

THE MAGYAR MOUSTACHE EXPERIMENT

Research about historic hairs

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Of all the European experiments that center on mustaches, the Magyar Mustache Experiment is perhaps the one most tightly tied to the interpretation of Hungarian history.

The Magyar Moustache Experiment and Controversy

“The Magyar Moustache: The Faces of Hungarian State Formation, 1867–1918,” Emese Lafferton, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, Part C, vol. 38, no. 4, December 2007, pp. 706–732. The author, at the University of Edinburgh, UK, explains:

[I]n defining the Magyar face, ‘we are often compelled to dispense with a significant basic element, the ... shape of the mouth, because the Magyars are not only a moustached people, but also one that is proud of the moustache, that recognises in it a basic element of its honour and respectability’. Thus, if not the mouth, than the hair that covers it gains significance....

No-one has ventured to make sense of [Ottó] Herman’s dubious undertaking with moustache and whiskers, mouth and eye, the typical and the beautiful. (By the end of this paper, the significance and meaning of the moustache will be clear for the reader.)

Lafferton summarizes Ottó Herman’s moustache experiment:

In order to prove the ‘enormous transforming power hidden in the Magyar moustache and eye-brow’, Herman made the following ‘experiment’ in his book. He took the photos of two distinguished statesmen, the Hungarian Ferencz Deák (1803–1876) and the English Lord Derby (1799–1869), copied out their facial lines on transparent paper, and drew Deák’s hair over Derby’s face and the other way around (Figs. 1 & 2). He found the



Detail from the study: Photographs, collected by Ottó Herman, of “Magyar faces”.

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THE MAGYAR MOUSTACHE EXPERIMENT [CONTINUED]

result absolutely persuasive and forceful: with Deák's thick white hair, moustache and eyebrow, Lord Derby came to look very close to Deák, while Deák did not grow to resemble Derby the least, whose playfully curly hair and whiskers simply 'lack the shaping power that is inherent in the [Magyar] moustache which covers the mouth'.

Lafferton then tells how he, Lafferton, confronted Ottó Herman's moustache experiment:

I place Herman's moustache experiment into a double context. The first is what may be called the 'Magyar face debate' raging among anthropologists, ethnographers, doctors and public figures in the long decade between 1890 and 1903.... In a second context, I discuss how the 'Magyar face debate' also constituted an important episode in a long series of cross-disciplinary attempts to define race and the essence of Hungarian nationhood.



Emese Lafferton, author of the study.



Ottó Herman, who conducted the moustache experiment.

The Magyar moustache: the faces of Hungarian state formation, 1867–1918

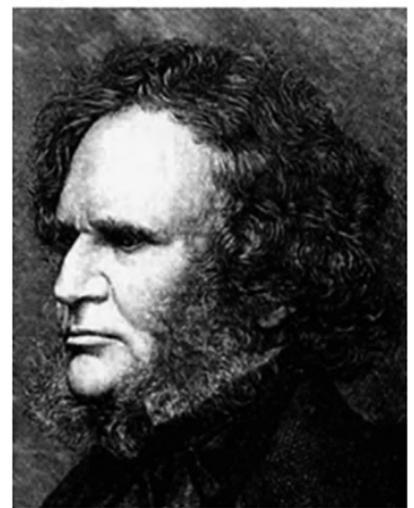
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lines the history of Hungarian ethnography and anthropology and their role in the construction of the nation in the Dualist period (1867–1918). Affected by the specific socio-political conditions of this ethnically diverse Central Europe, the disciplinary trajectories of Hungarian ethnography and anthropology diverge from the historiography in the British, French and German contexts. The paper argues that the pluralistic ethnographic tradition that prevailed in Hungary in the last decades of the nineteenth century did



29. Deák Ferencz 1803 - 1876.



30. Lord Derby. 1799 - 1869.

Detail from the study: photographs of the Hungarian Ferencz Deák and the English Lord Derby.

E. Lafferton / Stud. Hist. Phil. Biol. & Biomed. Sci. 38 (2007) 706–732



Detail from the study: Ottó Herman's manipulative drawings of Ferencz Deák and Lord Derby.