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Kölcsey Ferenc and the Finno-Ugric people

Briefly about fictitious historical-etymological linguistics¹

Abstract

„Rudbeckianism” was the emblem of fictitious historical-etymological linguistics. How is it possible that even scientists considered serious enough, were fond of Rudbeckian principles? Below – as part of a larger research – we try to find the answers to the fact why politically exposed Ferenc Kölcsey (leading Hungarian writer and poet, a decisive scholar of the first third of the 19th century) in studying the Hungarian language, negates the theory of its Northern linguistic origin, how it’s linked to the critique of the language comparison method and the rudbeckian fictional historical-etymology and the criteria of science. We also explore, how big of an impact can a confusion have on history, if two scientists on the same name (father and son) are mixed up.

Keywords: historical-etymological linguistics, linguistic origin, Ferenc Kölcsey, Olof Rudbeck

It would not be entirely groundless to presume, that Kölcsey’s notes about the Lapps in the early 1810 came from interest towards the assumptions, which necessitated to prove the northern (Lapp, Finnish) origin and kinship of the Hungarian language (Kölcsey 1968: 205–208). Why would a Hungarian speaking student from Debrecen read a French travelogue about Lapland, if not in context with that? The paradigm of the northern linguistic affinity was a proverbial academic topic for discussion since the *Demonstratio* of János Sajnovics in 1770 (Sajnovics 1994), and the Lapps got outstanding interest from the Hungarian readers mostly on account of the posed common linguistic affinity. The point of interest of the lapon travelogue was that the notes were *not* made about the linguistic affinity. Moreover, his later scripts also did not deal with the topic. Kölcsey, *superficially* takes completely languid interest in the discussions about the northern (Finno-Ugric) connections of the Hungarian language.

The young Kölcsey was only interested in the travelogue of J. F. Regnard (*Voyage de Lapponie*) because of it’s contents about the Lapp religion, superstition and magic. In one of his letters he compared the sterility of his poetic inspiration, with self-ironic humor, to the drear living conditions of Lappland (Kölcsey 2005: 72).² By the way Regnard, who died in 1709, went to Lappland at the request of the Swedish king Charles IX, and his travelogue was published afterwards in 1681. The book does not make any conclusion regarding the kinship

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² Ferenc Kölcsey to Ferenc Kazinczy: Debrecen, 08. 12. 1809. The notes about the religious superstitions and magic of the folk „under the Cold Sky” (Kölcsey: „The Poetry”, 1808) appear in the example of the „Fragments on Religion” (1815–16, 1827) in connection with idolatry.

between the Lapp and Hungarian language, and does not even bring up the Lapp language. Which means Kölcsey would not have been able to know anything, even if he studied the writings of Regnard with this specific idea in mind. Unlike the Swedish scholar, Olof Rudbeck jr., who travelled through Lappland some decades later, with the intent to publish his book in 1717, what made him the first to make scientific observations on the similarities of Hungarian and Lapp languages, which caused significant academic echo (Rudbecki fil. 1717). Afterwards, the realizations of Rudbeck became an often referred source of the northern linguistic affinity paradigm, a theory which Kölcsey could have been familiar with as a student in Debrecen.

Kölcsey had only one relevant statement that is known, regarding the origin and kinship of the Hungarian language: „The Hungarian language is *pleno optimo Jure, occidentalis* language.” (Kölcsey 2005: 395).³ In this definite statement (with complete entitlement – *pleno optimo Jure*) he names the Hungarian language such a western („*occidentalis*”) language, which does not show resemblance to any eastern or western language, however it shows a close kinship in its evolution with the German language. Knowing, the contemporary discussions necessitated to prove the northern and/or eastern linguistic affinity, this statement may seem daring and surprising. Kölcsey, as far as we know did not perform regular linguistic comparative etymological studies. His statement that the Hungarian language with full eligibility is a Western language was rather based on insights and syntactic studies of organic language philosophy. (We will talk about this elsewhere.)

