this post until 10 September 1948. There is no direct evidence that he was personally acquainted with Grekov. It is, however, reliably known that during his stay in Budapest in 1948, Grekov, in the course of one of his public appearances, spoke of Szekfű in respectful terms.<sup>8</sup> There are also strong grounds to believe that Grekov became acquainted in Moscow with the young historian József Perényi, who served at the Hungarian embassy in 1946–1947.

5 См.: H. GRALA, „Nasz dorogoj Aleksandr Sanycz”. Aleksander Gieysztor i „przyjaciele Moskale”, in: *Aleksander Gieysztor. Człowiek i dzieło*, red. M. KOCZERSKA, P. WĘCOWSKI (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2016), 41–42; В. С. ГРУЗДИНСКАЯ, «“Споры способствуют коллективной работе”: встреча Б. Д. Грекова с болгарскими историками осенью 1950 года”, *Славяноведение*, no. 3 (2025), 125–141.

6 Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, *Egyetemi Levéltár* (ELTE – EL). 8. Bölcsészettudományi Kar, 1773–1995. A/51 Budapesti Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Karának ülései, 1948–1950. 73. old.

7 See, for example: MORAVCSIK GY., *Byzantinoturcica: Sprachreste der Türkischen Völker in den Byzantinischen Quellen* (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetem, 1943), 321.

8 ПАСН Зс. П., “Szekfű Gyula emléktáblájánál”, *Élet és Irodalom* 27, no. 21 (1983): 5.

Besides that shown by Szekfű and Perényi, interest in Grekov's work in the first postwar years also came from another Hungarian historian, whose scholarly and political career was at that time undergoing a rapid ascent – Erik Molnár. In 1945, his book *A History of Hungarian Society from Prehistoric Times to the Árpád Period* was published.<sup>9</sup> A substantial part of it was devoted to reflections on the specific character of Hungarian feudalism. Grekov's name was not mentioned in Molnár's book. However, in 1946, responding to readers' questions in the pages of the journal *Társadalmi Szemle*, the Hungarian scholar explicitly referred to the research of his Soviet colleague. Molnár noted that it was precisely Grekov who, on the basis of a meticulous study of the sources, had arrived at the conclusion that the Eastern Slavs had moved directly to feudalism, bypassing the slave-owning formation.<sup>10</sup> This was, in all likelihood, one of the earliest attempts to transpose the Soviet version of the theory of socioeconomic formations into the Hungarian historiography.

The new Marxist vector in the development of Hungarian historiography, combined with the unreserved orientation of communists towards Moscow, automatically turned Grekov into a prominent figure. His activities began to be covered not only in scholarly publications but also in the press.<sup>11</sup> In July 1947, the newspaper *Népszava* reproachfully lamented that the "Hungarian counter-revolution" had deprived the country of the opportunity to engage with the achievements of Soviet scholarly thought, including Grekov's works on social history.<sup>12</sup>

One further reference to Grekov in the Hungarian press should not be overlooked. In 1947, János Harmatta, a young scholar who would later become a renowned classical philologist and orientalist, published a review of a book entitled *Ancient Russia* (1944) by the Russian émigré historian George Vernadsky. Harmatta praised the author for his detailed examination of the connections between the Eastern Slavs and the Eurasian nomads and for situating their history within the broader context of the history of Eastern Europe as a whole. Harmatta emphasised that such breadth of vision was characteristic of only two historians known to

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9 MOLNÁR E., *A magyar társadalom története az őskortól az Árpádkorig* (Budapest: Szikra, 1945).

10 "Molnár Erik válasza", *Társadalmi Szemle* 1, no. 7 (1946): 534.

11 "Szovjet expedíció a Balkánon", *Magyar Szó* (1946. január 6.) 5; "A szovjet tudomány új állomása", *Uj Szó* (1946. november 21.) 4.

