

**Ph.D. Dissertation Theses**

**“We Are Clearly Deceived at Home:”**

**Inter-American Images and the Depiction of Mexico in Hungarian  
Travel Writing During the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century**

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Debrecen, 2014.

## **The Subject and Objectives of the Dissertation**

The dissertation set out to investigate Hungarian travel accounts on Mexico during the second half of the nineteenth century. It aimed at collecting and introducing the most influential and representative travelogues of the time (books, published letters, newspaper articles) and documenting the most important images of Mexico available in Hungary from such texts. The dissertation provides a discussion of the evolution of the depiction of Mexico and the characteristics of Hungarian travel writing of the period while it also offers insights into nineteenth-century society, culture, and politics on both sides of the Atlantic.

My goal was not only to find the most compelling texts and provide a descriptive introduction, but also to position these Hungarian accounts on Mexico within a wider perspective and discuss them in the framework of major questions in travel writing studies and in comparison with foreign travel accounts. I set out to investigate what Hungarian travel accounts can tell us both about Mexico and Hungary (and by extension the United States). The time frame “second half of the nineteenth century” in this dissertation refers to a period lasting from revolution to revolution (from 1849 to 1910); my period of investigation starts with the end of the Hungarian War of Independence in 1849 (as the first, detailed Hungarian travelogues were published by former revolutionaries leaving the country at this time and publishing from the end of the 1850s) and ends with the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution as it concludes the third phase of Hungarian travel writing on Mexico (the events, together with World War I, disrupting travel to Mexico).

In this period an increasing number of travelogues were published as travelling became more accessible and widespread due to technological development, commercialization of travel, and a changing view of nature and its beauties. Various political and historical events in the era under scrutiny, including the Hungarian Revolution and War

of Independence, Maximilian von Habsburg's involvement in Mexico's Second Empire, and New Immigration at the turn of the century also resulted in an increased number of travel accounts about the country. Such changes and events also resulted in the fact that Mexico was visited by Hungarians coming from diverse backgrounds, traveling with various purposes and assumed identities: the study includes travelogues from emigrants, a naturalist, a photographer, soldiers, and a (female) tourist as well. In the case studies of the seven chapters the following authors are introduced and their texts are analyzed: Károly László, János Xántus, Pál Rosti, Ede Szenger, Ede Pawlowszki, Jenő Bánó, and Mrs. Béla Mocsáry, while numerous other people and texts are mentioned briefly.

The major objectives of the dissertation can be formulated as follows:

- (1) To study how Hungarian travel writers presented Mexico to Hungarian readers during the second half of the nineteenth century, focusing on representative authors from various social and cultural backgrounds, with different reasons for travel and publication.
- (2) To examine how images of Mexico changed in this period, concentrating on the wider social, political, and historical context of the countries involved in the study, as well as possible personal reasons for certain types of depiction.
- (3) To specify and examine overarching themes preoccupying Hungarian travel writers of the time and to identify tropes of travel writing recurring in the different texts.
- (4) To establish how Hungarian travel accounts both built on and differed from Western-European (imperial) depictions of the Americas by providing an international comparative context.
- (5) To identify unique achievements of Hungarian travelers.
- (6) To see how the attitude of Hungarian travel writers changed towards the "home" (the Self) and Mexico (the Other) during their travels and in their publications, and how the "other Other" (the United States) refined such an attitude.

(7) To identify the tools and methods used by Hungarians to establish the reliability and “objectivity” of their texts (e.g. excerpts from diaries, statistics, photographs, etc.).

(8) And in this process to reveal those influences (cultural, social, and personal) that shaped the view and writings of these travelers.