Regarding the *northern* linguistic affinity, as we noted before, Kölcsey did not exert a detailed viewpoint, he does not formulate his counter-argument, except some far from flattering slips. The situation is nearly the same, with the discussions about the *eastern* (namely Arab, Persian, Turkish and Hebrew) linguistic affinity of Hungarian language, with the difference, that the eastern language affinity paradigm – unlike the northern, which in his case is completely disregarded – is not excluded from the possible kins of the Hungarian language. In the following we attempt, according to the given sparse reflexions, to reveal the conceptual causes of Kölcsey’s clearly exerted (supposedly emotionally driven) deprecating attitude, regarding the northern linguistic affinity discourse.

From the most active period of Kölcsey’s linguistic (philologic) activity, in the mid 1810s altogether we can only inspect two reflexions. He notes in his – yet unpublished – critical-evaluative *review* from the *Grammatika* of Miklós Révai, that „[Révai] does not only not fear the name Rudbeckianus, moreover he considers it glorious” (Kölcsey 1815).⁴ In a *personal letter* to Pál Szemere about an etymological problem he gives the following advice: „if I would not abhor Rudbeckianism, as much as Révai likes it, I would tell you, to seek the meaning of *Cseke* in Fenni (Finnish) words in Gyarmati [...]” (Kölcsey 2005: 441).⁵

The phrase „Rudbeckianus” and the „Rudbeckianism”, which is clearly pernicious in the sentences, and understanding to what and to whom this term refers to, is seemingly complicated at first sight, by the names of two Swedish scholars, father and son, namely the *older* and *younger* Olof Rudbeck. *Olof Rudbeck Senior* (1630–1702) was the professor of medical sciences at the University of Uppsala. He achieved his international reputation with his monumental work, *Atland eller Menheim* [Atlantis, or Home Sweden, in latin *Atlantica*]. The national gothic fantasy, that was predicated on the historical-linguistic-etymologic inspections, sought to prove, that Atlantis, as described by Plathon, is identical to his *home*

³ Ferenc Kölcsey to Ferenc Kazinczy: *Cseke*, 05. 07. 1815.

⁴ Own Translation. The criticized work: Révai 1806.

⁵ Ferenc Kölcsey to Pál Szemere: *Cseke*, 24. 10. 1815. Own Translation.

Sweden, Scandinavia was once the Garden of the Hesperides, the Elysian Fields can also be found there, and Adam's original language was Swedish, what was formed with the mixture of latin and hebrew.⁶ Diderot mentions *Atlantica* in the *Enciclopedia* under the article „ethimology”, as a cautious example of imaginary historical, etymological linguistics (Diderot–d'Alembert 1656: 110),⁷ while Bayle's historical-critical dictionary – which was used as a manual by Kölcsey from the get go – talks about Rudbeck, who made Sweden the homeworld of all nations, with sarcastic scepticism (Bayle 1737: 140).⁸

Olof Rudbeck Junior (1660–1740), who walks in his father's footsteps at the University of Uppsala, studied – besides medical sciences – zoology, botany, and last but not least linguistics, discovered parallels between the Hebrew, Finnish, Lapp and Hungarian languages, during his already mentioned journey to Lappland in 1695. Olof Rudbeck Jr., contrary to his father; who presumed relation between the Slavic and Hungarian language (*Atlantica*, I. volume 3. chapter 18. §); and of those, who claimed, that the Hungarian language is different from all European languages; he was the first who announced, that based on empirical experience and comparative examinations, that „I've found such tight correspondence between the Hungarian and Finn language, that I could call them, within reason, relatives” (Sajnovics 1994: 104).⁹

The source of Kölcsey's first commentary is easily identifiable as Miklós Révai who discussing the Hungarian language affinity, refers to the work of Olof Rudbeck Jr.¹⁰ Regarding the essence of the language affinity paradigm of Révai, the Hungarian language shows similarities, *at the same time*, with the *northern* (Finnish, Lapp), and the *eastern* (arabic, persian, turkish, hebrew) languages, because primarily those had the *same origin*. (That is how the Chinese come into play in the end). To prove his theory, Révai refers to Olof Rudbeck Jr. as a determining (great and kind) phylologic authority. At the same time according to Kölcsey, the *name* of Rudbeck should have to *raise fear* in a real scholar:

⁶ The „national Gothic fantasy”(Warne 1996: 92) synonym will be followed by „rudbeckianism” (Porter–Teich 1992: 243. See also Rabasa 2012: 462. King 2005).

