

Traveling and Studying Abroad

Performing Identity in the Case of the “Last Transylvanian Polymath”: Sámuel Brassai

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Through the reconstruction of biographical data, this study has tackled aspects of Sámuel Brassai's personal, confessional and scientific identity.

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I^N THE educational context of the 19th century, the lack of studies abroad raised certain difficulties for the career advancement of Sámuel Brassai, a very important academic personality from Cluj. In this study, I analyze the phenomenon of studying abroad not from a broader perspective, but as regards a single personality.

During the 19th century, the structure of the Hungarian educational system did not accommodate the possibility of studying abroad, the measures taken to stave off this phenomenon including the implementation of many educational reforms, the broadening of the offer of local higher education institutions, the restructuring of the universities, and the training of university professors, all of these representing non-existent aspects prior to 1860.¹

The research dealing with the issue of the studies abroad undertaken by the youth from Hungary and Transylvania in the past is based on the student records collected from the regis-

ters of the host universities.² This prosopographic investigation presents personal information about the students, but also other information that makes it possible to analyze the socio-cultural context of their studies and to interpret this phenomenon. The meaning of the phrase “studies abroad” is not restrictive, as it encompasses both semester-long studies and studies started at one university, or at several faculties of the same higher education institution, and continued in other European countries.

Academic mobility and the flexibility it imprinted upon the travelling scholars’ minds represented positive aspects, as they could reveal the students’ personal/specialized preferences and provide them with a certain degree of liberty, possibly conditioned, of course, by their mentors, by their sponsors back home or by the private/foundational/confessional stipends they received in the country or abroad. In time, this traditional form of peregrination practiced by the students from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy disappeared, short sojourns or occasional visits to the universities of Western Europe being preferred in its stead.

The scholar Sámuel Brassai (1800?–1897), also known as a Nestor among scholars (since he approached several domains of science, without specializing in any particular one, and carried out scientific work that cannot be circumscribed to one area alone), is a marginalized personality in the history of Hungarian literature; only linguistic research conducted over the past few decades has rehabilitated him on the grounds of his theoretical works on sentence syntax and structure. The importance of Brassai’s life, work, and scientific career is difficult to ascertain by a single researcher, who represents just one field of knowledge; hence, it is necessary to adapt the methodology used to approach his figure.

The starting point of this study is the absence of Sámuel Brassai’s name from the prosopographic investigations of the 19th century. Therefore, based on these types of documents, one cannot analyze the phenomenon of *peregrinatio academica* in his case. However, the scholar’s career and scientific concerns offer substantial details about his academic training.

This study examines attitudes surrounding the concept of “polymath,” emphasizing notions of self-construction and self-performance as regards Brassai’s role as a scholar, and it makes reference to archival documents, to manuscripts that have not yet been studied, and to journals of the 19th century, which, in their time, had a wide circulation, influencing the specialized branch of literary sciences.

Márton Szilágyi, who has studied the connection between the history of literature and the socio-historical study of a particular culture, draws attention to the relationship between literary history and biography. Like other complementary sources, biographies are useful for documenting not only facts of life, but also those writerly ambitions (or, in our case, those scientific ambitions) that reflect

interdependent models of life.³ For instance, the family milieu can reveal certain mobility strategies or social and career models. That is why this study also focuses on the micro-society in which Brassai began his life, on his school experience, followed by his outlook on science and scientific concerns after 1840, and by the issue of his inclusion among the members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the professorial community of the new Francis Joseph University of Cluj, during the years 1870–1880.

Genealogy and Micro-Society

BRASSAI'S SURNAME refers to the origin of the family: the city of Braşov. The first generations of the family, starting from the 18th century, opted for the “strategies” of settling in Rimetea, Colleşti, of occupational continuity (carpenters), and of integration by marriage.⁴

Sámuel Brassai Sr., the scholar's father, was educated by his mother after his own father's death and was trained according to the local traditions of those times (the *particula*, the Unitarian College in Cluj, the philosophy class, as a “togatus” student) and later became rector of the *particula* in Rimetea.⁵ He therefore chose a different career from that of his ancestors or the priestly one: being devoted to educating the youth, he initially steered away from priesthood, although he had specialized studies in this respect. However, having married Krisztina Koncz, the daughter of the archpriest of that village, he accepted the pulpit of the local church, replacing his father-in-law in that capacity after the latter's demise. He died as a priest in April 1837, struck by lightning. For Brassai's father, the educational offer of the region had led to his changing professions, as confessional institutions allowed for social mobility (vertical, too), while his marriage to the daughter of the local Unitarian archpriest represented yet another way of integrating into the Unitarian society of Rimetea and Colleşti in the 18th–19th centuries.