12 "Lépésről lépésre... A marxizmus térhódítása a világ tudományában", *Népszava* (1947. július 6.) 7.

him – Boris Grekov and Mikhail Rostovtsev.<sup>13</sup> Most likely, at that time the Hungarian scholar could scarcely have imagined that, within the official Soviet narrative, these three names could not stand side by side: that Rostovtsev and Vernadsky were émigrés who were consistently exposed to condemnation in Soviet historiography. He was probably also unaware of the fact that Grekov and Vernadsky had once been close friends and that both had served under Wrangel in Crimea. In November 1920, scholars were confronted with a stark choice – to leave Russia or to remain. On the eve of the evacuation from Crimea to Constantinople, Vernadsky ran to Grekov and his wife late at night to bid them farewell. At the last moment, at the very threshold of their house, the Grekovs hesitated and decided to stay.<sup>14</sup>

### **“WE CONSIDER PROFESSOR GREKOV’S VISIT TO HIS FRIENDS TO BE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE”**

The invitation received from Budapest was favourably received in Moscow. On 22 October 1948, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party authorised the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences to dispatch Grekov (together with his wife) to Budapest for a two-week period to deliver lectures.<sup>15</sup>

On 5 November 1948, the Soviet academician and his wife arrived by train in Budapest. In an interview given immediately after his arrival, Grekov expressed the hope that he would be able to make the personal acquaintance of Hungarian historians and that his visit would contribute to the strengthening of bilateral scholarly ties.<sup>16</sup>

On 6 November, a ceremonial reception in Grekov’s honour was held at the restaurant of one of Budapest’s finest hotels – the Nagyszálló – located on Margaret Island. The importance attached to the event is underscored by the fact that it was organised by the Minister of Religion and Public Education, Gyula Ortutay.<sup>17</sup> Invited to the reception were Hungarian

13 HАРМАТТА J., “Vernadsky, George: Ancient Russia. New Haven 1941, Yale University Press, XIV, 425 1. 8°. – (A *History of Russia* by George Vernadsky and Michael Karpovich. Volume I)”, *Századok* 81, no. 1–10 (1947): 267.

14 ГОРСКАЯ, Борис Дмитриевич Греков, 57.

15 В. Ю. АФИАНИ (ред.), *Летопись Российской академии наук, Т. VII. 1946–1953* (Москва: Архив РАН, 2022).220.

16 *Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár – Országos Levéltár* (MNL – OL). Magyar Távirati Iroda hírei, 1920–1956. Külföldi–Belföldi Hírek. 1948. November 11. Hír sz. 96.

17 “Ortutay Gyula minister ebéde Grekov szovjet professzor tiszteletére”, *Magyar Nemzet* (1948. november 6.) 3.

political, scholarly, and cultural figures, representatives of the Soviet embassy, and numerous journalists. Ortutay delivered a speech in honour of the guest.<sup>18</sup> In his response, Grekov stated that, with the commencement of the construction of a people's democracy, Hungarian scholarship had begun to serve not class interests but the interests of the people.

The newspaper *Népszava* portrayed Grekov not merely as an outstanding Soviet scholar, but as a historian of international renown. Its readers were offered an explanation of the significance of his works. Thus, the importance of his book *Kievan Rus'* for Hungarian historiography was explained by the very fact that the ancestors of the Hungarians had migrated westwards through the territories of the Eastern Slavs and had been in direct contact with them.<sup>19</sup> Grekov thus appeared not only as a "great specialist" and an "excellent Marxist-Leninist", but also as an outstanding academic administrator. The academician's visit to Budapest was presented as the most important event in Hungarian scholarly life in 1948. Moreover, important guidance was expected from the Soviet academician – guidance that Hungarian historiography would be able to put to use.