In line with the historical events and changes in the image of Mexico, the dissertation is divided into three parts. After an introductory chapter on history and travel writing before the 1850s, the first wave of travelers, former Hungarian revolutionaries (Károly László, János Xántus, and Pál Rosti) and their major texts are introduced. This is followed by the writers who participated in Maximilian’s Mexican venture (Ede Szenger and Ede Pawlowszki) and the discussion of the changes this event brought in Hungarian travel writing in Part II. Part III includes the analysis of texts by travel writers at the turn of the century (Jenő Bánó and Mrs. Mocsáry). The general structure of the chapters is similar throughout the dissertation: after a few introductory remarks, the life and publications of the travel writers are presented briefly; this is followed by an analysis of their most important texts, focusing on the image of Mexico and Mexicans. In most cases, the analysis includes a discussion of the inter-American aspect of the writings (triangulation, if applicable) and the themes usually mentioned by Hungarians: the image of the Mexican population (with special regard to Natives, women, etc.), history, and politics. There are also introductory chapters at the beginning of each part, providing the historical and cultural background necessary for understanding the chapters included in that subsection.

### **Research Methods Applied in the Dissertation**

Travel writing is quite heterogeneous, encompassing texts from numerous other genres (it is usually seen as a genre of genres) and including topics studied by different disciplines. This complexity and heterogeneity makes it necessary to conduct an interdisciplinary research at

the borderline of the fields of history, literature, and cultural studies. My major goal has been to provide not only a descriptive but also an analytical study and, therefore, use a wide range of methodological approaches. I visited special collections and archival sources both in Hungary and abroad, making use of the traditional research methods of history. I included books, newspaper articles, published letters in my analysis, while also using unpublished diaries and autobiographies to reveal motivating forces of travelers both for leaving the home and for writing in a particular manner. As the social and cultural context influenced the preconceptions and perceptions of travelers, I had to investigate the historical background in detail in all cases; this involved various approaches and methods borrowed from immigration, social, and cultural history.

Postcolonial studies have also influenced the development of travel writing studies and key texts in this disciplinary field proved to be useful to me as well. The works of Edward Said and Mary Louise Pratt were especially helpful although certain modifications had to be made as Hungarians were not representatives of imperial powers and wrote in a different manner. At the same time, specific methodological approaches had to be adopted in the various chapters, as required by the primary source and the writer. Thus, for example, visual studies and research in photography was important in the case of Chapter 4, while I had to venture into the realm of medical geography in Chapter 5 and gender studies in the last chapter.

## **Research Results**

The dissertation documented and revealed the changes that took place in the image of Mexico in Hungary during the period discussed. The authors and their texts can be divided into three groups, each group representing a special attitude towards the country as discussed in the

three parts of the dissertation (see above). The main findings of my research could be summarized as follows:

(1) Hungarian travel writing on Mexico went through fundamental changes in the second half of the nineteenth century: from the first, sporadic travel accounts of the 1850s to the turn of the century, the image of Mexico shifted from one extreme to another. While the first travel writers often introduced a backward country with an inferior population, many travel accounts by the turn of the century, following an increased interest in the country and in line with Mexican political goals during the Porfiriato, reported only on progress and presented a “new Mexico” for Hungarian readers. Travel accounts from the second half of the nineteenth century stand as witness to a growing interest in Mexico on the part of Hungarian travel writers. Yet, they could not provide unbiased accounts and descriptions and perceptions of Mexico were shaped just as much by the preconceptions of Hungarians as by the actual journeys in Mexico. Accounts of Mexico often served as a medium for commentary on the home country: feelings related to a failed Revolution, the attitude towards Hungary’s position caught between East and West, changing political systems, power struggles, emigration, etc.

(2) The first wave of travel writers depicted Mexicans as inferior, calling for foreign (especially US) intervention to develop the country (see especially László and Xántus). They reported mostly what was appalling to them in terms of social and political issues and the status of the country in general. They projected their negative preconceptions and the stereotypes promoted by former (foreign) travel accounts onto the population and wrote accordingly. These travelers established the basic and later recurring elements of the image of the country: an inferior, lazy, and unreliable (male) population, the land of bandits and exotic señoritas, and abundant nature. Mexico was presented as the periphery, a country that could and should learn from Western nations, especially the United States, which was often perceived as a possible model to be followed by Mexicans (some even calling for US

intervention in Mexican affairs). Hungarians, not willing to identify with a country they deemed to be backward and un- or semi-civilized, reiterated Western images.