The scholar's mother, Krisztina Koncz, an educated person, who taught at the local school together with her husband, knew Latin and German, and was devoted to the Unitarian confession upheld by her family. Little Brassai was educated at home by his parents, without being influenced by a college community or the school system. This educational approach resembled the private educational strategy of the noble families. The child-centered education, the parents' philanthropy and confessional liberalism left their mark, from a very early age, on the training of the future university don. On 13 September 1813 he was admitted to the Unitarian College in Cluj, as attested by the *Testimonium Scholasticum* document, written in Latin, in 1822, authenticated by the profes-

sors' signatures and the stamp of the institution.⁶ His institutional education, interrupted several times, was marked by aptitudes and intellectual skills that were different from those of his peers, which explains the professors' liberalism towards Brassai the student.

Professional Strategies—Models, Changes

BRASSAI'S EDUCATION followed the schooling model set by his father and the young Unitarians (the confessional *particula*, the Unitarian College in Cluj), but it also diverged from that model, as he did not choose a priestly career or peregrination abroad,⁷ which would have meant one step up the social ladder, as well as a step forward in relation to his father's achievements. He worked as a private tutor, teaching foreign languages and piano lessons to the Transylvanian noble families of Bethlen, Kendeffy, etc. He followed another model with important traditions: having completed their institutional studies, the youth worked as tutors to ensure a level of independent living. For instance, in 1851, editing the youth magazine *Fiatalok barátja* (The friend of the youth), Brassai mentioned the contributors' names,⁸ by way of advertisement, on the one hand, as among them were some of the most important Hungarian writers of the time, and, on the other hand, because many of them had educational experience, since they ensured the training of the aristocratic families' children. They chose the same professional strategy as Brassai and because of this strategy, working as private instructors or tutors, they could later deal with the literature for children and the youth, which, at that time, acquired a distinct status among other fields in the system of Hungarian literature. This professional model—which was practiced in the 1830s—shows that besides specialized forms of institutionalized education, there were also forms of private education that were preferred by certain layers of the Transylvanian population.

In the 1830s, Brassai (who had reached professional maturity) began his career as a writer and critic, always adopting combative positions. His publications dealt with current issues: he defended the work of the reformer István Széchenyi in 1832, and wrote about *Klio*, authored by the historian Ferenc Szilágyi from Cluj. The latter polemicized, taking the stand of a scientist and looking down upon Brassai, whom he considered an amateur that had started his career by writing reviews, not original works, which did not entitle him to speak as a specialist.⁹ Szilágyi signed his texts as a professor of history and as a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, positioning himself above Brassai on a professional level. Their polemic reveals the characteristics of the professional hierarchy at the middle of the 19th century: the lengthy duration

of studies, and the fact that original works were regarded as a prerequisite for engaging in a professional scientific discourse.

In 1855, in Pest, Brassai edited the review *Critikai Lapok* (Critical papers), which presented itself as a specialist publication, and participated thus in the polemical debates about modern professional criticism as a special discourse about literature and the other arts, identified as a specialized field of literature, along with literary history (founded by Ferenc Toldy with his histories of literature from the 1850s).¹⁰ Brassai went against the famous Pál Gyulai in several debates on the women writers' practice of writing, of literature, on female authorship in general, evincing a very liberal opinion, close to that of Mór Jókai or János Vajda. Brassai also intervened on the issue of the education of young women, advocating the girls' access to higher education. In 1860, he criticized Ferenc Liszt's study on Gypsy music.¹¹

His contemporaries referred to him as an old man who was infatuated with controversy. They also marginalized him, commenting on the legitimacy of his discourses because after the sciences became differentiated into various fields of specialization in the second half of the 19th century, Brassai was somehow left out of the picture. He would not let himself be guided by the strategies of his generation, whose members remained in Pest, the future capital, and pursued professional careers, but returned to Cluj after the events of 1848–1849 and was reintegrated in the local elite.

