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The Management of the Benedictines in Hungary in the Dualistic Era

Doctoral (PhD) dissertation: Theses

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1. The Antecedents and the Purpose of the Research

The history of the Benedictine Order in Hungary is one of the most researched topics in Hungarian ecclesiastical historiography, and the operation of the Order has also been examined many times in many respects within public historiography. These researches primarily focused on the Middle Ages, but the Order's history of the 17th–18th centuries also became conspicuous as modern historiography developed. Many publications covered the lives of renowned Benedictine teachers active in the 19th and 20th centuries and the history of famous Benedictine schools, but the comprehensive presentation of the dualistic era was given less attention, although – due to the researchers of economic history – it was exactly the examination of this era that produced new results in the decade following the political transformation.

Besides the publications of the Order's history, I consider the research on estate-history developing in the middle of the 20th century as the antecedents of my dissertation. The school-creating activity by Domanovszky Sándor and his disciples started in the 1930s, it continued after World War II due to the activity of Szabad György and Für Lajos whose disciples gave the research on the history of estates renewed momentum after the political transformation. The first monographs on ecclesiastical and religious estates were also published in this track. The pioneer was Gerendás Ernő, who analysed the 18th-century management of the estate in Garamszentbenedek pertaining to the Chapter of Esztergom; Bodrog György elaborated the management on the estates of the Cistercian Order in Előszállás; and Tóth Tibor analysed the operation of the Piarist Order's estate in Mernye in quite a novel approach. Fülöp Éva Mária is the best expert in Benedictine estate-history; she was concerned with the present research-topic in her numerous papers and articles, most notably in her monograph published in 1995, which discusses the economic management of the Hungarian Benedictines' estates. The purpose of my dissertation is to adjust the 1865–1918 history of the Pannonhalma Archabbey's estate to the above outlined course of the Order's history and that of economic history.

Strictly speaking, I try – collecting the results of the secondary sources and completing them with the missing data – to form a comprehensive opinion about the management of the Archabbey's estate in the dualistic era. I was directed to the topic under examination by questioning an “axiom of the Order's history”. The statement in question is: in 1802, the Benedictine Order was restored to the estates of its four former abbeys so as to use their earnings to finance the operation of the ten schools newly committed to their charge, the employed teachers, and the maintenance of the buildings. The Order's wealth was a trust, which had served the purposes of teaching and public education in Hungary since 1802, and this wealth provided for the economic stability of the parishes run by Benedictine monks in the Territorial

Abbey of Pannonhalma and in other dioceses. The earnings of the estates provided for the monks, many of whom displayed significant scholarly activity, some of them became university professors, thus the Order served the matter of the universal Hungarian culture. As a presumption, the above statement implies that the estates of the Benedictine abbeys run such a professional management whose profit made the Order able to maintain the schools and parishes committed to its charge. My dissertation's fundamental question is exactly this: whether the agricultural units created on the Benedictine large estates really produced enough profit that made the Order able to meet the expectations specified by the monarch in 1802.

2. The Sources and Method of the Research

In the course of my work, exceeding the summing up of the research results achieved so far, relying on lots of archival sources, I strive to define precisely the profile formed about the Archabbey's management. The overwhelming majority of the used sources are kept in the Archives of the Pannonhalma Archabbey, a part of which can be found in the archives of the Archabbot, another part is filed in the archives of the finance office. As for the first unit, besides the correspondence and the registered documents of the archabbots and the separately administered documents proved to be productive. As for the archives of the finance office, the minute-books of the Central Estate Management, the accounts submitted to the audit office, and the thematically sorted documents of the individual estates proved to be productive. I would like to draw particular attention to the documents of the Chapter, which have already been examined by many researchers, but have not been completely exploited yet; I consider them to be one of the main sources and databases of my dissertation, and I can effectively rely on them particularly when evaluating the management. Based on the documents explored in this way, I outline the profile in four movements to try and phase new theses.