**"THIS OUTSTANDING SCHOLARLY REPRESENTATIVE  
OF THE SOVIET UNION SHOULD BE AWARDED THE HIGHEST DEGREE  
OF HONORARY DOCTOR BY OUR UNIVERSITY"**

On the eve of the Grekovs' arrival, on 3 November 1948, an extraordinary meeting of the Faculty Council of the Humanities at Budapest University was hastily convened. Among those present were Gyula Németh, Gyula Moravcsik, István Kniezsa, György Lukács, Zoltán Trócsányi, Imre Lukinich, Imre Szentpétery and other eminent scholars. The minutes of the meeting indicate that, prior to Grekov's visit, Hungarian scholars had resolved that "this outstanding scholarly representative of the Soviet Union should be awarded the highest degree of honorary doctor by our university".<sup>20</sup>

A special committee was immediately established, comprising Imre Lukinich, Gyula Moravcsik, István Hajnal, Zoltán Trócsányi, Péter Váczy and Sándor Szalai. The members of the committee emphasised that in his works Grekov had devoted considerable attention to the history of the Hungarians

18 MNL – OL. Magyar Távirati Iroda hírei, 1920–1956. Külföldi–Belföldi Hírek. 1948. November 5. Hír sz. 96.

19 "Grekov", *Népszava* (1948. november 13.) 6.

20 *ELTE – EL. 8. Bölcsészettudományi Kar, 1773–1995. A/51 Budapesti Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Karának ülései, 1948–1950. 73. old.*

and had repeatedly called for the development of Soviet–Hungarian historical research. In a memorandum on Grekov’s scholarly merits, prepared by Moravcsik and Trócsányi, it was stated – very much in the spirit of the time – that the historian had become acquainted with Karl Marx’s *Capital* during his university studies, and that this encounter had determined the direction of his research.<sup>21</sup> Having discussed the proposal, the Faculty Council decided not to conduct a secret ballot on Grekov’s candidacy. Instead, it unanimously approved the committee’s recommendation and resolved to submit it as a matter of urgency for consideration by the University Council.<sup>22</sup>

The University Council, chaired by the rector, Professor Gyula Németh, who, it should be noted, was simultaneously a member of the Faculty Council, convened for an extraordinary session on 9 November 1948.<sup>23</sup> The Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Professor Miklós Zsirai, reported that the special committee had approved Grekov’s candidacy. Following an exchange of views, Grekov’s candidacy was unanimously approved by the University Council. The ceremony honouring the Soviet scholar was scheduled for Saturday, 13 November, at 5:00 p.m.<sup>24</sup> The ceremony would take place in a solemn atmosphere and would be recorded on film for the state newsreel *Magyar Filmhíradó*.<sup>25</sup> The conferral of the honorary doctorate upon the Soviet academician was thereby transformed into a symbolic act of alliance.

### “THE RUSSIAN STATE EXISTED EVEN BEFORE RURIK”

Grekov’s first lecture at the university took place on 6 November. The opening address, delivered in both Russian and Hungarian, was given by the dean, Professor Zsirai. He acclaimed the USSR as a great country and welcomed Grekov as a renowned European scholar who had always sought historical truth with unwavering determination.<sup>26</sup> The lecture was devoted to the formation of the Old Rus’ state. In accordance with the official Marxist

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21 Ibid. 75. old.

22 Ibid. 78. old.

23 *ELTE – EL*. 1. Rektori Hivatal iratai, 1635–2018. A/4. Budapesti Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetem Egyetemi Tanácsának ülései, 1948–1949. 11. old.

24 *ELTE – EL*. 8. Bölcsészettudományi Kar, 1773–1995. A/51 Budapesti Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Karának ülései, 1948–1950. 79. old.

25 “Grekov professzor díszdoktorrá avatása a Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetemen (Magyar Filmhíradó, 37. szám, 1948. November)”, *Filmhíradók Online*. <https://filmhiradok-online.hu/watch.php?id=6955> (Accessed November 20, 2025).

26 “Grekov professzor, a Szovjet Tudományos Akadémia alelnöke az orosz állam kialakulásáról előadást tartott a budapesti egyetemen”, *Népszava* (1948. november 10.) 6.

canon, Grekov sought to convince his audience that the state emerges only as a result of class struggle. In fact, Grekov aimed to show that the process of state formation among the Eastern Slavs had begun long before the 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> Grekov vehemently criticised the Normanist theory. He appealed to the legendary character of the account of Rurik's invitation and cited the opinion of Mikhail Vasilyevich Lomonosov as his principal authority. It is indicative that one of the newspaper headlines reporting on the lecture stated explicitly, "The Russian State Existed Even before Rurik."<sup>28</sup> How did all this relate to Hungarian history? Grekov maintained that, in studying their own past, Hungarians did not need to search for founding heroes; instead, they should closely analyse social relations – above all through the prism of class struggle and oppression in history.