If we examine his work chronologically, we may notice that he stayed in touch with the current cultural manifestations at national and international level: he drew up a series of school textbooks entitled *Kék Könyvtár* (The blue library), after the French model. His first important study on aesthetics appeared in 1832 (*A gyönyörűségéről*/On delightfulness), a second edition was published in 1859, and was then translated into German in 1878. His concerns included the economy—*Bankismeret* (Basics of banking, 1842), logic—*Logika* (Logic, 1858), Hungarian grammar (studies on the structure of the Hungarian sentence, syntax theory and method), foreign languages, geography, botany, mathematics, literary translations from Russian (Sologub), French and English (Poe), music, astronomy, and journalism.

Sámuel Brassai's professional career spanned—chronologically—various scientific and artistic domains, and was characterized by his orientation towards scientific areas and cultures that were little known at that time by the Hungarian professionals, displaying a strong liberal propensity and being impelled by the idea of keeping up with the advancement of contemporary science. Even though he was sensitive to novelty, Brassai failed to notice that within the changed paradigm of the sciences his writings and concerns appeared to have different validities from a professional point of view. That is why his contemporaries con-

sidered him an extravagant dilettante. He was a man of science who was, at the same time, a professor (a private tutor initially, then a secondary teacher and, later on, a university professor).¹²

The Savant Professor—No Peregrination?

THE ATTITUDE of Brassai the scholar seems to have several explanations: in her study on the University of Göttingen during the late 18th and the early 19th centuries, Vera Békés states that “the university professors taught, but they also continued their researches so that neither they, nor their students would specialize, because specialization allegedly imperiled the accomplishment of the desideratum of all-encompassing knowledge.”¹³ The curriculum of this university conceived of the limits of science as limitations in dialogue, and relied on the existence of a number of similarities between the different scientific areas, which explains why the contextual aspect was deemed to be important. In the 1830s, the scientific paradigm of the university changed, as the modern, specialized scholars worked in hierarchical teams, dividing their work; this gradually entailed the disappearance of the polymath genius as a type of academic, once collective cooperation was introduced.¹⁴

Brassai did not study abroad; at first sight, he cannot, therefore, be associated with this model of scientific thinking. However, I have come across documents attesting his (not solely indirect) orientation towards the European university centers.

In 1844, Brassai sent a letter to the Reformed Minister Peter Nagy from Cluj,¹⁵ who had studied natural sciences at the University of Göttingen.¹⁶ This letter reveals the fact that Brassai had undertaken a voyage along the route Berlin–Halle–Leipzig–Braunschweig–Göttingen–Frankfurt–Paris. The letter dated 4 July 1844, Frankfurt, gives a detailed account of Brassai’s itinerary. I consider these notes to be essential because in them we may find the names of professors and institutions, and we may realize, from the perspective of the traveler, how important it was to recount these journeys to those back home.

At Halle, Brassai visited the Pedagogical Institute, founded by August Hermann Francke in the late 17th century, and Sprengel’s Herbarium, which he thought to be more valuable than that of Baumgarten. He also learned something which he was to discuss on his arrival home. He met the botanist Schlechtendal. The next stop: Leipzig, visiting Kunke, whom he considered more competent in training the youth than the entire University of Berlin. At Berlin he spent the longest time, but was disappointed with the city’s rigidity, and only Mademoiselle Melanie from the French vaudeville (ill-appreciated in Berlin, but, if it comes to that, enthusiastically received in Vienna) cheering him up. From

Leipzig he went on foot to Braunschweig, as he was “botanizing,” and then he arrived at Göttingen. He reported to Nagy that he had also written to his mother from there—a letter that has not been found to this day. The atmosphere in the university center of Göttingen was welcoming, as was that of Dresden. He was received by Apel and Bartling.¹⁷ The Bartling family sent their regards to Peter Nagy, considering him a friend. Brassai was excited by Wöhler’s chemistry laboratory.¹⁸ He recommended the University of Göttingen to his young compatriots since, despite the thousands of professors in Berlin, here the conditions and the institutions were conducive to valuable studies. He met Gauss¹⁹ and Listing.²⁰ He did not have time to see Wilhelmsöhe²¹ because he was in a hurry to reach Paris, having got so far as Frankfurt by the time of writing this letter. Here he admired Städel’s “Institute,”²² Senkenbergisches Museum,²³ and Bethmann’s museum. Everything seemed beautiful to him: the Dome, Römer—“cela est va sans dire,”²⁴ even the cemetery (Thorwaldsen’s bas-relief).²⁵ He also noted down impressions of a less scientific nature: for instance, his encounter with a baker who painted with his finger pastels on cakes that were more admirable than those achieved by the Hungarian painter Miklós Barabás, “with his ten fingers and thirty brushes.”²⁶ In the evening he went to the theater, listing the names of the Hungarian artists who were in Frankfurt: the baritone Gundy and the tenor Gyöngyöldi/Perlgrund.

