

Géza Alföldy (1935-2011). In memoriam*



Death came seeking Géza Alföldy at the height of his productivity at the foot of the Acropolis in Athens. It was a death similar to the one that came to Scipio in Africa, as Cicero recalls in *De amicitia* (3, 112): “Quam ob rem vita quidem talis fuit vel fortuna vel gloria ut nihil posset accedere, moriendi autem sensu celeritas abstulit”. With him vanishes one of the leading representatives of scientific research in the 20th and early 21st centuries in the field of the ancient Roman history, as well as one of the best, if not the best, epigraphists of our day.

Born in Budapest on the 7th of June 1935, Alföldy was educated in Hungary, where he also spent the first part of his brilliant career. But he moved to Germany, where he found the means and the peace and quiet he needed to conduct research that was peerless in its uniqueness and breadth. While the first part of his education includes worthy referents from Hungary itself, the second part came to adopt the methods, opinions and the example of the great 20th century historians of the ancient world, such as Andreas Alföldi, a Hungarian living outside his country like Géza Alföldy, and his close relationship with Hans-Georg Pflaum and Eric Birley, together with the unforgettable Sir Ronald Syme, of whom he spoke often and whose opinions and memory he always mentioned fondly.

The University of Budapest and the city's museum welcomed him and were the site of his early important studies before moving to what was then West Germany in 1965. Thus began a steady new career: he immediately earned his qualification from the University of Bonn in 1966 and once again performed his scientific research at a museum, the Rheinischen Landesmuseum in Bonn. He complemented his museum work with teaching at the University of Bonn until he was appointed ordinary professor of Ancient History at the University of Bochum, from which he would later move to the Ruprecht-Karl Universität in Heidelberg in 1975. The rest of his career until his retirement unfolded in Heidelberg, and he kept up close ties with the university even as an emeritus professor. When it befell him, he served in numerous academic posts which he performed with care and attention, even though it took away hours he could devote to study and research. As a prominent professor in Heidelberg, he obviously had to become a member of the most prestigious and active academic institution, the Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, which he did in 1978 as an ordinary member of its Philosophisch-Historische Klasse. As was inevitable, once again he was asked to serve in supervisory posts which, as always, he performed with punctuality, efficiency and discretion. At this institution, he was able to undertake major initiatives, publications and projects in conjunction with the university, such as the Epigraphische Datenbank Heidelberg, a pioneering work in its day and the continuation of his activity which still remains indisputable point of reference in his field. Also worth noting is his remarkable presence in the su-

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pervision of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* for many years, a publication of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Géza Alföldy's joining the project brought it a renewed impetus despite the host of difficulties entailed in carrying on with a project of such an impressive scope and duration.

His interests were not limited to the study of certain regions within the Roman Empire; rather the contrary: on his incessant journeys he revealed himself to be an indefatigable scholar of almost all these regions, aware that only this curiosity and this experience would enable him to assess society in the Roman period from a global vantage point.

Many universities had the good fortune and honour to welcome him as a guest professor, including Princeton inside the ranks of its prestigious Institute for Advanced Studies (1972–1973), Rome, Paris, Poznan and, of course, Barcelona. Starting in 1993, he repeatedly taught at the leading Hungarian universities, where he was able to teach in his native language and was bestowed an honorary doctorate by many, specifically by the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, which named him *doctor et professor honoris causa* in 1992, an honour that he dearly prized since it came from the city of his birth.

What was surprising about Géza Alföldy is the fact that he was endowed with a memory and ability to relate data that were truly exceptional. As a logical result of this fact, prosopography and military history were inevitably his favourite fields, and from this perspective they led to social history, where he could apply his extensive knowledge on the Roman leading classes as well as his interest in the world of slavery. This scientific experiment, the subject of many of his countless scientific studies, was translated into a manual, *Römische Sozialgeschichte*, which was published for the first time in Wiesbaden in 1975. It was reissued four times since and translated into twenty languages. Just a few weeks before his death, he enthusiastically sent us the new German-language edition whose volume had doubled, updated primarily with his own research. Another product of this interest was one of his important monographs, *Konsulat und Senatorenstand unter den Antoninen. Prosopographische Untersuchungen zur senatorischen Führungsschicht* (Bonn 1977, *Antiquitas*, no. 1, 27).

In his studies, he had an approach, always based on direct sources and data, through which he extracted theoretical consequences, which contributed to updating Roman social history with new viewpoints and direct deductions from documents while abandoning entrenched theoretical models which could distort the results of his studies on the same documents, which were often new or reinterpreted thanks to his tireless research. With the same method, in 1997 he dared to grapple with contemporary Hungarian history in a book published in Heidelberg (*Ungarn 1956: Aufstand, Revolution, Freiheitskampf*), which made waves and enabled him to analyse with an objective method, as he used to say, a subject

which was quite close to his heart as he had experienced it firsthand.

