

**Baráth, Magdolna and Nóra Szekér, eds. *Ügynökhistóriák a Lajtán innen és túl: Hírszerzéstörténeti tanulmányok*. Kronosz. 2020;
Palasik, Mária and Nándor Pócs, eds. *Titkos hidak: Az állambiztonság és az emigráció kapcsolatai 1945-1989*. Kronosz. 2021.**

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Since the fall of Communism various countries of East Central Europe have opened special research institutions where their citizens may view surveillance files about themselves. The files can make interesting reading for their subjects, and have provided the basis for a new genre of scholarship. Timothy Garton Ash interpreted for his readers the contents of his file in the East German Stasi archives (*The File: A Personal History*, 1997), while Katherine Verdery conducted an anthropological analysis of her Securitate file and the agent subculture (*Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania's Secret Police*, 2014).

The Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára (ÁBTL, Historical Archives of the State Security Services) is a repository in Budapest of Hungarian domestic and external intelligence agency records for the period 1944-1990. A law passed in 2003 stipulates that the ÁBTL provides access for Hungarians to intelligence files about themselves as well as research access to the material for accredited scholars. The first of these roles is a legal responsibility to citizens; the second role is similar to that of other public archives, but made more difficult by the internal secretiveness of the intelligence organs that caused them to lack much of the indexing and functional organization that facilitate the work of archivists and researchers in most public archives.

To help address the lack of finding aids, the ÁBTL provides a wealth of information about its services and ongoing research in text, video, virtual and on-site exhibits, conferences, publications, and its own well-indexed, open access journal *Betekintő* (Investigator [my translation--JPN]) on the website, <https://abtl.hu/>. The intellectual mastery of the records is a work in progress for historian-archivists as well as for historians from outside the ÁBTL.

¹ This and subsequent quotes from the book have been translated by the reviewer. Niessen@rutgers.edu



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This journal is published by the University Library System of the University of Pittsburgh as part of its D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program and is cosponsored by the University of Pittsburgh Press

Readers may find the research output of the archivists helpful for their own investigations as they provide insight into the record groups in the ÁBTL and the work methods of the intelligence agencies.

Scholarly research in police archives is subject to the privacy rights of the citizen. An additional complication arose in the European Union with its General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which was enacted in 2016, came into effect two years later, and is popularly known as "the right to be forgotten." The best-known application of this regulation is to the internet, but how does it apply to information about private citizens in archives? The interpretation of the regulation in Hungarian archives has at times slowed access by researchers to complete files of documents, especially for foreign researchers with limited time in Budapest if, in the judgment of the archivist, the pages of records must be examined individually and withheld if mention is made of a non-public figure. In 2018 the ÁBTL hosted an international workshop on how the GDPR should be applied in Communist era archives. The proceedings of this workshop have been published in Hungarian and English (*The Application of the GDPR in Archives: With Special Attention on the Documents of Totalitarian Political Systems*, 2021). The way the GDPR is applied as well as the inadequacy of the finding aids enhances the value of research findings published by ÁBTL archivists.

The two books under review are from the series *Közelmúltunk Hagyatéka* (The Legacy of Our Recent Past). The first of the two, *Ügynökhistoriák* (Agent Histories), arose from a project initiated in 2017 by the ÁBTL and the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on the Consequences of War at the University of Graz. The project led a year later to a joint conference at the ÁBTL. The presentations there provided the basis for this book and for its English version, which appeared with the same publishers in 2021 with this title: *A Frontline of Espionage: Studies in Hungarian Cold War Intelligence in Austria*, edited by Magdolna Baráth and Dieter Bacher. Nine of the contributions are by Hungarians, two by Austrians, and one by two Danes; all provide original research. Among the Hungarian studies, the one by veteran archivists Magdolna Baráth and Lajos Gecsényi stands out for its description of how Hungarian intelligence operations in Austria were organized. Other contributions from the ABTL address more specialized topics: what Hungarian intelligence knew about Hungarian instructors at the NATO base in Oberammergau, intelligence operations of the IBUSZ office in Vienna, and the treatment of espionage in late Communist era criminal law. The studies are bookended with two chapters by Hungarian non-archivists, Andrea Pető, on gender issues in the careers of female agents, and Imre Tóth, on the history of the "technical border" between Austria and Hungary during the Communist era.

Two Danish historians provide surprising insights on the significance of Hungarian intelligence on NATO capacities in Denmark, while the two Austrian contributors present findings from non-Hungarian archives. Barbara Stelzl-Marx details what she learned in the archives of Soviet military tribunals about their death verdicts against Hungarian civilians in

Austria between 1950 and 1953, while Dieter Bacher traces evidence in the US national archives about the “WRINGER” program to interrogate Hungarian refugees in Austria up to 1955.

The second book, *Titkos hidak* (Secret Bridges), compiles papers that arose from a conference held at the ÁBTL in November 2019. Six of the eleven contributors in this book were also authors in the first, all archivists in this institution. The solid first chapter by Magdolna Baráth provides an appropriate introduction with her investigation of central government efforts to infiltrate and undermine the influence of the Hungarian emigration during the years 1950-1963, ending with the granting of a partial amnesty that was effectively a prerequisite for the removal of Hungary from the agenda of the UN General Assembly.

The “bridge” in the title of this book proved more or less stable and effective for communication between the Communist state and “the emigration”: the relationship between handlers and informants varied immensely. Personal files are the most common organizing principle for the records. This principle inspires many of the authors to reflect upon their subjects’ life choices. The geographic reach of the Hungarian organs and these studies is broad, ranging in turn from Germany (Zsuzsanna Borvendég and Ágnes Jobst) to Australia (Éva Argejó), Canada (Mária Palasik), South America (Éva Petrás), the U.S. (Nóra Szekér), and the Netherlands (Szilvia Köbel). The studies by Éva Sz. Kovács and István Bándi have a thematic rather than geographic focus. Sz. Kovács examines the value of intelligence archives for the position of women in the emigration, while the concluding study by Bándi is the only one to draw upon a security archive outside Hungary, namely the CSNAS (Consiliu Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității, in English: National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives) in Bucharest. He studies the recruitment by the Social Republic of Romania of Romanian emigres in France and Italy, Gustav Pordea and Ion Constantin Drăgan, for historical polemics that often targeted the Hungarians.

The experience of Hungarian handlers with their informants varied greatly. The organs failed outright in their efforts to recruit socialist politician Anna Kéthly and Nobel prize winning physicist Leo Szilárd, and also achieved unsatisfactory results in its efforts to recruit émigré pastors in the Dutch Reformed Church. But the operations in Germany provided useful intelligence, and the recruitment of former Jesuit priest Töhötöm Nagy in South America eventually led to his repatriation.

Both of these volumes feature an excellent scholarly apparatus, with an extensive list of abbreviations, an index of names, and English language summaries. They provide valuable insights into the surveillance and manipulation of private citizens by the Communist authorities: a phenomenon of not only scholarly interest but a source of personal trauma in the lives of many older readers of this journal.