Concluding on Brassai’s travel account, we may detect a friendship between the two scholars from Cluj, based mostly on their botanical interests. Being more experienced, Nagy helped him by suggesting landmarks to be visited on his journey. Brassai did more than merely recount his travel experience: he observed the differences between the university centers, made comparisons, and established friendships with various scientists—through Nagy’s connections. His reflections also presented his aspirations, his scientific interests (as a botanist), and his concerns as an art lover in general, who did not forget to visit museums, go to the theater, and watch vaudeville performances. This attitude of the traveler, who had clear goals and interests, is yet another argument supporting the notion of Brassai’s holistic vision, as for him not only scientific, but also cultural and artistic institutions were important places worth visiting. In his case, traveling, which included visiting foreign universities, represented an informal, liberal form of education, an exchange of experience influenced by the trajectories and social relationships of his friend from Cluj.

Although it cannot be categorized as a *peregrinatio academica*, this short voyage, as well as his other journeys (especially for musical, cultural purposes, to Vienna, Paris, etc.), were nonetheless important for the scholar’s orientation, represented by the thousands of volumes in his library or by his writings; his scientific outlook (for instance, his research on colloquial language and his mother

tongue)²⁷ confirmed his integration in that German paradigm that was about to vanish at the onset of his career. Brassai remained the representative of this vanishing paradigm, even after its disappearance.

Vera Békés states that these paradigms should not be viewed chronologically, teleologically, from the vantage point of the history of sciences, because the “new paradigms are born not only from the old ones, but rather from those forgotten by the old ones, from the latent ones.”²⁸ For example, Brassai’s approach to sentence/phrase theory acquires importance not in terms of its success in the 19th century, but from the standpoint of its present-day valorization, as it has become the starting point for contemporary (generative) grammar.²⁹

Brassai As a University Professor

RETURNING TO a scholar’s life in Cluj, Brassai was elected vice-rector of the Royal University, which opened in 1872, the rector being Mózes Berde, also a Unitarian. He became a professor of mathematics. If we examine the premises of his election, we may say that he became a professor on the basis of his socio-cultural positions within the church, the Unitarian College, and the Transylvanian Museum Society. His age (75 years old?) and the document that certified his studies appear to have been less important in this respect. In the Register of the counselors and doctors of the University from Cluj, next to the name of Sámuel Brassai, we may read the following: “matheseos elementaris Professore publico ordinario, Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae Socio ordinario, Viro ad tentandos numeris docendi in gymnasiis candidato publice misso.”³⁰ From the point of view of the meritocratic system, already at work in the educational structure of the monarchy, he remained behind the other professors of the university, Grigorie Silași and Hugo Meltzl, who had studied abroad and had received their doctoral degree before becoming university professors.³¹ The lack of a documented peregrination was thus a hindrance in the way of Brassai’s professional advancement.

What counted towards his recruitment as a professor³² and vice-rector was the fact that he was a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and that he had experience in the educational system. For Brassai, from the perspective of family strategies, career mobility occurred late in life due to the prestige of the socio-cultural background he came from. During the following year, both he and Berde obtained their Ph.D.’s: Berde received his doctorate in law from the Faculty of Law, and Brassai—in philosophy, from the Faculty of Letters, Mathematics and Natural Sciences. It should be noted that Brassai did not become a doctor of mathematics, that is, in the subject he taught, but in the discipline he

was interested in at that time: philosophy. This suggests his nuanced approach to scientific inquiry, shedding light on his conception about the limits between disciplines, and even faculties. These data also reveal the scholar's self-perception, highlighting his process of self-construction.

