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The Ecclesiastical Middle Class in Early Modern Győr:  
A Prosopographical Analysis of the Cathedral Chapter of Győr,  
1658–1783

PhD Thesis Booklet

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## I. OBJECTIVE OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION, PROBLEM STATEMENT

I set two complementary tasks as the aim of the dissertation, as well as a third perspective that has been scarcely examined in the case of the canons of Győr. The few narrative works published about the cathedral chapter of Győr are usually biased and partial. This is understandable in the case of Vince Bedy and Béla Szabady, as their social status and personal ties to the chapter inevitably influenced their work.

My preliminary hypothesis was that through a prosopographical perspective and method, I could provide a more impartial, objective, and comprehensive picture of the chapter's body in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. By using prosopographical data on the canons' social and geographical origins, education, and university attendance, I believed a broader explanation could be given regarding the chapter's corporate character. Studying the chapter's membership indirectly illuminated the bishop's appointment policy, since the cathedral chapter, an institution of high importance in church governance, served as the bishop's immediate auxiliary body.

During the preliminary prosopographical and archontological data collection, it became clear that Vince Bedy's data could not always be effectively utilized. Bedy was mainly concerned with the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries; the backbone of his monograph is built around this era. In the section titled "*List of Canons*" in his book, individuals from the 18<sup>th</sup> century are less emphasized, and he practically conducted no archival research concerning them. Instead, he incorporated the brief biographies from the *Liber Cantoralis*, opened for internal use in 1880 by Canon Lajos Szely, often quoting them verbatim. However, these 18<sup>th</sup>-century biographies are superficial and inaccurate, offering no possibility of reconstructing complete career paths. Therefore, one of my aims was to process the 18<sup>th</sup>-century divisional lists of the chapter and the canon lists found in the records of the chapter's authentic archives, and based on these new and accurate archontological findings, to initiate further investigations of the chapter's body.

Thirdly, my goal was to present the material and mental conditions of the ecclesiastical middle class of Győr through the last wills and inventories of objects and books of the canons. Beyond the location of the canons' residences within the city, Vince Bedy did not examine the question of material culture. I consider this particularly important because, according to my preliminary assumption, canons must be regarded as part of the urban elite in every sense. To prove this, I undertook the processing of selected items from the '*Testamenta*' series of the Private Archives of the Chapter of Győr, held at the Diocesan Archives of Győr.

In summary, my aim was to organize and complement the 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century knowledge of the Cathedral Chapter of Győr, based on prosopographical, database-driven examples already existing in the literature, and then examine it from a modern perspective. The preliminary questions formulated for the dissertation were suitable for creating a realistic portrait of a closed, well-defined group. Nevertheless, the results not only answered these questions but also indirectly revealed the social dynamics and mechanisms of an entire era. At the end of the research, I was able to establish career types and valid group characteristics. Studying the career types also allowed me to compare the Cathedral Chapter of Győr with other similar bodies functioning within the Kingdom of Hungary. In addition to this, I compared the characteristics of the Győr chapter with its own late medieval past. The research spanned 125 years. Naturally, it was not possible to outline a static picture; rather, it seemed feasible to identify trends, periodic phenomena, and processes through which the chapter could be better understood. These investigations are essential for the future goal of achieving a more accurate picture of the entire Hungarian ecclesiastical society.

## II. METHODOLOGY OF THE DISSERTATION

In the dissertation, I applied the methodology of prosopography, already mentioned above. The term “prosopography” was introduced into scientific discourse by Lawrence Stone in 1971. Stone used it for a method best suited to examining processes and changes within a community or society. In other words, prosopography should be understood as the study of a specific group with a common background. The members of the given community can be analysed based on their shared characteristics, resulting in a collective study.

It is important to note that prosopography is not identical with biography or the method of comprehensive biographical study. The latter focuses on the careers and lives of one or more individuals selected by the researcher, placing their trajectories at the center of analysis. Prosopography, in contrast, deals with the similarities within a group, analysing the characteristics of individuals based on biographical data collected systematically. Furthermore, biographies aim to present the complete life stories of individuals, whereas prosopography only concerns itself with specific aspects of life relevant to the group under study. Thus, the individual becomes a subject of scientific inquiry only in relation to the other members of the group.

