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PHD THESIS

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The professional life of László Gyula Erdélyi OSB with special reference to his
university career

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1) The Topic of the Dissertation

László Gyula Erdélyi (1868-1947) was one of the most important researchers and university professors of the end of the 19th and during the first half of the 20th century, especially between 1900 and 1930 in Hungary. His research interest focused on the medieval Hungarian history. From 1892 to 1938, Erdélyi held leading positions in several Hungarian institutions, colleges and universities: he was college teacher in Pannonhalma, then worked as professor at the universities in Cluj and Szeged, at the latter he was also head of department, dean and rector. No comprehensive career trajectory of Erdélyi has yet been researched and this present dissertation is an essential contribution in this regard and more generally, to the history of Hungarian science. Moreover, the dissertation's results are important not only for the Catholic church history but also for public memory and social history. László Erdélyi's most productive field of activity was his university work and, as a result, this dissertation focuses on the systematic development of his research and teaching activities, which were insofar absent from the Hungarian cultural history materials.

Erdélyi's academic activities were influenced by various changes in public life and politics (especially cultural politics), as well as by the changing aims of the Benedictine Order where he belonged, which were mostly linked to the personality of the abbots. Erdélyi's career and his life in Transylvania were therefore linked to the vicissitudes of Hungarian history that ranged from the dualist state at the turn of the century, then the First World War, the period between the two World Wars and during and after the Second World War.

Born in Northern Hungary, Erdélyi came from a peasant family and moved upwards developing into an important intellectual figure. He became a Benedictine monk, and as member of the Benedictines he was part of a community which, with its regulated norms and history, had been an accepted part of Hungarian public thought for many centuries. Working as professor between 1911 and 1938, Erdélyi had the permission of the archabbot to live outside the abbey building(s) and outside the abbey community. He was a 'kincés' (word pun on living 'out'='kinn' as a Benedictine, resulting in the compound word of "kin(n)+(Ben)cés") in monastic hierarchy, however his work and scientific achievements raised the social standing of the Order. As college director, Erdélyi spent nearly a decade at the head of the Szent

Imre College in Szeged, organizing and leading the institution, which provided a secure environment for many students studying at the university. In addition to this community education work, he was also a teacher, author of books and studies, and head of a department of cultural history, unique in the country, for almost two decades.

The social relations of László Erdélyi, including figures of academic life (scholars of medieval culture, faculty colleagues) and the public figures of the city of Szeged (such as bishops, mayors, architects, artists, soldiers), allow us to draw a very useful picture of the society of the time and the people and their social net, especially in a period when a large rural town becomes a university city.

In the light of the above, the aim of the dissertation is also to answer the question of how a university professor and a member of a monastic order experienced the life-altering changes of his times and what ideas and challenges did László Erdélyi face and how did he respond to them?

In my thesis, I consider important to present the places of Erdélyi's career involving Pannonhalma, Kolozsvár and Szeged, including the cultural and economic significance of these places for his work and career and I present the professor primarily as a teacher at the University of Kolozsvár and Szeged, who, in addition to his research, taught and educated generations of students. He was successful as the forerunner of medieval studies, a field of research and study is still thriving at the University of Szeged. I also narrowed down the topic due to its scope and specific research aspects, and the result is a portrait of a scientist within the subject of the history of the university. Therefore, in this dissertation I dealt with medieval social history and theology only tangentially, and focused mostly on the Kolozsvár and Szeged period of Erdélyi's academic life.

The topic was suggested by the late Professor László Koszta, a medieval historian familiar with the work of László Gyula Erdélyi OSB, who gave me the idea to process the former professor's career in Kolozsvár and Szeged, a very timely and under-researched topic in the context of Szeged's university history.

2. Hypothesis and New Findings

1. The early career choice of László Gyula Erdélyi (recruitment to the Order) is linked in the literature to Esztergom. Even at an early stage of the research, Nagyszombat seemed a more likely choice but Esztergom just further strengthened the commitment to his career and education.
2. University applications. The application to Kolozsvár was known, but all the others were not known, so this is a new addendum to the career trajectory of Erdélyi.
3. The choice of being an outward member of the Order as university lecturer (that is, being a 'kincés') instead of the insider of the quiet world of the Pannonhalma College („being a Benedictine”). This research has revealed several reasons for Erdélyi's option for the 'kincés.'
4. At the beginning of the research, based on the knowledge of some of the sources, it was assumed that Erdélyi's appointment as rector was due to his decades of research and teaching spent in Kolozsvár. My findings reveal that this was not true.
5. Why did not Erdélyi (who retired in 1938) return to the main monastery of his order, Pannonhalma or to Zalaapáti? Unfortunately, the sources have no reassuring answer to the decision of the Archabbey.

3. The Aim of the Research

The aim of my research was to explore the career of László Gyula Erdélyi and by doing so, to trace how a Benedictine monk became a university professor in the last decade of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. I also aimed to show the places that shaped Erdélyi's personality, with special regard to the people around him and their influence on his academic career,

At the heart of my doctoral research was the process of becoming a university professor, which Erdélyi began in Kolozsvár and completed in Szeged. My aim was to gain the most and best possible insight into Professor Erdélyi's activities as a

lecturer and then full professor and the university posts he held, including his deanships in Kolozsvár and Szeged and his position as Rector in Szeged).