In his second lecture, devoted to the origins of Russian culture, Grekov delved deep into the past, seeking to demonstrate that by the 9<sup>th</sup> century the Eastern Slavs had already developed an advanced material culture. Above all, however, Kievan Rus' was presented as having been peace-loving. Under Vladimir I, it was said to have lived in harmony and amity with the Poles, Hungarians and Czechs.<sup>29</sup> Conceptions of the peaceful disposition of Rus' towards its East European neighbours were being projected onto the contemporary policies of the USSR. It is also worth noting that Grekov spoke of the profound influence exerted by Old Rus' culture upon Eastern Europe as a whole.<sup>30</sup> His remarks clearly implied that, in the present day, the USSR was destined to exercise an equally fruitful influence.

The third lecture was entitled "Patterns in the History of the Peasantry of Feudal Europe." In it, Grekov sought to acquaint his audience with the doctrine of socioeconomic formations and with its application to the solution of concrete problems in agrarian history.

Grekov's personal file records that he had a good command of German, Polish, and English, and some knowledge of French, Latin, Ancient Greek and all the Slavic languages.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the lectures were delivered in Russian; the audience had been provided in advance with printed

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27 "Grekov professzor előadása az egyetemen", *Szabadság* (1948. november 11.) 3.

28 "Az orosz állam már Rurik előtt is fennállott: Grekov világhírű szovjet történész előadása", *Szabad Nép* (1948. november 10.) 6.

29 *MNL – OL. Magyar Távirati Iroda hírei, 1920–1956. Külföldi–Belföldi Hírek*. 1948. November 11. Hír sz. 96.

30 "A Tudományegyetem új díszdoktora", *Friss Ujság* (1948. november 13.) 5.

31 *Архив ПАИ*, ф. 411, оп. 3, д. 175, л. 4, 8.

brochures containing the texts, which had been translated beforehand by József Perényi.<sup>32</sup>

The newspapers widely circulated statements attributed to the Soviet academician to the effect that he had come to Hungary with great pleasure, since in the course of his scholarly research he had devoted much attention to Hungarian history.<sup>33</sup> Grekov, in his study of Kievan Rus', could of course hardly avoid addressing the early Hungarians, who were among its neighbours. It is, however, difficult to credit the academician's words that in the course of his research on the Russian peasantry he had "deeply immersed himself in the history of the Hungarian peasantry" as well.<sup>34</sup> Although Grekov was proficient in foreign languages, he did not know Hungarian and had no direct familiarity with Hungarian historiography. Neither his *Kievan Rus'* nor his *Russian Peasantry from the Earliest Times to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century* cites a single Hungarian author or a single Hungarian source.

Yet in his conversations with journalists the academician assured them, "I have studied the history of Hungary thoroughly," while they enthusiastically declared that "the word 'thoroughly' in Grekov's vocabulary means a great deal."<sup>35</sup> The public euphoria surrounding the visit of the Soviet academician was so intense that scarcely anyone paid attention to the actual depth of his understanding of the rhythms of Hungarian history. The press categorically described him as one of the foremost Soviet authorities on the Árpád period.<sup>36</sup>

### **"THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM I HAD OCCASION TO MEET SHOWED A GREAT DEAL OF ATTENTION TO THE SOVIET SCHOLAR"**

The Hungarian milieu received Grekov warmly. In his subsequent report on the trip, he noted, "The people with whom I had occasion to meet showed a great deal of attention to the Soviet scholar."<sup>37</sup> Since the guest did not know Hungarian, he was accompanied everywhere by an interpreter – the young literary scholar Miklós Szabolcsy, who would later become a major academic figure.