Considering the above, I placed at the center of my investigation every individual who was a member of the cathedral chapter between 1658 and 1783. For each canon — whenever possible — I determined their place of origin, nationality, social background, and places of study. Subsequently, I categorized their modes of entry into the chapter, their age at entry, and the career paths they pursued within the body.

### III. RESULT OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Through extensive data collection, I compiled the most detailed database to date regarding the 113 canons who served in Győr between 1658 and 1783. This was a necessary precondition for a comprehensive prosopographical study. As a result of the research, the origins, nationalities, and social backgrounds of the Győr canons became known to an unprecedented extent. The newly systematized data opened further perspectives for studying the ecclesiastical middle class of Győr.

Thus, it became possible to establish periodization and trends concerning the secondary and higher education of the later ecclesiastical middle class of Győr (*Chapter II, Section 5*). In addition to presenting unified, comprehensive results representing the entire period, I also published the analysed data in tabular form, broken down into 20-year periods, allowing clearly distinguishable trends to emerge.

I sought to incorporate as much as possible the bishop Christian August's correspondence from the Diocesan Archives of Győr, previously only sporadically used, as well as the materials related to the Zichy capsza series, almost unknown to researchers. In the two chapters titled 'Path to the Middle Class I–II' (*Chapter III*), I used this correspondence and ecclesiastical administrative records to present the backgrounds of those who entered the chapter from the lower clergy or through royal commendation.

My intention was not only to examine the body itself but also to present its broader social environment, both vertically and horizontally. Wherever possible, I compared the findings to those of "sister institutions" of the Cathedral Chapter of Győr, thus providing points of reference for evaluating the trends observed in Győr.

By returning to the archival sources and interpreting them, I was able to reconstruct chapter careers (*Chapter IV, Career in the Cathedral Chapter*) and dignity sequences (*Chapter X, Archontology*) with greater accuracy than before, thus enabling the depiction of career paths as

close to historical reality as possible. Based on the corrected 18th-century biographies, I eliminated many anomalies previously evident in Bedy's volume.

As in the construction of the biographical database (*Chapter IX, Register*), I subjected the chapter careers to revision and succeeded in clarifying many previously unknown internal chapter career paths. This is significant not only for each individual but also for the understanding of the chapter's internal functioning.

It is particularly important that I was able to find data on the liturgical life of the chapter (*Chapter VI*). I processed working documents of the precentors that offer a realistic picture of the ecclesiastical middle class's liturgical presence in the 18th-century cathedral. I also addressed the cultural role of the Győr chapter (*Chapter VII*). Analysis of the book inventories showed that the canons must be counted among the city's intellectual elite. Alongside their cultural and intellectual standing, the ecclesiastical middle class also belonged to the wealthier strata of the city. Based on the 1784–1785 housing census and wills, it can be concluded that the Győr canons generally lived at the standard of wealthy nobility or affluent urban citizens.

The goal of prosopography is to define group characteristics, identify the most typical shared traits, and analyse individuals within a determined group according to a set of criteria. By highlighting and aggregating the most frequent general features, it becomes possible to describe an “average” canon — a figure who never existed in this form but represents the dominant traits of the group members. This idea is justified not only by its local relevance but also by the fact that the Hungarian episcopate of the era largely recruited from the cathedral chapters, including that of Győr.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the personnel structure of the Cathedral Chapter of Győr always adapted to the era in which it operated and to the personnel policies of the bishops. My dissertation is an attempt to make the early modern history of the chapter better known through the study of its members. This represents a major step toward a monographic treatment of the thousand-year history of the Cathedral Chapter of Győr for the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### IV. PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE TOPIC OF THE DISSERTATION

- *A győri székeskáptalan személyi összetétele 1658 és 1725 között*, Arrabona 57 (2019) 145–176.
- *Bényi János győri nagyprépost magánkönyvtára*, Magyar Könyvszemle 136 (2020) 248–256.
- *Die Archidiakonen von Lutzmannsburg zwischen 1658 und 1783*, Burgenländische Heimatblätter 84 (2022) 1–2., 59–72.
- *The Educational background of the canons of the Győr (Raab) Cathedral Chapter between 1658 and 1783*, Publikationen der Ungarischen Geschichtsforschung in Wien, (The article is currently in press.)