

Biography of Gyula Németh

Gyula Németh

(1890-1976)



He was born on November 2, 1890 in the town Karcag, one of the most important centres of the Hungarian countryside called up today Greater Cumania. When he was 14 he began to learn Turkish and was still a student of secondary school when he first visited Istanbul in 1907.

In 1909 he became a student of the University of Budapest and at the same time he was admitted to the famous Eötvös-College. Next year he got a travel-grant for a study tour in the Caucasus. The report on his Kumyk and Balkar studies was his first independent publication. Németh continued his studies in Leipzig, Berlin and Kiel, and two years after gaining his Ph.D in 1913 he began to give lectures in turcology. In 1916 he became professor extraordinary and his appointment as full professor is dated from December 31, 1918. Since he retired from his chair in 1965, he had taught for an uninterrupted period of 50 years at the University of Budapest.

In the meantime, Németh had played an active role in the organization of Hungarian oriental studies. He was one of the founders of the Körösi Csoma Society and became the editor-in-chief of its new journal the Körösi Csoma Archivum.

In 1922 he was elected as a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. His inaugural lecture was delivered in 1923 under the title "Huns, Bulgarians, Hungarians". Working already on his opus magnum "The formation of the land conquering Hungarians" he gave his first results and outlined his plans.

Németh became the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy in 1932 and three years later he was elected as ordinary member of the Hungarian Academy.

After the reorganization of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1949, he was elected as president of the First Class Language and Literature, and held this position until 1955. He became the editor-in-chief of the journal of the Acta Linguistica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae where he was active until his death.

When he was 75 Németh retired from both the chair of Turcology and from the directorship of the Institute of Linguistics in 1965, but he continued to take an active part in several committees and institutions.

The inheritance left behind by two outstanding Hungarian turcologists, Ármin Vámbéry and József Thúry deeply influenced the development of Németh's scientific activity: he dealt thoroughly with problems of both ancient Turkic and Osmanli-Turkish language history, the solution of which has led to a direct or indirect clarification of the debated questions of Hungarian-Turkic contacts.

In 1921 his first papers on Turkic loanwords in the Hungarian language and on questions regarding Hungarian prehistory came out. Following the same direction, after decades of study and careful critical investigations, he published in 1930 his work entitled "The formation of the land conquering Hungarians". Its main issue was to uncover Turkic tribal naming and tribal system, as well as the initial form of the nomadic Turkic states; its individual moments served as