(3) Events of the 1860s, Maximilian von Habsburg and the Second Mexican Empire (with more than a thousand Hungarians involved), brought changes in Hungarian travel writing about the country to a certain extent. Mexico became more attractive and interesting than ever before and more accounts were published than previously. A more independent image of the country emerged but travel accounts did not bring positive changes with regard to the country's representation. The travelogues discussed as case studies (by Szenger and Pawlowszki) were used primarily to justify a European intervention, the presence of foreign soldiers in Mexico, including that of Hungarian participants. Vague attempts were made to alter the attitude towards Mexico (especially by Szenger) but in general, many of the former stereotypes and building blocks of the nation's image were reiterated by Hungarians.

(4) By the turn of the century, we can witness a change in the tone of Hungarian travel writing. In many of the accounts only positive developments were reported, completely disregarding (or not reporting) problems of society (that soon resulted in a revolution). The third period brought real changes in Mexico's Hungarian image and clearly reflected the influence of the Porfiriato (and its campaign aimed at altering the foreign perceptions of Mexico) on Hungarian travel writing. Jenő Bánó consciously set out to revise the former negative depiction of the country in Hungary, while Mrs. Mocsáry also promoted an image of a new Mexico that was characterized by modernization, safety, and a welcoming population. This was in sharp contrast with the portrayal of the country by travel writers publishing before them. Bánó also offered strong criticism of the imperial voice and called attention to the mistreatment and misrepresentation of Mexico by Westerners. As the dissertation has shown, such criticism was mostly influenced by Bánó's view of the position of his home country within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and his career plans in his adopted homeland.

(5) Bánó claimed at the turn of the century that Hungarians had been deceived at home about Mexico. This is valid criticism regarding the travelogues published before; however, it applies to his travel accounts as well as he was just as selective in terms of what he described as his predecessors. Thus, one might claim that despite Bánó's attempts, Hungarians learning about Mexico from Hungarian travel accounts "were misled" throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. While the first travelers were eager to share with armchair travelers only the problems of the country and stressed issues of inferiority, backwardness, those at the turn of the century reached the other extreme and reported only on what shed a new, positive light on Mexico and Mexicans.

(6) One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that Hungarian travel writing on Mexico often involved a process of triangulation. Many Hungarians when writing about Mexico used a third reference point besides the binary oppositions of home and abroad, familiar and unfamiliar. In most cases, this reference point was the United States. Mexico was rarely presented independently in any of these periods; it was mostly depicted in an inter-American context, using triangulation involving the Self (Hungary), the Other (Mexico), and the *other* Other (the United States), thus creating a special contact zone of three cultures. The use of the US as a reference point was partly due to its geographical proximity but also to the fact that many Hungarians visited Mexico's northern neighbor as well and the US was often seen as a possible model for the Latin American country. In certain cases (for example Rosti's), a Western European reference point was stronger and Mexico was measured against that part of the world and not the United States; but even when references to the US were less central, the authors had to explain why the United States was missing from the accounts. In all cases, such triangulation reflected Hungarian's identification with the West and the fact that they tried to pose as Western travelers. They could not use their home country as a direct point of comparison with Mexico when talking about the latter's

backwardness and its lack of progress, and this required the assumption of a new identity that enabled them to write similarly to Western travelers; without expressing any sympathy with Mexicans or admitting any similarities between the status of Mexico and their home country.