As an introduction, I summarise the dualistic era's economic conditions, which the Benedictine Order also had to adjust to. It is essentially extended with an introduction to the history of the Order, in which I describe the way of historic development how the originally monastic Benedictine Order reached the status of a teaching order – and not only teaching order (!) – in the second half of the 19th century. An important part of the latter section is the description of the Order's economic management and the corrections of the inaccuracies emerging in the secondary sources. In the second movement, some case-studies demonstrate the frameworks and problems of the Benedictine management in the dualistic era focusing on some farming lands, i.e., agricultural units, whose source-data make it possible to consider small details. In this respect, first I provide a detailed analysis of the Győr and Komárom districts of the

Archabbey's estates, then I focus on the estates of two affiliated abbeys, those of Bakonybél and Dömölk. In the third movement, slightly drawing back, I examine the presence, importance, and efficiency of individual agricultural branches – plant-cultivation, livestock breeding, silviculture – on the Benedictine estates. Finally, in some analytical chapters, I evaluate the entirety of the Order's management, including the order of management-plan of the estate, especially considering the activity of Archabbot Fehér Ipoly (1892–1909), his efforts of modernization and his taking a public role realised in the Order's management. In the end, after examining the state of the Order's funds, I conclude my dissertation with drawing up the balance of the management.

3. Theses

As for a starting point of my dissertation – relying on my previous studies and archival experience –, my hypothesis is that the estates of the Benedictine Order in themselves – contrary to the intention of the royal diploma of 1802 – were not able to provide for the Order's schools and parishes in the dualistic era. In witness thereof I completed a research of estate-history, which put in a new light many issues related to the management; these can be summarised in five points as follows.

I. CORRECTION

In the dualistic era, the supreme body of the Order's government directing the management of the estates of the Archabbey in Pannonhalma and those of the Benedictines in Hungary was the Central Estate Management with the Archabbot of Pannonhalma presiding.

Surveying the secondary sources on the management of the Benedictines, I came across a statement, which needs revision in the light of my research. According to the general point of view hitherto, the supreme body of the Order's economic government was the Economic Committee between 1820 and 1945. On the contrary, between 1866 and 1920, the Central Estate Management was the Order's primary body of economic decision-making, which was based upon the collaboration of the archabbot, the prior, and the central estate manager or – as it was later referred to – manager-general. Some archabbots completed this body with the auditor, the economic councillor, or councillors, but it was always presided by the archabbot. It has some significance beyond the occasional economic committee operating besides the ruling abbot in 1822, or the economic committee performing the duties of the bailiff's and auditor's tasks under the chairmanship of the estate-manager of Szentmárton in the first half of the 19th century. Its sphere of authority covered all the branches of management, and its decisions were of binding

force. It was the source of initiations, which strived for the modernisation of the management system, and which after all resulted in the intense cultivation of the Order's estates. The actual archabbot always had an initiating role in it, but the opinion and recommendation of the governance's other members also influenced the making of decisions. Without knowing the decisions, the Order's profile of the management in the dualistic era cannot be drawn, therefore in my dissertation, I repeatedly refer to the minutes registering the decisions of the body.

II. PRODUCTION ORGANIZATION AND MODERNISATION

On the Benedictine Order's estates, contrary to the data explored in the secondary sources so far, the planned industrial management was present in a much larger measure and in a much greater depth, which was principally manifested in the plan of management applying to all Benedictine estates and approved by the Agricultural Academy of Óvár. Owing to this, intensive farming became general on the Order's estates in the first decades of the 20th century.