A further aim of the research was to collect data on the existence of so-called 'kincés' (those members of the order living outside the order) in the given period of time, an aspect that will answer the question of how science and religion appear and intermingle during a person's life course. Furthermore, my research provides data for a more nuanced understanding of the role of the Benedictine Order in society (education and youth education) in the early 20th century through the figure and personality of Erdélyi.

An additional goal was also a compilation of a Erdélyi's work in a personal bibliography, which is a good representation of the professor's more than four decades of research in history.

4. Methods and Tools of the Dissertation

In order to achieve my research objectives, I had to examine the legacy of László Erdélyi in the main Library of Pannonhalma Abbey in Győr-Moson-Sopron County, Hungary.

Erdélyi's legacy is extremely rich and varied. In addition to Erdélyi's personal papers, the personal collection contains a large amount of correspondence spanning his entire career, copies of university minutes, notes on the history of the Order of Pannonhalma, and various other manuscripts on several subjects.

The first threads of the legacy led to the archival records kept in the Abbey, which contained information on the history of the Order and on Erdélyi's application for the university cathedra.

The documents I found in the Pannonhalma bequest also made it necessary to examine other archival documents. Therefore, I also consulted the archives of the Faculty of Theology, Budapest and the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Budapest as well.

The archives of the University of Szeged where period records of the Ferenc József University of Szeged can be found, helped me understand Erdélyi's academic career and his life in Transylvania (especially the minutes and records of the Faculty of Humanities and the Rector's Office).

Erdélyi's correspondence which is in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) manuscript archives and the National Archives of Hungary (MNL OL), and the diaries of Sándor Márki, partly published and partly kept in the city of Gyula, provided basic reference points in understanding Erdélyi's activities in Transylvania.

In addition to the archival sources, the dissertation drew also on various national and local newspaper reports.

4. Expected Scientific Results

The dissertation has a threefold scientific result:

- a. With respect to the Monarchy and the University of Cluj: Erdélyi became a university member in 1911, by which time everything was "set up." He was Professor in Kolozsvár during the time of the Monarchy and during and after the First World War.
- b. The dissertation outlines a more nuanced picture of university life in Szeged between the two World Wars through the academic portrait of Erdélyi and his academic career.
- c. It contributes to the field of university archontology in Hungary

4. Publications Pertaining to the Topic of Dissertation

- 2022 „From the University Pulpit of Cluj to the Opening Ceremony of the Academic Year in Szeged. The Journey and Life of Two Professors in the Light of Newspapers and Memoirs. The Legacy of László Gyula Erdélyi and Sándor Márki.” In: *Acta Historiae Litterarum Hungaricarum*, 2022 (37-38)/ 6-7: 223-237.
2022. „The Commemorative Year of Saint Emeric. The View from a Benedictine Professor.” In: *Veritatis Imago* (accepted for publication) (*Veritatis Imago*, 2022, évfolyam, 3-4 szám)
Veritatis Imago http://veritatisimago.hu/VeritatisImago_2022_3-4.pdf
2021. „Adalékok az 1921-ben egyetemi várossá váló Szeged történetéhez a napilapok és a visszaemlékezések tükrében – Erdélyi László Gyula és Márki Sándor hagyatéka alapján.” In: *Veritatis Imago*.2021. évfolyam 2.szám 18-30. Web: http://veritatisimago.hu/Vi_XI_JanzsoK.pdf
2020. „A szegedi egyetem és a Csanádi püspökség együttműködése 1920 és 1930 között.” In: *Veritatis Imago*, 2019/2-2020/1. évfolyam 1. szám, 27-39.
Web: Veritatis Imago http://veritatisimago.hu/Vi_VII_JanzsoK.pdf
2019. „Adalékok a Szent Imre emlékévk szegedi eseményeihez.” In: *Laborator assiduus. A 70 éves Zombori István köszöntése* Budapest: BMTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet - Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltár, 27-41.
2016. „Episcopus, Archiabbaas Benedictinus, Historicus Ecclesiae.” In: *Vigilia Tanulmányok Várszegi Asztrik 70. születésnapjára* 2016 (81/ 6): 475-476.
2016. „Egy bencés egyetemi tanár a pannonhalmi rendházon kívül. A bencés hétköznapi lét Pannonhalmától Zalaapátiig. Erdélyi László Gyula emlékére.” In: *Episcopus, Archiabbaas Benedictinus, Historicus Ecclesiae Tanulmányok Várszegi Asztrik 70. születésnapjára*, Szerk.: Somorjai Ádám OSB, Zombori István, Budapest: Magyar Egyháztörténeti Enciklopédia Munkaközösség, 125-140.
2014. Janzsó Károly: Egy életpálya képekben (A történész professzor emlékezete) Szeged.26 (2014) 10. szám 26-29.