(7) Triangulation was used less extensively, however, when there was no need for such identification or when Mexico proved to be interesting enough in its own right. This was the case for example in connection with Maximilian's Mexican venture as we have seen, when Hungarians could assume their "own imperial voice" as members of an invading army. The United States did not serve as a main reference point in these texts as the identification with the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy provided them with a vantage point for criticism. Triangulation was also left behind by Mrs. Mocsáry as a result of textual and generic considerations related to a Baedeker-like publication. In Bánó's case, when he set out to alter Mexico's image the process involved the revision of triangulation as well: not only Mexico's position had to be revised but its depiction in relation to the Northern neighbor also had to be adjusted and Bánó did exactly this.

(8) The East Central European background of Hungarian travelers clearly influenced the attitudes towards Mexico and its representation. Travel to Western Europe and the United States (the West), especially during the Reform Era in Hungary (from 1825 to 1848), was seen as a form of education and the countries in these regions were often perceived as possible models for Hungary in terms of politics, technological development, and economic modernization. When visiting Mexico (part of the West only in terms of geography but not in a cultural/historical sense), the first wave of Hungarians acted as representatives of the West, assumed an imperial voice, and wrote about Mexico similarly to Western travelers while (either directly or indirectly) refusing an "Eastern" heritage identified with lack of progress and backwardness.

(9) Mexico (as seen in the points above) was often presented as backward, inferior, and having a lazy population not capable of properly making use of its resources. This happened despite the fact that Hungarians were often depicted the same way by Western European travelers who introduced Hungary as a country “overflowing with riches,” but which Hungarians are not capable of properly exploiting. They considered the West to be a model and judged Mexico (and their own country as well) according to the standards of the West, this way complicating the self and other dichotomy and adopting alien models willingly and recognizing and accepting the superiority of these foreign cultures (see Alexander Kiossev’s term of “self-colonizing cultures”). Hungarians considered the civilizational model of the United States and Western Europe in their travel accounts to be the standard and looked at these countries as examples that should be followed both by their mother country and Mexico. Jenő Bánó was the first one to call attention to this “confused identity,” raised his voice against the imperial view which both Mexico and Hungary was subjected to, and called for a readjustment of the lens through which Mexico had been viewed.

(10) The number and composition of these Hungarians in Mexico also reveal the country’s position in the history of Hungarian travel writing: Mexico was not an important destination either for travelers or for emigrants. Still, a discourse was started on the country in the period under scrutiny and people interested in this far-away land could turn to diverse publications for information. Compared to the United States, Mexico was marginal but in contrast to other countries in the Latin American region, it received considerable attention. However, there are certain types of travel accounts missing from the spectrum of travelogues on Mexico (that were more popular in the case of other regions of the world): hunting accounts seem to be missing (only short stories are included in the publications discussed in the dissertation), detailed political studies are also lacking, and publications resulting from study trips in the country are not available either or at least we are not aware of them yet.

(11) One of the central objectives of the dissertation was to discuss Hungarian travel writing in comparison with Western travel accounts. Hungarian writers heavily relied on the terminology and attitudes of Western travel writers and depicted Mexico and Mexicans similarly to them. This was due to several factors: on the one hand, it reflected Hungarians' perceived identification with the West ("the more civilized, modern, developed part of the world") as a result of which they wrote similarly to them, emphasizing the superiority of their own culture and background. On the other hand, most of them were familiar with such travel accounts even before visiting Mexico and thus Western travelogues clearly influenced their preconceptions and determined the way they saw Mexico even before their arrival to the country; they willingly used the tools and images offered by these publications.

## Candidate's Publications Related to the Dissertation

### Articles, Book Chapters:

“Strange New Wor(l)ds: English Language Books for Hungarian New Immigrants – With two Case Studies.” (with István Kornél Vida) In *Hungarian-American Ties: Essays and Studies in Intercultural Links and Contacts*, ed. Virágos K. Zsolt. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, 2013: 200-213.