According to the traditional narrative of the secondary sources, on the estates of the Benedictines, convertible husbandry was introduced and the change-over to intensive farming took place in the middle of the 19th century. It is truly so, since the first plans were made as early as the time of Archabbot Kruesz Krizosztom (1865–1885), and the development of convertible husbandry was gradually started in the individual estates. However, the full-scale introduction of the system of the plan of management was the merit of Archabbot Fehér Ipoly (1892–1909). First, he sent his monks to study the management of ecclesiastical estates; they visited the estates of the Cistercians, the Piarists, and the Cathedral Chapter of Esztergom. Then, by reason of the Agricultural Academy of Óvár, they examined the operation of some Hungarian model farms, and later they went on field trips abroad. Thus, the members of the Order studied the archducal estate in Óvár, Csekonic Endre's estate in Zombolya, Baron Berg's leasehold in Kapuvár, the Leidenfrost-lease-hold on the Léva-estate, the estates in Bajna and Bia, finally the State Stud-Farm Estate of Mezőhegyes in Hungary, while the primary targets of the field trips abroad were German and Czech estates. The first plans of management were based on the experiences of these field trips following the models of the plans of management created in the academies of Óvár and Debrecen. The documents were created in the Central Audit Office based on the recommendations submitted by the bailiffs; the one of the Zalavár management in 1899, the one of the Komárom District and the one of the vineyards of Bársonyos in 1900-ban, the ones of the Deáki and Füss managements in 1901, the one of the Dömölk Abbey in 1905, and the one of the Somogy estate-district in 1906. For the sake of measuring the estates' real profitability, in 1908, the Archabbot introduced the account-system

based on balance sheet, whose basis was established on the stocklist of the property-assessment. These stocklists included the tenements, the buildings, and the implements of the Order's entire management, including the land produces and livestock as well. The General Chapter of 1912 was the first one when the net-earnings-account could be given, but after the outbreak of World War I, the new system of account was not successfully enforced in every respect despite the countless summons by the archabbot, the chapter, or the deans. Considering all these, I still state that intensive farming became general on the estates of the Benedictine Order because of working out the plan of management at the beginning of the 20th century.

III. DISTORTING FACTORS

The fact that the Benedictine Order was not a simple profit-oriented business company but a Christian monastic community at the same time raised difficulties in exploiting the possible maximum profit from the Order's properties.

While examining the management of the Benedictines in the dualistic era, one has to reckon with motivations, which influenced the economic decision making from the points of view of moral consideration, social or national interests disregarding economic rationality. In the case of the planned establishment of a cognac-factory [which plan was dismissed – besides the lack of proper competence – with the reason (among others) that it “goes ill” with a monastic community], one can recognise some consideration of ethics. The protectionism supporting Hungarian products emerged in connection with the examination of buying machines, when in the case of purchasing two steam-engines of identical price, the Hungarian product was procured. It is a laudable patriotic attitude, but on making the decision, neither the differences in quality nor the possibilities of parts-supply were examined, which could later generate additional unwarranted expenses. Yet, in my mind, the most interesting ones are those social considerations, which can be identified in relation to the purchases of means of production on the estates of Deáki or Kismegyer. In both cases, purchasing machines was regarded untimely because of the fear that the local inhabitants, i.e., the congregations of the parishes would lose their living due to such a decision, and it would reflect on an ecclesiastical community. The social aspects also included the dread of spreading secularization, which was occasionally combined with anti-Semitism as a characteristic of the zeitgeist. For example, despite the promising profit, Archabbot Kruesz Krizosztom (1865–1885) did not lease out the Order's estates lest they fall into the hands of Jewish leaseholders.

IV. MODEL-IMITATING MANAGEMENT

The Benedictine Order's agricultural units were not counted among the model farms even though the Order – after introducing the mentioned measures of modernisation – strived to keep abreast of the development of agriculture and took into consideration extensively public initiatives. If it is convenient, the Pannonhalma Archabbey's estate was not a model farm but a model-imitating management.

