

Nóvé, Béla. 2022. *Magyar emigrációtörténeti kézikönyv* (Handbook of Hungarian Emigration History). Budapest: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár. 376 pp.

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The author of this work is a historian and filmmaker who lives and teaches in Budapest. He earned his PhD at Károly Eszterházy University, in Eger, with a remarkable history of 56er refugees in the French Foreign Legion that was published by Balassi Kiadó in 2016. He notes in the book under review that the use of oral history for the investigation of the Hungarian emigration helped inspire the methodology he employed in his work on the Legion. That work and his filmmaking are reflected in Nóvé’s special appreciation and skill in describing the variety of media that can be useful for this field.

The first and longest part of the book is a “survey of Hungarian publications on the history of the emigration, 1893–2020” (my translation). This is an extended historiographic essay with greatest focus on the period after 1945, organized into ten thematic sections: periodization, the literature of self-description, typologies of space and subject, definitions of key concepts, emigrants and political émigrés, the separate development of domestic and Western emigration literature, late-century syntheses, case studies, church history, and the lessons of postemigration research. The enumeration of these titles cannot do justice to the sophistication of their contents, but it reflects thoughtful conceptualization. The works are carefully cited and summarized, but also placed in relation to each other, and Nóvé returns repeatedly to the most important ones.

The leading historians of the Hungarian emigration make their appearance in multiple sections: Stephen Béla Várdy, Gyula Borbándi, and Julianna Puskás. There are critical remarks about the oeuvre of Várdy, the Duquesne University professor and nestor of American Hungarian “self-history,” a term Nóvé uses for writers chronicling the community of which they are a part. Várdy, he writes, was a historian of daring generalization who did little archival or field research (p. 32). Nóvé is less critical of Gyula Borbándi, the longtime editor of the Munich journal *Új Látóhatár* and author of *A magyar emigráció életrajza 1945–1985*. He notes approvingly Borbándi’s modest characterization of his synthesis as a “biography” rather than a history, though Nóvé says the author’s work to preserve emigration history and network with the diaspora throughout his long life (he died in Hungary at ninety-five) showed “the diligence of an ant” (*hangyaszorgalom*) (p. 37). Julianna Puskás receives Nóvé’s highest grade as a scholarly historian, one who, he observes, continuously renewed her historical vision with new explorations of primary and secondary sources and overcame the limitations of work life in

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communist Hungary, in part through her family ties to the émigré community in America. Both the early and later historical monographs of Puskás receive careful attention.

A fourth writer to whom Nóvé gives repeated attention is Kázmér Nagy, the author of a pessimistic and hotly debated portrait of émigré life entitled *Elveszett alkotmány* (Lost Constitution). What is the shelf life of the diaspora? What are its future prospects? Can it be vibrant and meaningful in isolation from the homeland? The most positive judgment one can make of this work is that it was a successful provocation and created ample material for diaspora periodicals over the course of decades. Nóvé notes that some of the pessimism of Kázmér Nagy grew out of his troubled personal life. Of course, Nagy was not alone in his pessimism. Z. Attila Papp's sociological study of Hungarian life in the US, *Beszédből világ* (From Speech to World), documented the extraordinary commitment in time and psyche required of "weekend Hungarians." A more optimistic answer to these questions was that free Hungarian life could take what was best in host societies to create a positive alternative to the Hungarian homeland. For instance, historians of the diaspora church showed that it was often the core institution of ethnic life, and in the case of Catholicism the portion of the Hungarian faith that was more serious about putting the documents of Vatican II into effect. The writings and speaker series of New Jersey émigré Károly Nagy during the last decades of communist rule in Hungary delivered the persistent argument that American democracy and pluralism was a positive alternative to the home country. Nóvé introduces the reader to two scholarly journals of the diaspora, *Hungarian Cultural Studies* and *Hungarian Historical Review*, summarizing a few selected articles.