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32 B. D. GREKOV, *Az orosz állam kialakulása* (Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1948); IDEM, *Az orosz művelődés forrásai és a kievi Ruszj művelődése* (Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1948); IDEM, *Törvényszerűségek a feudális Európa parasztságának történetében* (Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1948).

33 "Az orosz parasztság történetírója Budapesten", *Szabad Szó* (1948. november 7.) 14.

34 Ibid.

35 "Grekov", 6.

36 "A helyzet pénteken", *Magyar Nemzet* (1948. november 6.) 3.

37 Архив РАН, ф. 579, оп. 2, д. 76, л. 8.

Paradoxical though it may seem, Grekov's lack of knowledge of the Hungarian language also served him well, allowing him to avoid any awkward questions. A man accustomed to caution, it was evidently not by chance that Grekov wrote in his official report on the trip, "I did not manage to grasp the country's political life, and it was difficult for me to do so owing to my lack of knowledge of the language. The interpreter assigned to me helped me a great deal in understanding contemporary Hungarian life, but, of course, not sufficiently for me to form a clear picture of the internal relations within the country."<sup>38</sup> Although the report contained ritual phrases about a "bourgeois interpretation of history", it did not name a single specific "falsifier of history" or "revisionist", and was entirely devoid of any denunciatory rhetoric. Grekov was restrained and cautious in his assessments.

Describing his conversation with the archaeologist László Gerevich, he reproached his colleague for the fact that Hungarian archaeology was not integrated with history and did not participate in the resolution of historical problems, as was the case in the USSR. Gerevich, for his part, proposed a toast to the imminent unification of archaeology and history, and this response fully satisfied Grekov.<sup>39</sup>

Grekov's writings on Hungary and the Hungarians were marked by a consistently respectful tone. He noted that many of his colleagues displayed a sincere interest in the work of their Soviet counterparts yet encountered difficulties in obtaining scholarly literature. Accordingly, he petitioned the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries to send Professor Trócsányi new publications on the history of Russian literature, to the rector, Professor Németh, books on the history of Bashkiria and a Chuvash-language dictionary, and to Perényi, works on Russian palaeography.<sup>40</sup>

Grekov admired the beauty of Hungarian cities as well as Lake Balaton, to which he was taken on a specially arranged excursion on 14 November. "The country lives an intense life. Attitudes towards the Soviet Union are serious and friendly," the academician concluded.<sup>41</sup> Before his departure from Budapest, on 14 November, Grekov wrote a letter to Gyula Ortutay, in which, on his own behalf and that of his wife, he expressed gratitude for their warm and cordial reception.<sup>42</sup>

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38 *Ibid.*, n. 9.

39 *Ibid.*, n. 6.

40 *Ibid.*, n. 8.

41 *Ibid.*

42 *MNL – OL. XIX-I-1-v. Ortutay Gyula miniszter, 1947–1950. 22. doboz. 5399/1948.*

### “DEBRECEN IS A PROVINCIAL CITY, BUT A VERY CULTURED ONE”

On the morning of 15 November, Grekov arrived by train in Debrecen. In his travel report, the academician wrote, “Debrecen is a provincial city, but a very cultured one”. The visit was not accidental. On the previous day, Sunday 14 November, Debrecen had witnessed the ceremonial opening of the local office of the Hungarian–Soviet Cultural Society (*Magyar–Szovjet Művelődési Társaság*), at which speeches were delivered by the president of the country, Árpád Szakasits, and by a member of the National Assembly, István Szabó.<sup>43</sup> The arrival of a high-ranking Soviet guest was intended to serve as an important symbolic gesture. The event had been announced in advance by the city’s newspaper, which described Grekov as a “world-famous historian.”<sup>44</sup>

Grekov noted in his report that in Debrecen the audience at his lectures consisted primarily of students. At the same time, the newspaper reported that many workers had attended the lecture and that the Soviet guest, observing this, enthusiastically remarked “that in the Soviet Union, too, he regarded the delivery of historical lectures to workers in factories and plants as one of the tasks closest to his heart.”<sup>45</sup> In addition, those present at the lecture included the Soviet consul in Debrecen, Mikhail Yakovlevich Khosev, a secretary of the Soviet embassy, Kulakov, and an adviser to the Ministry of Culture, György Szántó.