One of my dissertation's problem-oriented question is to what extent the Pannonhalma Archabbey's estate can be regarded a model farm. In my opinion, considering the whole of dualism, it was not one despite all the efforts of the archabbots; the Benedictine Order's estates hardly produced any profit in the middle of the 19th century. The decisive majority of the earnings was consumed by operational expenditure. The lack of profit could have many reasons, e.g., now and then a year of bad weather after Archabbot Kruesz Krizosztom (1865–1885) assumed his duties, the carelessness of some bailiffs as in the time of Archabbot Vaszary Kolos (1885-1891), or the lack of proper agricultural experience as in the first years of Archabbot Fehér Ipoly (1892-1909). As for me, I still think that the primary cause of the poorer profitability was the slow adjustment to the market conditions. Even if the Benedictines did not always have up-to-day agricultural knowledge, they employed bailiffs as early as the 1860s, who graduated from an agricultural academy, and who theoretically had the most up-to-date knowledge. The superiors also wanted to become acquainted with and apply the actual agricultural innovations. Before the comprehensive development of a branch now and then, they took competent professional, academic advice. In addition to this, they regularly joined in the agricultural programmes either initiated or supported by the state. Hereby primarily I think of the stock-plantations introduced in relation to the protection against phylloxera, especially of the state stock-plantation in Somló introduced on the land leased from the Order, which was transferred to the Order's own use after the expiration of the term of lease. The participation in the local agricultural associations or in the initiatives under the aegis of OMGE (National Hungarian Agricultural Association) was of the same significance. For example, in 1874, Archabbot Kruesz offered a prize for the remuneration of the agricultural exhibition organised by the Agricultural Association in Győr Comitát, and in 1896, the estate in Kismegyér provided land for a ploughing competition in the comitat. The participation in the artificial-fertilizer-experiment of a country-wide scale was organised by OMGE. All these initiatives were promoted by the state's ambitions to modernise agriculture, which the Order was anxious to exploit and utilize for its own advantage. I assert that the Order was a good subject of the state's aspirations to modernisation, and it is due to this model-imitation that the

forms of intensive farming became current on the Order's estates, and that the Archabbey's estates produced harvest results approaching the national average (most often slightly surpassing that) in the years before World War I.

V. PROPERTY-LOSS

Based on the examination of the equity capital, the Archabbey's management presents a negative balance in the dualistic era. The Order's agricultural units could not produce earnings, which would have covered the expenses of the Benedictines, in consequence of which many investments had to be accomplished to the debit of the Order's equity capital, which led to the erosion of the Order's wealth in the aggregate.

Since the Order's restoration in 1802, the equity capital of the Pannonhalma Archabbey had been kept in government bonds, then in the dualistic era, it was partly invested in other bonds. The core of the equity capital was the financial compensation for the parts of wealth of the Benedictine estates, which were sold during the state's management, which were completed with the bonds of land-discharge and other bonds of compensation after the emancipation of serfs. In the second half of the 19th century, it was needed many times that for the sake of financing an investment or a project now and then, the superiors draw on the equity capital, but it always took place with assuming the obligation of refunding. Archabbot Vaszary Kolos (1885–1891) repeatedly made use of the possibility of interest-free borrowings from the equity capital, and he could easily attain its ministerial approval due to his political relations. The practice of renouncing the obligatory refunding evolved in the first decade of the 20th century, when the completed investments to the debit of the sum from the equity capital were declared equity capital. The peculiarity of this solution was that if these finances were used for constructing outbuildings, the development of the central monastery, or installing lighting in a church, for example, it resulted in the decrease of the volume of the interest-bearing equity capital, thus, these representative and unproductive advowson expenses meant some loss of wealth for the Order. It is true despite the fact that according to the minutes of the Chapter of 1912, the equity capital slightly increased after the last Chapter, but it was due to selling real properties during the Chapter's round, which repeatedly meant some loss of wealth. Due to the economic effects of World War I, the Order suffered additional monetary damages. The greatest loss was the war-loan of depreciation and the inflated fees of leasing. As a last step, after the world war, a part of the equity capital was transferred to a so-called regular bank account, which markedly served to cover the Order's expenses of operation.

4. Publications

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