⁷ See: „Je n'ai point encore parlé de l'usage le plus ordinaire que les savans ayent fait jusqu'ici de l'art étymologique, & des grandes lumières qu'ils ont crû en tirer, pour l'éclaircissement de l'Histoire ancienne. Je ne me laisserai point emporter à leur enthousiasme: j'inviterai même ceux qui pourroient y être plus portés que moi, à lire la *Démonstration évangélique*, de M. Huet; l'*Explication de la Mythologie*, par Lavour; les longs *Commentaires* que l'évêque Cumberland & le célèbre Fourmont ont donnés sur le fragment de Sanchoniathon; l'*Histoire du Ciel*, de M. Pluche, les ouvrages du P. Pezron sur les Celtes, l'*Atlantique* de Rudbeck, &c.”

⁸ See: „Du livre intitulé *Atlantica*. Il y a sans doute du profit à faire dans la lecture decette Dissertation, pour ceux qui aiment à entendre les Anciens. On cite de temps en temps un Ouvrage composé en Suede depuis peu par *Olaus Rudbeckius*. C'est un Livre *in folio*, intitulé *Atlantica*, que nous n'avons pas encore vû. On nous le fait espérer au premier jour [...]. On dit qu'il est plein de belles choses; & ceux qui savent que M. Rudbeckius s'est engagé de montrer, que presque tous les Peuples dont les Histoires nous parlent, sont originaires de Suede, ont beaucoup d'impatience de voir comment il prouve ce paradoxe.” We cannot identify the source of Kölcsey's opinion exactly. We must assume that the judgment of older Rudbeck based on his *Atlantica* was commonplace. The proof of Sajnovics also reflects on this problem. Regarding the protection of the The Finnish-Hungarian common origin idea of Miklós Hell he writes this, “Don't let the hungarian reader dismiss these never before heard ideas as RUDBECKIAN nonsense [...] HELL does not describe stories, rudbeckian dreams, but pure truth [...]” (Sajnovics 1994: 112).

⁹ Citation *Demonstratio*, 1994: 104. See: „[...] cum equidem Hungaricam et Finnicam linguas tam, propinqua fibi cognatione junctas deprehenderim ut consanguineae veluit dici merito queant”. (Rudbecki fil. 1717: 77).

¹⁰ Comp. Révai 1806: 52.: „*Specimen Vsus Linguae Gothicae, in eruendis S. Scripturae Locis obscurissimis, addita Analogia Linguae Gothicae com Sinica, nec non Finnonicae cum Vngarica, Vpsalis, 1717. in. 4.*”

Révai began his great work with the examination of old times, using the eastern and Finnish languages [...] He does not follow the principle of language but the etymological tradition based on principles in his *Grammatika*. His etymology, in addition to the Hungarian language, also comes from Eastern and Northern languages. He thinks that the Hungarian and the mentioned languages are relatives of one another (a branch of a now non-existent common tribe). While rehearsing this assumption, he is not afraid of mentioning the name *Rudbeckianus*, and more, he regards it as glorious. *Tam magnum tam charum mihi est hoc nomen*. [Such a name is so nice to me.] These are Révai's own words on page 52 of *Grammatika*. We do not intend to evaluate this hypothesis of Révai, but we will examine his statements in his *Grammatika* (Kölcsey 1815).¹¹