Brassai's Personality: Performing the Self

BRASSAI'S ATTITUDE and his scholarly career represented the conscientious construction of a striking personality. We have access to biographical data that helped build this type of personality: as an independent, single man, living with his mother until he reached the age of 62/65 years, Brassai perforce adapted to the traditional type of a scholar who, as a mentor, assisted (even financially) the youth who aspired to learn. From the perspective of generative psychology, Dr. William S. Pollack states that men who do not have the opportunity to become fathers may still have this parenting skill, manifesting it towards the youth through care and attention.³³ The account of a visit undertaken in 1887 may be found in the magazine *Magyar Szalon*. Several Hungarian young men had come to Cluj from Budapest and claimed that their joy, as traveling artists and writers, would not have been complete during their visit to Cluj had the image of the historical town not been rounded off by Brassai's patriarchal figure.³⁴ In time, he became the emblem of Cluj for the youth: the epitome of the patriarchal scholar, hardly an effigy of the present, who appeared as a relic, even though he was still alive. As we have seen, as he was aging, he began to be called "Brassai bácsi," being very popular among the younger generation, among students and acquaintances.

The construction of identity emerges, as a theme, also from his correspondence, which is in manuscript form. When his works were published, he wrote to important personalities in the field: in 1842, he contacted—through János Bethlen, that is, through his social relations with the noble families—István Széchenyi, asking for the latter's permission to dedicate his work about banks (*Bankismeret*) to him.

On 24 January 1884, he wrote a birthday card to Pál Gyulai, mentioning his election as an honorary member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences on the anniversary of 50 years since his election as a full member thereof. He said that if he was not elected, he would resign his position as a full member.³⁵ Although the jubilee year should have been 1887, as he had been elected in 1837,³⁶ Brassai mentioned his option much earlier, using his amicable relations for professional successes or for consolidating his professional position: he became an honorary member on 13 May 1887.³⁷

Due to the Anglo-American relations of the Unitarian Church, Brassai's work also crossed the ocean.³⁸ We have no data on Brassai's American reception; perhaps this was just a symbolical gesture, but it does highlight the scholar's importance from a confessional point of view, as the result of his socio-cultural relations.

Brassai's scientific aspirations stood apart in the context of the turn of the century. Before his university career came to an end, he founded the journal *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (together with Hugo Meltzl, in 1877)—the first journal of comparative literature in the world, and taught Sanskrit, in the 1880s, changing once again his domain and discipline.

Finally, as regards the concept of “polymath,” which is also placed between quotation marks in the title of this study, it is consistently used in the specialist literature about Brassai (initially written by his disciples, who were all Unitarians);³⁹ however, I consider it to be an a-historical concept, which started losing its referent in the latter half of the 19th century. Mention should be made that not only Brassai, but also his younger colleague at the Transylvanian Museum, Otto Herman, received this sobriquet of “the last polymath.” In my research on this problematic phrase, I have come across the series of monographs published by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, *A múlt magyar tudósai* (Hungarian scholars of the past). These monographs have also been published in CD-ROM format.⁴⁰ If we use the search function of this CD-ROM, we find this phrase occurring 21 times.⁴¹ The polymaths' dates of birth show that there existed a continuity of this type of scholars (Brassai was not the only one in the 19th century, and there were also polymaths who were younger than him), and these scholars' places of death coincide in most cases—the capital, Buda, and, as of 1873, Budapest. This emphasizes Budapest's quality as a scientific, professional center and as a city of opportunities.

As we saw above, Brassai's career came to fruition in another important city of the monarchy, Cluj (Koložsvár), which aspired to be its second capital, the center of the region of Transylvania, constantly competing against Budapest.⁴² Another feature polymaths held in common with Brassai was their election as academic members. Summing up, the tendency evinced by these scholars' career was their presence at the center, not in peripheral regions, and their election as academic members. These statistical data highlight, in fact, Brassai's uniqueness as a scholar.

Through the reconstruction of biographical data, this study has tackled aspects of Sámuel Brassai's personal, confessional and scientific identity. It has examined a leading figure of the 19th century, a personality whose economic and symbolic high standing reflects his charitable concerns, and it has documented the construction of his identity, foregrounding his gestures towards generating the cult of his personality.