The rector of the university, Professor Béla Pukánszky, noted that in the person of Grekov the university was welcoming “one of the greatest living Soviet scholars.” He further observed that Grekov was by no means an unfamiliar figure in Debrecen, since in recent years students had been translating his works in the course of their studies on the history of serfdom.<sup>46</sup> Grekov delivered a lecture entitled “Patterns in the History of the Peasantry of Feudal Europe.” He sought to analyse and compare the situation of serf peasantry in different European countries. Particular attention was devoted to the so-called “second edition of serfdom,” which began in a number of countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Grekov aimed to demonstrate that, in different countries,

43 “Szakasits Árpád köztársasági elnök avatja fel a MSZMT új székházát”, *Debreczen* (1948. november 13.) 3.

44 “Hétfőn tart előadást Grekov moszkvai professzor a Debreceni Egyetemen”, *Debreczen* (1948. november 14.) 5.

45 “Grekov professzor látogatásai Debrecenben”, *Debreczen* (1948. november 17.) 4.

46 “Grekov professzor előadása a Debreceni Egyetemen”, *Debreczen* (1948. november 16.) 6.

the development of agriculture and the fate of the peasantry associated with it were subject to the same forces and evolved according to similar patterns.

On 16 November, Grekov visited two university seminars. With the head of the historical seminar, Professor István Szabó, he exchanged views on specialised scholarly issues, after which he attended the practical classes of the participants in the Slavic Seminar. One of the female students recited a poem by Mikhail Lermontov with impeccable pronunciation and artistic sensitivity, which deeply moved the Soviet guest.<sup>47</sup> Grekov also visited the Reformed College, including its large library.

On the same day, the university rector hosted a ceremonial dinner in Grekov's honour, to which members of the professoriate were invited. On the day of his departure, 17 November, the head of the city, the communist János Ménes, invited the Soviet academician to his home for a cup of tea, which clearly testified to the special, warm, and friendly attitude shown towards him. That evening, Grekov departed by train from Debrecen for Chop. Thus ended his Hungarian journey.

### **“THE ARMY OF PEACE IS GROWING, JUSTICE WILL PREVAIL”**

Even after Academician Grekov's brief, though memorable, visit, Hungarian newspapers continued to follow his activities. Few Soviet scholars were accorded such extensive space in the press in the late 1940s and early 1950s. His scholarly and public activities were covered regularly and in considerable detail. Hungarian readers were informed of how Grekov criticised “warmongers” and stood “on guard for peace,”<sup>48</sup> how he spoke out in favour of the peaceful use of atomic energy,<sup>49</sup> and how he vehemently denounced “American militarism.”<sup>50</sup> Grekov appeared at an academic session commemorating Maxim Gorky on 11 June 1951,<sup>51</sup> and welcomed the Chinese scholar Guo Moruo at a ceremony marking the award of the Stalin

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47 “Grekov professzor látogatásai Debrecenben”, 4.

48 “A Szovjetunió a népek békéjének óre”, *Népszava* (1949. augusztus 25.) 1.

49 “Végetért a Szovjetunió Legfelső Tanácsának ülészakája”, *Délvidéki Hírlap* (1950. június 21.) 1.

50 “Tiltakozó nagygyűlés Moszkvában az imperialisták baktériumháborúja ellen”, *Győr-Sopron Megyei Hírlap* (1952. március 15.) 4.

51 “A Szovjetunió Tudományos Akadémiája kiadja Gorkij összes műveit”, *Magyar Nemzet* (1951. június 19.) 3.

Peace Prize in 1952.<sup>52</sup> In this way, the Soviet academician came to function as a kind of public institution in his own right.