The novel treatment of the inscriptions from the Augustinian period was one of his main areas of expertise and, I would venture to say, inclinations. In this field, we must mention his *Studi sull'epigrafia augustea e tiberiana di Roma* (Rome 1992), in which he compiled his famous reconstruction of the inscription on the temple of *Mars Ultor* in Rome. It is likewise impossible to fail to mention the publication of the monumental *pars octava* from the *CIL VI* corresponding to the *Inscriptiones Urbis Romae Latinae* (Berlin 2000). The *litterae aureae* and inscriptions in bronze letters, the only part of which remains are the holes or grooves where the letters were attached, was the subject of his tireless curiosity and his readings and restorations. In this field, Hispania was the site of his most important contributions, such as his interpretation of the inscription on the aqueduct of Segovia detailed in an important study entitled *Die Bauinschriften des Aquäduktes von Segovia und des Amphitheaters von Tarraco. Mit einem Anhang von Peter Witte* (Berlin, New York 1997, *Madridischer Forschungen*, no. 19). He associated the inscriptions on the aqueduct with the longest inscriptions known, those from the amphitheatre of Tarragona. The part from Segovia was translated and published once again under the title of *La inscripción del acueducto de Segovia* (Madrid 2010).

His study *Der Obelisk auf dem Petersplatz in Rom. Ein historisches Monument der Antike* (Heidelberg 1990, *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse* 1990, no. 2) is extremely important in the urban sphere, that is, in the chapter on the Roman Empire. In it, he once again interpreted, among other strata, the inscription by Cornelius Gallus attached to the obelisk, today located in the Vatican, which was taken to Rome from Alexandria, where it had been part of a *forum Iulium* and perhaps the *gnomon* of a gigantic sundial.

Showing exceptional initiative, he founded the series "Heidelberger althistorische Beiträge und epigraphischen Studien" (HABES). *Die Krise des Römischen Reiches. Geschichte, Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsbetrachtung. Ausgewählte Beiträge*, Stuttgart 1989, which he dedicated to Sir Ronald Syme to commemorate his 85th birthday, was published within this series. This volume compiles much of his contributions to the History-Augusta-Colloquia which the group Bonner Kreis, still legendary today, was organising at the time and which revealed one of the most notable scientific facets of Géza Alföldy: his interest in "Augustan History". This same collection included the volume in honour of Eric Birley published in conjunction with Brian Dobson and Werner Eck. Birley was one of Alföldy's main referents; the volume was entitled *Kaiser, Heer und Gesellschaft in der Römischen Kaiserzeit. Gedenkschrift für Eric Birley* (Stuttgart 2000). Later, he prepared *Inschriftliche Denkmäler als Medien der Selbstdarstellung in der römischen Welt* (Stuttgart 2001) with Silvio Panciera. The military facet of his studies were col-

lected in the compilation *Römische Heeresgeschichte: Beiträge 1962–1985* (Amsterdam 1987), the third volume in the “MAVORS, Roman Army Researches” collection. We should also mention *Die Legionslegaten der römischen Rheinarmeen* (Cologne, Graz 1963, *Epigraphische Studien*, no. 3) and *Die Hilfstruppen der römischen Germania inferior* (Düsseldorf 1968, *Epigraphische Studien*, no. 6).

The Roman province of Dalmatia was the subject of two seminal monographs: *Bevölkerung und Gesellschaft der römischen Provinz Dalmatien*, with a contribution by András Mócsy (Budapest 1965), and *Die Personennamen in der römischen Provinz Dalmatia* (Heidelberg 1969). The *Noricum* was analysed in a volume of the same name (London, Boston 1974) and is still a classic on the subject. It should be noted that other regions of the Roman Empire were also the subject of substantial contributions, the fruit of Géza Alföldy’s perennially active curiosity and sagacity.

The subject of Hispania was one of his prime concerns. His contributions in this field can aptly be described as revolutionary and in some respects marked a pivotal point. Among many indispensable contributions, we should mention the *Fasti Hispanienses: senatorische Reichsbeamte und Offiziere in den spanischen Provinzen des römischen Reiches von Augustus bis Diokletian* (Wiesbaden 1969), as well as other noteworthy examples, including *Res publica Leserensis (Forcall, Castellón)* (Valencia 1977, *Servicio de Investigación Prehistórica. Trabajos varios*, no. 45) and *Los Baebii de Saguntum* (Valencia 1977, *Servicio de Investigación Prehistórica. Trabajos varios*, no. 56). And, with H. Halfmann, *El Edetano M. Cornelius Nigrinus Curiatius Maternus, general de Domitiano y rival de Trajano* (Valencia 1973, *Servicio de Investigación Prehistórica. Trabajos varios*, no. 44), *Römisches Städtewesen auf der neukastilischen Hochebene. Ein Testfall für die Romanisierung* (Heidelberg 1987, *Abhandlungen der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse*, no. 3), and finally, *Provincia Hispania superior* (Heidelberg 2000, *Schriften der Philosophisch-historischen Klasse der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*, no. 19, with a Spanish version published in La Coruña in 2002). Shortly after his death, in 2011, the volume *Segobriga V. Inscripciones romanas 1986–2010 (Bibliotheca Archeologica Hispana*, no. 38) was released, which had been written in conjunction with J. M. Abascal and R. Cebrián, yet further proof that his capacity for work did not diminish in the face of hardships.