Kölcsey (similarly to Révai) thought the proper method, the scientific examination of the history of a language, is based on determined principles (*principium*), which inspected the language in its own historical (diachronic) tradition order, the so-called root-word theory; opposed to the synchronicity approach, which concentrated on the speechway (*usus*) aspect. However, Kölcsey did not find the inclusion of the linguistic synthesis method into the examination of the historical etymology of a specific language justified. *Why*, that we do not get to know from this short passage only that, the northern language affinity theory (mixed with the eastern one) represented by the name of Rudbeck, *such as*, gives a reason for mistrust, therefore it's use in Révai's dual linguistic hypothesis makes the theory *irrelevant as a whole*. All of this is made obvious by the fact, that Kölcsey would not necessitate to *officially judge* it, refute and evaluate this hypothesis as part of his critical review. His declared absence from the discussion is partly the answer for the question: the Rudbeck Theory (and as a consequence Révai's) is not simply unacceptable, but also not appropriate for scientific discussion. Since it is not (philological) science, it can not be scientifically debated. The personal attitude realized in clear *aversion* marks more accurately his position of refusal, which actually covers – in addition to the author's concept – the name Rudbeck and what it meant with the whole northern language affinity paradigm, the discussion of kinship marked by this term (rudbeckianism), and all its representatives (the also namely mentioned Sámuel Gyarmathi). There was certainly another reason why he removed himself from the debate: Kölcsey would like to see Miklós Révai, as such a paradigmatic scholar of the Hungarian grammar, whose approach can be the base for the constitution of the modern Hungarian linguistics. At the same time, this notion is completely incompatible, with the fact that Révai is an advocate of such an unscientific theory.

Even with all this taken into consideration, it still can not be stated certainly, that the phrase „rudbeckianism” in Kölcsey's dictionary, marks only and exclusively the northern linguistic paradigm. The uncertainty stems from the suspicion that Kölcsey does not distinguish the two Rudbecks by name, therefore also does not separate them. The omission of „junior”, or „senior” distinctive notations do not necessarily mean, that Kölcsey was not aware, that there were two separate persons (authors), who show similarities and are (literaly) related, and he would *mix them up* without reflecting. Based on Kölcsey's two writings from the mid 1830s we might perceive more clearly, that the *merging* of the figure and the work of the father and son under a single name, and the apparent failure to resolve the name identity question, is far from accidental. Both Olof Rudbeck Sr.'s ideas in *Atlantis*, and Olof Rudbeck Jr.'s theory of the Ural region-Hebrew-Hungarian(-Chinese) language affinity lie below Kölcsey's expectations, regarding science. The two Rudbeck and their enthusiastic followers can only be interpreted in a fictitious historical-linguistic etymology setting.

The following part below, from the study titled *History Investigation [Történetnyomozás]* (1833) gives an accurate description of the aforementioned pseudo-scientific fiction:

¹¹ Own Translation.

Some have based their hypotheses on fragmented words and their descriptions, hoping to dispel the obscure details of history. You can see they're widely read, and their iron will is reflected in the thousands of data collected within their writings. However, without memories and real data, the moral world is just as inaccessible as the objects of metaphysics. Induction and analogy may be helpful, but they do not provide certainty. And, in the case of multiple options, what makes the infallible choice? The more he clings to his hypothesis, the farther his goal, and does not realize he is lost: he looks at a star leading to a swamp, confusing his own thoughts with reality; misled by broadness he thinks, that is exactly what gives importance. Since he finds order and correlation in his conclusions, he does not even suspect that the reason for this is what I call *petitio principii* a fallacy in which a conclusion is taken for granted in the premises.

The willingness to etymologize and the wide readability can lead to bold deviations. Bochart is an eternal example of this. Many attacked this great scientist fairly, but hard. But should we not be more tolerant of those who have mistakenly married these deviations with patriotism? I am thinking of Rudbeck and those who worked in a similar spirit (Kölcsey 1960: 1266).¹²

The fictitious historical-etymology (from serious scientific point of view) is objectionable, its view and methodological characteristics are the following: hollow (shimmery), not concentrated to the bigger picture (fragmentary) experimental method, imaginary (made up) etymology, inventive and extensive, but essentially pointless philological awareness (literacy), in the absence of facts (without memories) typically metaphysical; inductive; analog; biased with himself; without self-reflection (lack of reality perception, adherence to hypotheses); volume vs. uniqueness; fabricated system creation. Kölcsey concludes with a typical reasoning error by mentioning the circular reasoning / begging the question (*petitio principii*), as a lack of logical self-reflection. Only good intentions can save an activity that is considered dilettantism from a scientific point of view. The intentions of „softening” the critical rigor are nothing more than a community interest in the sense of self-contradiction, which Kölcsey calls the „patriotism” formula. Although he does not indicate which Rudbeck is an example of this, he clearly speaks with lenient understanding in retrospect, about that Olof Rudbeck and his ilk, who identifies Sweden as the center of the world.