Hungarian-language newspapers published in Romania also wrote regularly about Grekov, reporting, for example, on his receipt in 1951 of the Stalin Prize for his book on the fall of the Golden Horde.<sup>53</sup> They likewise covered his protest against bacteriological weapons<sup>54</sup> and his visit to Timișoara in 1952 as part of a Soviet delegation.<sup>55</sup> On that occasion, speaking at an evening event organised by the Society for Romanian–Soviet Friendship at the Opera House, the academician castigated “falsifiers of history” and “warmongers,” after which he delivered a lecture entitled “The History of the USSR in the Light of the Teaching of Comrade Stalin.”

At the same time, the works of the Soviet academician continued to be translated into Hungarian. Thus, in 1949, at a session of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR held in honour of the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of Joseph Stalin, Grekov delivered a paper entitled “Stalin and Historical Scholarship,” which was published in the Academy’s *Izvestiia*. It was immediately translated into Hungarian.<sup>56</sup>

It may be assumed that Grekov’s popularity was also fostered by his high level of involvement in the international anti-war movement. It was no coincidence that in February 1950 the newspaper *Szabad Nép*, reporting on the nomination of candidates from the Academy of Sciences to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, devoted special attention to Grekov. He was described as an “academician of peace,” a “well-known fighter for the people and democracy, who had repeatedly raised his voice in defence of peace at international congresses on behalf of the Soviet intelligentsia.”<sup>57</sup>

From today’s perspective, it is easy to criticise such naivety – especially in the knowledge that the Soviet leadership skilfully exploited the noble anti-war movement for its own political ends. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that only a few years before the events described here, the bloody Second World War had come to an end. It was followed by a new

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52 “Kíuo Mo-Zsonak ünnepélyesen átadták a nemzetközi Sztálin-békedíjat”, *Vasmegeye* (1952. április 11.) 2.

53 “Kiosztották az 1951. évi Sztálin-díjakat”, *Világosság* (1952. március 12.) 2.

54 “Az amerikai imperialisták olyan gonosztetteket követnek el, amelyeket eddig nem ismert a történelem”, *Viharsarok* (1952. március 15) 2.

55 “Szovjet küldöttség érkezett Temesvárra”, *Szabad Szó* (1952. október 24.) 3.

56 B. D. GREKOV, “Sztálin és a történettudomány”, *Századok* 83, no. 1 (1949): 3–23.

57 “Neves tudósok a Legfelső Tanács képviselőjelöltjei között”, *Szabad Nép* (1950. február 14.) 5.

global confrontation – the Cold War – further exacerbated by the advent of nuclear weapons. The lingering horror of recent tragic events and the fear of a new threat compelled many to listen attentively to calls for the struggle for peace. The voice of Academician Grekov did indeed sound loudly. “The army of peace is growing, justice will prevail,”<sup>58</sup> the historian proclaimed from the rostrum in Sofia in September 1950.

## INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

Among those present at the reception held in Grekov’s honour on 6 November 1948 was the young historian Zsigmond Pál Pach, who would later become one of the key figures in Kádár era Hungarian historiography and a prominent European specialist in economic history. In his articles and public lectures, he repeatedly recalled this November encounter. Grekov remained in his memory as a grey-haired, blue-eyed old man, imbued with dignity and self-confidence.<sup>59</sup> Pach also reported that the lectures Grekov delivered, translated into Hungarian, had exerted a significant influence on Hungarian historical scholarship. But was this in fact the case?

Even a cursory survey of Hungarian historiography of the 1960s–1980s suggests that references to Grekov’s lectures are virtually impossible to find in articles and monographs of that period. By the mid-1950s, the long-drawn-out process of translating into Hungarian the two-volume *Russian Peasantry from the Earliest Times to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*<sup>60</sup> had been completed, a project carried out with the participation of Perényi.<sup>61</sup> Yet already at the moment of its publication, this work was not destined to become a scholarly bestseller, as political, academic, and cultural contexts were changing rapidly. In the years that followed, Hungarian

58 “Megnyílt a Bolgár Országos Békekongresszus”, *Kis Ujság* (1950. szeptember 22.) 1.