Notes

1. The Hungarian educational system in the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy was reformed mainly in the 1860s; through its ranking of the institutions and through the specialization of its scientific areas, it differed substantially from the Romanian system in the Old Romanian Kingdom. In the latter, peregrination occupied an important place well into the early 20th century, while in Hungary it lost its value due to the expansion of the possibilities offered by the local education institutions.
2. See the volumes edited by Sándor Tonk, *Erdélyiek egyetemjárása a középkorban* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1979); Miklós Szabó, László Szögi, Júlia Varga and others, published by the Archives of Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest. For the Romanian students, see Lucian Nastasă, *Itinerarii spre lumea savantă: Tineri din spațiul românesc la studii în străinătate (1864–1944)* (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2006).
3. Márton Szilágyi, “Irodalomtörténet és társadalomtörténet,” in *Bevezetés a társadalomtörténetbe*, eds. Zsombor Bódy and József Ö. Kovács (Budapest: Osiris, 2006), 567–578.
4. See György Boros, *Dr. Brassai Sámuel élete* (Cluj-Kolozsvár: Minerva, 1927).
5. A *particula* was an educational institution similar to a gymnasium.
6. *Testimonium Scholasticum* (the document is found at the National Széchenyi Library, Budapest, Hungary: MS Analekta).
7. On the peregrinations of the Unitarians and, mainly, of the Protestants, see: Kelemen Gál, *A kolozsvári unitárius kollégium története* (Cluj: Minerva, 1935), 430–485; István Török, *A kolozsvári ev. Református collegium története* (Kolozsvár: Ev. ref. Collegium, 1905); István Rácz, “A magyarországi protestáns peregrináció szükségzerűsége és lehetősége,” in *Politikai gondolkodás-műveltségi áramlatok*, ed. István Rácz (Debrecen: Kossuth Lajos Tudományegyetem, 1992), 133–143; *Régi és új peregrináció külföldön, külföldiek Magyarországon* (Budapest–Szeged: Scriptum, 1993).
8. He enumerates them: Arany, Csengeri, Emödi, Gáspár, Gönczi, Gyulai, Jókai, Kriza, M. Lukács, Majer, Mentovich, Nagy, Tárkányi, Vas Gereben, János Varga in *Fiatalság barátja*, ed. Sámuel Brassai (Pest, 1851), 33.
9. Ferencz Szilágyi, “Vég-szó a Klio perben recensens Brassai Sámuelhez,” *Nemzeti Társalkodó* (22 March 1834): 178. “So Mr. B. starts his literary career by writing reviews, this unknown man, who has not attended or finished any schools, but is now a harpsichord master, now an educator, and today even a publicist; thus, dabbling in everything, he wants to gain, at once, what others get only much later, through effort and a scientific education acquired over the years, achieving thus genuine critical talent.”
10. Tímea Berki, “Brassai Sámuel kritikaértelmezései az 1850–60-as években: Egy példa Criticai Lapok 1855,” *Keresztény Magvető* 3 (2007): 277–288.
11. However, he also participated in other polemical exchanges: with Csató, on the English Constitution (1838), with Jókai, on Roman feminine names (1853), with Gyulai, on a line from the poem “Fóti dal” (1859).
12. As of 1837, he taught at the Unitarian College in Cluj, and then, from 1872, at Francis Joseph Royal University.
13. Vera Békés, *A hiányzó paradigma* (Debrecen: Latin Betűk, 1997), 54, 59.