“Poor Mexico, So Far from God, So Close to Hollywood: Recurring Nineteenth-century Stereotypes in US Movies about Mexico.” In *A szavak szépsége, avagy a bibliográfus igazsága. Tisztelgés Vadon Lehel 70. születésnapján*, eds. Abádi-Nagy Zoltán, Kádár Judit Ágnes és Tarnóc András. Eger: Eszterházy Károly Főiskola, 2012: 741-753.

“‘A Land Full of Gold and Happiness:’ Changing Interpretations of the Legend of El Dorado in Hungary.” In *Mítoszok bővületében. Ünnepi kötet Virágos Zsolt Kálmán 70. születésnapjára*, ed. Lenke Németh et al. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, 2012: 168-175.

“The Study of Hungarian Travel Writing: Challenges, Opportunities, and Findings.” In *My Fulbright Experience*. Budapest: Fulbright Bizottság, 2012. (electronic document)

“Describing the Other, Struggling with the Self: Hungarian Travel Writers in Mexico and the Revision of Western Images.” *Journeys: The International Journal of Travel and Travel Writing* 12.2 (2011): 28-47.

“Writing with Devotion, Drawing with Light: Images of the Americas in Nineteenth Century Hungarian Travelogues.” In *Metamorphoses of Travel Writing: Across Theories, Genres, Centuries and Literary Traditions*, szerk. Grzegorz Moroz and Jolenta Sztachelska. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010:104-112.

“Letters from a Revolutionary: Károly László in Mexico and the USA.” *The Round Table* 2.1 (2009) (electronic document)

### Accepted for Publication:

"A császárságnak buknia kellett: Habsburg Miksa és a magyarországi Mexikó-kép alakulása." *AETAS Történettudományi folyóirat*. Expected publication date: summer 2014

"Revisiting the Legacy of János Xántus: An Inter-American Approach." In *HUSSE 2013 Proceedings*. Expected publication date: summer 2014

"Habsburg császár Mexikó trónján" *Múlt- kor*. Expected publication date: fall 2014.

"Mapping the Land of Headhunters: János Xántus in Borneo." *Acta Neerlandica*. Expected publication date: fall 2014

### Book Reviews

“Két Amerika: Érvek és magyarázatok az Egyesült Államok és Latin-Amerika közötti fejlettségi különbségekre.” Francis Fukuyama, szerk., *Falling Behind: Explaining the*

*Development Gap Between Latin America and the United States*. Oxford: OUP, 2008. *Klió* 4 (2011): 5-8.

“Mexikó függetlenségi harcai: előzmények, fordulópontok és megoldatlan problémák.” Timothy J. Henderson, *The Mexican Wars for Independence*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2009. *Klió* 3 (2011): 104-108.

“A New Perspective on Warring Latin America.” John Charles Chasteen, *Americanos: Latin America’s Struggle for Independence*. New York: Oxford UP, 2008. *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 1 (2009): 216-19.

#### **Other, minor publications:**

“Latin America and the United States in Nineteenth-century Hungarian Travel Literature.” *Vasváry Collection Newsletter* 2 (2008). (electronic dicument)

“Following in the Footsteps of Nineteenth-century Hungarian Travelers.” *Fulbright Foreign Student Newsletter*, Issue 26, 2011. (electronic dicument)

#### **Further Publications**

##### **Articles:**

“Új Európa, új szövetségek: az amerikai-magyar kapcsolatok 1989 utáni változásairól.” *Debreceni Szemle* 4 (2008): 455-67.

“Variációk Fidel Castro likvidálására: Kuba az USA latin-amerikai politikájában.” *Múlt-kor*, 2012 summer: 45-51.

##### **Book Reviews:**

“A New Approach to the Study of Minstrelsy.” Gabriella Varró, *Signifying in Blackface: The Pursuit of Minstrel Signs in American Literature*. Debrecen: Kossuth, 2008. *Eger Journal of American Studies* 12.1.2. (2010): 683-687.