That this patience has its own limits, as it is shown in a script from four years later (1837). Kölcsey's academic review written about the book, *About the original language of the World [A Világ eredeti nyelvéről]* (1836) from János Váradi, (after the natural history identified in the *History-investigation*) gives detailed criticism of Rudbeckianism (Kölcsey 1960: 751–753). According to Kölcsey, the first statement (ie. „The Hungarian language is the first and original language of the world”) of the more likely historical, instead of (linguistic) philological work is typical for the whole opus. „What is the whole dissertation worth? It is already suspected by the claim you want to prove. Thick rudbeckianism, not anything else.” The insignia and simultaneously the basic feature of the thick (meaning: primitive) rudbeckianism is the *petitio principii*, reasoning which assumes the very thing which requires proof. Moreover, in the case of Váradi, the logical error is coupled with a low level of literacy and fictional etymology, wishing to prove that „The names appearing in the Old Testament can only be understood in Hungarian e.g. *Paradicsom* (*Paradise*), in hebrew: *Pardes*, namely the Hungarian *pár-disz*. *Kain*, in Hungarian *Kaján* (*Sardonic*). *Ismael* in Hungarian: *Isten ma él* (*God lives today*). *Eliazer* in Hungarian: *Elő az erő* (*Power forward*), etc. etc.” The bold historiographic conclusions of the creative etymological glossary in Kölcsey's summary are as follows:

¹² Own Translation.

The texts of the Old Testament were made after the Babylonian captivity, on one hand, by Esdrás, on the other, from original Káldi (ie. Hungarian) documents, which were kept in the archives of the Persian Empire. The latter original documents were copied by Attila (King of the Huns), who was also the prince of Media. His copies were used (with delusions and omissions) in the chronicle of János Thuróczy. This chronicle (ie Chronica Hungarorum, Brno, Augsburg: 1488) is the result of the authentic records of the Old Testament, which must be believed. And since this chronicle teaches that the Hungarians come from a certain Nemrot, and that he was in possession of the ancient, original language, so... etc.¹³

With regard to the two writings from the 1830s, it can be clearly stated that Kölcsey also understood the term „imaginary historical, etymological linguistics” (certainly in the 1830s) as „rudbeckianism”. Knowing Kölcsey’s philologist’s proficiency and prudent bibliographic awareness, it is unlikely that he would have confused the two authors. He knew they’re not the same person and was well aware of the philological difference between the activities of the younger and the older Olof Rudbeck. However, by not distinguishing them from each other, he ultimately considered the theory of the Lapp-Hungarian-Hebrew linguistic affinity and the patriotic fantasy of Sweden being the linguistic and historical origins of the western world, unbelievable. Rudbeckianism is the name of the dilated historical-linguistic pseudoscience in the Kölcsey dictionary; something whose theoretical assumptions and methods of analysis do not allow for a relevant, controversial scientific discourse that produces serious results.¹⁴ The Northern (Finno-Ugric) linguistic paradigm by this standard, is also outside the scope of scientific philology. So it’s not just a misguided idea, it’s annoying fiction, not even worth mentioning.

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¹³ Own Translation.

¹⁴ Of course, the Swedes think differently about this. The Uppsala University still counts Olof Rudbeck as one of the greatest scholars of all time while his son is respected as the first scientist and explorer in Sweden. And even though Atlantica proved to be a fantasy magic, the smirking rudbeckianism, with the creation of the patriotic illusion of the former greatness, served a good purpose for the 18th-century Imperial aspirations of national consciousness, serving as an important ideological background for the organization of modern Swedish science.

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