14. Cf. *ibid.*, 70–74.
15. “Brassai Sámuel Nagy Péterhez” (the manuscript is in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, Hungary: Ms 4745/107-108).
16. In 1841, Peter Nagy enrolled at the University of Göttingen. See: Miklós Szabó and László Szögi, *Erdélyi peregrinusok* (Târgu-Mureş: Mentor, 1998), 340.
17. Friedrich Gottlieb Bartling (1798–1875), botanist.
18. Friedrich Wöhler (1800–1882), chemist.
19. Carl Fridrich Gauss (1777–1855), mathematician.
20. Johann Benedict Listing (1808–1882), mathematician.
21. A castle with a dendrological park near Kassel, close to Göttingen.
22. An art museum.
23. It had a very important zoological collection. Today it is a pathological institute.
24. “Brassai Sámuel Nagy Péterhez.”
25. Bertel Thorwaldsen, German sculptor.
26. “Brassai Sámuel Nagy Péterhez.”
27. For a further discussion of this problem, see Berki, “Brassai Sámuel kritikaértelmezései.”
28. Békés, *A hiányzó paradigma*, 85.
29. Vera Békés, *A kreativitás mintázatai* (Budapest: Áron, 2004), 9. For a further discussion of this problem, see the works of Katalin É. Kiss on Brassai’s grammar theories.
30. “Album Doctorum Almae ac Celebratae Regiae Hungaricae Scientiarum Universitatis Francisco-Joesphinae Claudiopolitanae Die 10 mensi Novembris anni MDCCCLXXII. inauguratae,” vol. 1, 1872/3–1899/1900 (the document is in the National Archives of Romania, Cluj County Branch, Coll. 315, University of Cluj, no. 111).
31. Cf. *ibid.* 1872: 138, 217.
32. About the recruitment of university professors, see: Gábor Kovács and Gábor Kende, “Egyetemi tanárok rekrutációja a két világháború közötti Magyarországon,” in *Zsombékok: Középszintű és iskoláztatás Magyarországon*, ed. György Kövér (Budapest: Századvég, 2006), 417–509.
33. William S. Pollack, “Az apaság szerepe az én átalakításában: lépések a férfiak új pszichológiája felé,” in *Férfiasság és szexualitás: Válogatás a férfigpszichológia témakörében*, eds. C. Friedman, and I. Downey (Budapest: Lélekben otthon, 2003 [2004]), 112.
34. Antal Váradi, “Látogatás Brassai Sámuelnél,” *Magyar Szalon* (1887): 321–324. Váradi depicted Brassai’s home, decorated with the portraits of István Széchenyi and Ferenc Erkel. I consider that the elements of the narrative fully make sense (e.g. the kind of portraits that decorated this house), since they reflected not only the scholar’s decorative concept, but also the elements he selected towards the construction of the self: next to him, his musician friend, the great Hungarian reformer.
35. “Brassai Sámuel Gyulai Pálhoz” (the document is in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, Hungary—Letters).
36. Cf. *Academic Almanac* on the elections of 1837.
37. Cf. *Academic Almanac* from 1886–1888 (Budapest: MTA, 1888).

38. “Stein Brassaihoz” (the document is in the Brassai Collection of the Unitarian Church Archives, in Cluj). “Due to the encouragements of Professor János Kovács, your works have been sent to America, to Harvard University.”
39. László Kóváry, “Brassai százéves pályafutása,” *Erdélyi Múzeum* (1897): 349–361, 444–456, 505–518, 550–560; György Boros, *Dr. Brassai Sámuel élete* (Cluj-Kolozsvár: Minerva Irodalmi és Nyomdai Műintézet Rt., 1927); Imre Mikó, *Az utolsó erdélyi polihisztor: Száz dokumentum és történet Brassai Sámuelről* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1971).
40. *A múlt magyar tudósai* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1991), CD-ROM.
41. Ferdinánd Barna (Carei, 1825–Budapest, 1895), Farkas Bolyai (1775–1856), Antal Csengery (Oradea, 1812–Budapest), Otto Herman (Brezsnóbánya, 1835–Budapest, 1914), Pál Hunfalvy (Nagyszalók, 1810–Budapest, 1891), Ferenc Kállay (Debrecen, 1790–Buda, 1861), Mór Korach (Miskolc, 1888–Budapest, 1975), Emil Thewrewk, Ponori Török (Bratislava, 1838–Budapest, 1917), Vince Wartha (Fiume, 1844–Budapest, 1914). The physician Sámuel Decsi (1742–1816) and Martinus Fogelius, a polymath from Hamburg, are mentioned in relation with the work entitled *Demonstratio*, written by the linguist Sajnovics.
42. Without going into details: the competition was reflected diachronically through the particular independence of Transylvania, as a principality, over the centuries, as well as through the institutional parallelism formed in the second half of the 19th century: the Transylvanian Museum Society was the equivalent of the Hungarian Academy; the second university of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy opened at Cluj, after the model of Pest, Budapest, etc.

Abstract

Traveling and Studying Abroad: Performing Identity
in the Case of the “Last Transylvanian Polymath”: Sámuel Brassai

The name of Sámuel Brassai is missing from the prosopographic investigations of the 19th century. Therefore, based on this type of documents, one cannot analyze the phenomenon of *peregrinatio academica* in Brassai’s case. However, the scholar’s career and scientific concerns offer substantial details about his academic training. This study examines several attitudes towards the concept of “polymath,” emphasizing notions of self-construction and self-performance as regards Brassai’s role as a scholar, and it makes reference to archival documents, to manuscripts that have not yet been studied, and to journals of the 19th century, which, at that time, influenced the specialization of literary and historical sciences.

Keywords

19th century, Transylvania, education, polymath, professional identity, Unitarian