His predilection for Tarragona was the subject of countless articles and books, of which we shall only spotlight a few. They range from *Flamines provinciae Hispaniae citerioris* (Madrid 1973, *Anejos de AEA*, no. 6) to the fundamental corpus of *Die römischen Inschriften von Tarraco* (Berlin 1975), which today is only surpassed by his own edition of the three fascicles on Tarraco in the second edition of the second volume of the *CIL*, which predated the fascicle covering Valencia and the *ager* of *Dertosa (CIL II² 14, Conventus Tarraconensis. Pars meridionalis*, Berlin 1995). We should also recall his article on Tarraco in Pauly-Wissowa

(*RE Suppl.* XV, 1978, col. 570–644), which was translated into Spanish with the title of *Tarraco* and published in Tarragona in 1991 (*Forum*, no. 8). The Arc de Barà, a monument of which he was particularly fond, was the subject of a major contribution: “Der römische Bogen über der Via Augusta bei Tarraco (Arc de Berà) und seine Inschrift” (*Klio*, no. 78, 1996, p. 158–170). This unwavering loyalty remained with him always; indeed, fascicle 178 of the *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* from 2011 (pp. 87–125) contained his last decisive contribution on classical culture in Catalonia: “Griechische Inschriften und griechische Kultur in Tarraco”.

We must also mention the compilation of studies entitled *Die römische Gesellschaft. Ausgewählte Beiträge* (Stuttgart 1986), which contains major contributions on Hispania, especially on Roman society in what would later come to be called the Catalan-speaking lands. Precisely this volume was the first title in the HABES series mentioned above.

Society was not stingy in recognising Géza Alföldy’s numerous personal and scientific merits. He was bestowed an honorary doctorate by nine universities. He was invited to join numerous academies, including the Royal Academy of History and the Academia Europaea. He participated in numerous scientific councils for collections, journals and foundations, including the Fondazione Niccolò Canussio de Cividale del Friuli. His numerous distinctions include the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz-Preis from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft in 1986, which was the definitive sign of recognition of his career as a researcher as well as a point of departure for new accomplishments. In 1992 he shared the Max Planck Prize with his friend and colleague Silvio Panciera. He was also awarded the first-class German Verdienstkreuz in 2002 and the medal from his own University of Heidelberg (2006).

Finally, if we wish to solely survey the well-deserved honours he received in Spain based on his extraordinary devotion to Roman history in what is today Catalonia, the list is quite extensive. In 1988, the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* awarded him what was his first honorary doctorate in a long series; it was preceded by the silver medal from the *Universitat de Barcelona* that same year. Other feats worth mentioning from his career in Catalonia include his election as a corresponding member of the History and Archaeology Section of the *Institut d’Estudis Catalans* in 1996; the International Catalonia Prize in 1997; his presence as a visiting professor at the *Universitat de Barcelona* 1997/1998; the Cross of Saint George, the highest honour awarded in Catalonia, in 2001; the silver medal from the city of Tarragona in 2008; the honorary doctorate granted by the *Universitat Rovira i Virgili* in Tarragona in 2009; and his position as an honorary member of the *Reial Societat Arqueològica Tarraconense*. He was also a member of the scientific council of the *Institut Català d’Arqueologia* (ICAC) since its founding and worked faithfully with this institution.

All of us who were his colleagues and friends recall with admiration and no doubt a tinge of nostalgia when he delivered the inaugural speech at the XII International Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy on Tuesday the 3rd of September 2002 in Barcelona. It was an unforgettable lesson which further demonstrated not only his knowledge of Greek and Roman epigraphy but also his mastery of the most important modern languages, including Catalan.

This entire dense, long and important scientific *cursus*, with almost 600 publications, will ensure that his memory endures in the fields of study that he cultivated with such competence and, I would even venture to say, with abnegation. His personality and scientific generosity characterised an epoch and leave a void that will be difficult to fill in the future.

As we have already said, death found Géza Alföldy in Athens, at the foot of the Acropolis, on the 6th of November 2011. He was there to collect his tenth honorary doctorate, this one from the Ionian University. Destiny did not allow him to, and the Fates will cease to spin the thread of his earthly existence, which, however, remains and shall continue to remain in the minds of everyone who knew him and appreciated him, and even in the minds of those who were only able to read his work or will do so in the future. However, at this point Géza Alföldy is not just his oeuvre; the memory of his singular humanity will remain among us for this reason. And returning once again to Cicero's *De amicitia* (27,102), we can adopt these words for ourselves: "Nemo unquam animo aut spe maiora suscipiet qui sibi non illius memoria atque imaginem proponendam putet".