59 PACH Zs. P., “Közös dolgaink a történelem-kutatásban”, *Élet és Irodalom* 18, no. 38 (1974): 3; IDEM, “A szovjet és a magyar történettudomány kapcsolatainak jelentősége, eredményei, továbbépítése”, *A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Filozófiai és Történettudományok Osztályának Közleményei* XXIV, no. 1 (1975): 5.

60 B. D. GREKOV, *Az orosz parasztság története a legrégebb időktől a XVII. századig* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1956. 1. köt.; 1957. 2. köt.).

61 The relationship between Grekov and Perényi has already been discussed: СВАК Д., «Параллельные биографии – судьба историка в Советском Союзе и Венгрии (штрихи к портрету Руслана Скрынникова и Йожефа Перени)», in: СВАК Д., *На службе у Клио и власть предрежащих: этюды по руссиеведению* (Будапешт: Russica Panonica, 2014), 57–67; В. С. ГРУЗДИНСКАЯ, М. В. КОВАЛЕВ, «Венгерский историк в интерьере советской историографии», *RussianStudiesHU* 7, no. 2 (2025): 115–138.

researchers referred to it only very rarely.<sup>62</sup> It did not serve as a source of methodological inspiration for them.

As for the aforementioned Pach, while in the late 1940s and the first half of the 1950s he sought primarily to orient himself towards Soviet historiography, by the 1960s and 1970s he would do much to promote the integration of Hungarian scholarship into the international academic community. Owing to his efforts, Fernand Braudel, Jacques Le Goff, Eric Hobsbawm, Franco Venturi, and others visited Budapest.<sup>63</sup> For both Pach and Perényi, their encounter with Grekov remained more a matter of personal recollection than a source of creative inspiration.

Although Hungary formed part of the socialist bloc, Hungarian scholars in the 1960s–1980s experienced a fundamentally different mode of engagement with world historiography than did their Soviet counterparts. It is therefore unsurprising that, against the backdrop of the rapid development of historical scholarship in the second half of the twentieth century, Grekov's concept of feudalism and his studies of the peasantry could no longer satisfy Hungarian specialists.<sup>64</sup> At best, they acquired the status of historiographical facts, to which occasional and cursory reference was made in individual works. The image of Grekov as a "world-famous historian," artificially constructed at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s and essentially imposed from above, did not withstand the test of time in Hungarian historiography. Similar processes, however, unfolded in the historiographies of other European socialist countries as well – though that is already the subject of a separate, specialised study.

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62 See, for example: BARTA J., "A XVIII. századi európai gabonaforgalomhoz", *Acta Universitatis Debreceniensis de Ludovico Kossuth nominatae. Series Historica*, no. 1 (1966): 3; PACH Zs. P., "Az 1514. évi parasztfelkelés és a "második jobbgység"", *A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Filozófiai és Történettudományi Osztályának Közleményei* 21, no. 3 (1972): 254; GEBEI S., "Az ukrán kozákság a XVI. Században", *Agrártörténeti Szemle* 21, no. 3–4 (1979): 320; KISS L., "Földrajzinév-magyarázatok", *Magyar Nyelv* 84, no. 4 (1988): 456.

63 CZOCH G., "Az Annales történetírásának magyarországi recepciója az 1960-as években", *Atelier*, no. 25 (2015): 112–144; FRANK T., "A magyar történettudomány és nyugati kapcsolatai az 1970-es években", *Múltunk: politikatörténeti folyóirat* 61, no. 4 (2016): 72–84; KÁLI R., "Kvantifikáció és történetírás Magyarországon az 1960-as, 1970-es években", *Valóság* 60, no. 5 (2017): 62–85

64 It should be noted here that a revision of Grekov's conceptual framework was also under way within Soviet historiography itself, associated with the work of Igor Froianov, Vera Goremykina, Lev Cherepnin, and Valentin Yanin (Свак Д., «Дурно» ли говорить о «русском феодализме»? (К историографии вопроса), *Труды Института российской истории РАН*, no. 2 (2000): 24).

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