

TO PÉTER HAJDÚ
(27.12.1923 – 19.09.2002)

I will take the liberty to say a few words of farewell and of sincere devotion in English, because I am addressing my most respected colleague, my elder friend and my former teacher Péter Hajdú, and English was the language in which we usually communicated with one another during the more than 25 years of our acquaintance.

I called you, Péter, my teacher, though I never was formally your student and never attended your classes. But your brilliant handbooks of Uralic studies, published not only in Hungarian but also translated into several other languages – English, Russian, German, Polish – did much more for the education of contemporary generations of Finno-Ugrists and Uralists than any lectures could do. Everywhere in the world your name is one of the first to be pronounced in introductory courses of Uralic studies and one to be usually repeated more frequently than any other among many glorious names from our field. Your name became associated both with the classical basics of our discipline and with its spirit of discovery, became synonymous with the highest standards of Uralic studies. I believe that I have some right to speak now to you and express deep mournful gratitude to you also in the name of your numerous pupils and followers all over the world.

You started your studies, shortly after the Second World War, primarily as a Samoyedologist, as a scholar in the field that fifty five years ago was as underdeveloped and methodologically as backward as the regions inhabited by the Samoyeds themselves. And if during your lifetime the Samoyedic studies successfully made their way from a half-forgotten peripheral domain of Finno-Ugristics to the most important foothold of contemporary Uralic studies, we have you more than anybody else to thank for this. The rapid improvement of the situation in Samoyedology, the prerequisites for conducting qualified field work among the Samoyedic native speakers and folklore-bearers were primarily due to your activities and publications.

In the last fifteen years or so you made up your mind to rethink and reconsider many of your former results and opinions, believing or at least suspecting that this may be the demand of changing times. In your papers and private talks you were ready to express doubts concerning the localisation of the Uralic proto-home after Hajdú, or concerning the chronology of the Uralic family tree after Hajdú, or concerning the origin of certain Samoyedic words and affixes, also after Hajdú. I must confess that it was sometimes a point of disagreement between you and me, because – together with many others – I

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remained perhaps more true to the exact letter of Péter Hajdú's theories than Péter Hajdú himself. The research and the newer data from recent years seem only to have confirmed your basic results and to have shown that they need be developed rather than radically reconsidered. But we all learned to respect and to praise this spirit of innovation, of continuing search, of non-complacency, which was so characteristic of you. Let it be another important lesson you gave to your friends and colleagues, another aspect of your enormous scholarly heritage.

In 1960, Péter Hajdú, with 36, was the youngest among ten members of the International Committee for Finno-Ugric Congresses elected then for the first time. Now you are the last among the members of this first committee to leave this world. You made a very important contribution to establishing the tradition of these Congresses which summon up every five years the Finno-Ugrists from Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Russia, and from non-Finno-Ugric countries. But you were also the first to notice the shortcomings and dangers which internationalisation and unrestrained growth of Congresses' participation bring along, and to raise your voice against these detrimental tendencies. Here, as in many other situations, critics and intolerance were inseparable parts of your dedication and care. Thank you also for that, dear Péter!

It is much more difficult to proceed and to go further without you, but your life's work, your spirit, and your heritage teach us how the difficulties should be dealt with.

Requiescat in pace.

E. Helinski

Farkasrét, October 14, 2002