The effort to preserve the record of diaspora life is a recurrent theme. For many of the émigré works, Nóvé cites the preservation (*mentés*) of values and memory as their chief motivation and merit rather than any originality of research or interpretation. Preservation of the record has been a goal of the Hungarian state's diaspora policy since 2010. The author applauds the efforts to rescue archives and papers of the diaspora that might otherwise be lost, though he regrets the fact that they reside in many different repositories in the homeland. I personally doubt whether it is realistic or desirable to remedy this dispersion by moving materials from one institution to another within Hungary. Among the recent dissertations about emigration that the author reviews, the one by Eszter Kovács (2018) concerning Hungarian diaspora policy stands out. In two concluding chapters of her work, Kovács examines the diaspora policy of the Orbán government since 2010, stating that "in the eyes of those affected, these programs were at times improvised, not well thought out, and strike one as propagandistic" (p. 137). I had a similar impression when I attended the Diaspora Council during my time as AHEA president.

Discussion of the Kovács dissertation provides an appropriate transition to a presentation of diaspora collections of personal papers and organizational records in the major repositories in Hungary: the Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum (Petőfi Literary Museum), Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (OSzK; National Széchényi Library), and Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár (Hungarian National Archives) are among more than twenty whose holdings are detailed. Many of them have benefited in recent years from the repatriation efforts of the Orbán government's Mikes Kelemen Program.

Nóvé's book then turns to a similarly detailed survey of diaspora collections of the Western diaspora. Nóvé correctly notes—I find that some researchers who arrive in New Brunswick are confused about this!—that Rutgers University and the American Hungarian Foundation (AHF) are separate, independent institutions. The section on New Brunswick correctly notes that the university has digitized a valuable portion of the records about 56ers from the papers of the President's Committee for Hungarian Refugee Relief—founded by President Eisenhower, though Nóvé attributes it to Hoover, who was no longer in office—and that most archival records about Camp Kilmer are not in New Brunswick, but in the National Archives in College Park. The bulk of the President's Committee records are off the beaten track at the Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas. The description of diaspora collections includes many whose online information is very limited. Cleveland, Buenos Aires, Munich, and little known collections in Israel and Sweden are presented, as well as non-Hungarian institutions like the Library of Congress and Hoover Institution. The diaspora section concludes with a number of Hungarian museums.

The book details many oral history collections in Hungary and abroad. Two major projects within Hungary get special attention, those of the OSzK and the Oral History Archive (OHA) that originated with the 1956 Institute. Regrettably, access to the OHA is now restricted. In striking contrast are the testimonies of the Columbia 56er project (CURPH), now digitized and freely available thanks to a grant from the Blinken family. The 150 audio interviews conducted by Béla Máday in 1979–84 (held by the AHF) were digitized and are also available in the OSzK. The *Memory Project* is mentioned, but not the Shoah Foundation's *Visual History Archive* (VHA) that helped inspire it. 11,528 of the 53,000 testimonies in the VHA are of persons born in Hungary or Austria-Hungary, and of these only 879 were recorded in Hungary, the same number in Canada, 4,378 in the US, and 1,469 in Israel. Like the OHA and CURPH, the VHA documents chiefly the subjects' lives in Hungary, but the testimonies of emigrants generally also include a shorter segment on their lives after emigration.

The book has more than a hundred documentary black-and-white illustrations, mostly photographs of persons and places associated with the text. Separate sections identify the sources of these illustrations and provide a very extensive bibliography of the publications mentioned in the narrative. A helpful addition to the bibliography would have been a listing of diaspora newspapers, even if it would be difficult to approach completeness, given the fragility of newsprint and the ephemeral nature of many diaspora serial publications. Perhaps completed since this book went to press is the free availability on the Arcanum platform (which we hope remains free!) of the 103 diaspora periodicals held by the AHF. The author notes correctly that much of the published output of the emigration is already lost. In view of the tremendous amount of precise detail in the book, the number of editorial errors is impressively small: several illustrations are missing from the places marked for them, and the concluding narrative ends abruptly in mid-paragraph. All in all, this is a unique and valuable compilation for which the author must be congratulated.