



The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation in Medieval Studies

of

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on

Private Monasteries of Medieval Hungary (Eleventh to Fourteenth Centuries): A Case Study of the Ákos Kindred and its Monasteries

will be held on

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Central European University (CEU)
Nádor u. 11., Budapest**

Examination Committee

- Chair László Kontler (Department of History – CEU)
- Members Xavier Barral-Altet (Paris-Sorbonne University)
- István Petrovics (University of Szeged) – external reader, present
- Beátrix Romhányi (Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church) – external reader, present
- Adrian Rusu (Romanian Academy of Sciences, Cluj Napoca)
- Gerhard Jaritz (Department of Medieval Studies – CEU)
- József Laszlovszky (Department of Medieval Studies – CEU) – principal supervisor
- Béla Zsolt Szakács (Department of Medieval Studies – CEU) – associate supervisor
- External Readers István Petrovics (University of Szeged) – present
- Beátrix Romhányi (Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church) – present

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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

The former abbey church of Ákos (Acâș, Romania) is one of the most important Romanesque monuments of medieval Hungary. It is a good example to illustrate the complex issues of the so-called “kindred monasteries.”

Historiography: Concepts, Terminology and Problems.

The introductory chapter reassesses the conceptual framework and the terminology, synthesizing the main debates and results on kindreds and their monasteries in. Art historians, archaeologists, social historians, and ecclesiastical historians have all elaborated their own concepts, methodologies, and terminology, sometimes influencing each other. But, the reciprocal borrowings of concepts were often made without proper critiques and no attempt was made at a systematic integration.

Kindred monasteries were originally defined as those founded by noble families to serve as links between the different branches of related families. They were used as common burial places and as cult centers. All private monasteries were first referred to in the scholarship as “kindred monasteries,” an artificial linguistic construct, as such a term does not appear in the sources. After WWII, new socio-historical research led to new developments, most importantly separating the historical meaning of “kindred” as the social elite from related concepts of social organization, the system of inheritance and property rights. In this latter sense, a kindred was the assembly of male-line descendants of an ancestor who enjoyed special rights of inheritance and property.

The foundation and patronage of monasteries was linked to the concept of the social elite, which kindreds used to develop and express their influence and social status. Some kindreds emphasized their lineage’s connections with historical figures by calling themselves *de genere* (descendants) of famous ancestors. The importance of origins was also marked in the use of certain heraldic signs, their preference for certain first names, and certain elements of the oral historical tradition of kindreds – several of them incorporated in narratives on national history. All of these legitimized kindreds through increased prestige. The foundation of monasteries could plausibly be an element of such strategies through the cult of the ancestors. There were, however, prestigious kindreds who do not seem to have patronized any monastery and there were other kindreds that founded two or even more monasteries, which suggests that the role of monasteries was more complex than only the veneration of ancestors. Focusing on the relationships of monasteries with patron families revealed that there were no collective foundations. Monasteries were founded by individuals and collective patronage was only the result of inheritance. In fact, monasteries were not factors in defining the concept of the kindred, as the patrons were not always identical with the whole family.

From the viewpoint of ecclesiastical history, the patronage of kindreds over monasteries fits into the general development of private patronage in medieval Hungary. It followed the development from the system of the proprietary church to the use of the *ius patronatus* terminology, maintaining the essential features related to the role and rights of patrons. Scholars came to see that the endowing of monastic foundations by the upper elite was echoed in the foundation of parish

churches and chapels by families at lower social levels. From the viewpoint of the church there was no legal difference among the types of church institutions that attracted patrons (monasteries, parish churches, and chapels) and no distinction was made among the lay founders and patrons. Monasteries founded and patronized by kindreds were significantly weaker economically than royal foundations; they did not have the same administrative, juridical, and ecclesiastical privileges.

A considerable number of abbey churches belonging to the monasteries of kindreds have been preserved, being the most significant extant architectural monuments of Hungarian Romanesque style. Royal monastic foundations were almost entirely demolished or transformed, together with cathedrals and collegiate churches. In contrast with parish churches and chapels, abbey churches are of high standards and more impressive in their decorative programs, which has been of interest to art historians. A “kindred monastery”-type church was eventually defined as a triple-aisled basilica (with variations). This art historical concept influenced the historical research in general for decades, not only in its artistic implications, but also in its social meaning. New data from field studies led to revisions of the conceptual framework as well as typological and stylistic classifications. This type of ground plan arrangement was not specific to abbey churches of monasteries with kindred patrons, but to other churches as well and stylistic connections are not restricted to certain monasteries related to a single order or patronized by a particular social class. Further architectural details, with liturgical, juridical or even economic implications, must be considered; burials seem to be the most significant as they were the most important links with the patrons.

Research Methods and Thesis Structure

Analysis of the results of the previous scholarship showed that my inquiry must start with a general overview encompassing all monasteries under private patronage, not only to those linked to kindreds, and address several basic issues, such as: How many monasteries were under patronage of kindreds or other lay persons? What was their chronological evolution, spatial distribution, and affiliation? To get answers I compiled a list of monastic foundations in Hungary made before 1400 (in the appendix), on the basis of the recently edited monastic catalogue (*Kolostor CD* by Romhányi).

It seemed important to determine the relations of monasteries with parishes in order to assess their spiritual role and social status, their location in the estate structure and relation to the patron’s residence. I limited the general analysis to the regional level, examining cases from Bihar, Szabolcs, and Szatmár counties. The results of this survey were formulated in chapter III. The socio-economic status of monasteries is further clarified through several case studies, focusing on the relation of patrons with their monasteries and on the management of the estates (in chapter IV).

In the context of the scarcity of relevant sources, all available types of sources on monasteries should be used with joint methodology: charters and other narrative sources, archaeological discoveries and art historical considerations. Moreover, it became clear that the history of each monastery should be integrated into the genealogical evolution of the patron kindred and the history of their possessions. The case of Ákos kindred was fortunate, as the Abbey of Ákos is

among the best preserved Romanesque monuments and the results of its architectural and archaeological analyses (discussed in chapter VI) can be integrated in the history of the patron kindred (presented in chapter V).

A four-stage research methodology was adopted: A general overview, a regional survey, case studies focusing on the relation of monasteries with their patrons and the management of the estates, and, finally, a case study of the Ákos kindred and the Abbey of Ákos, where the detailed architectural and archaeological information was integrated in the history of the kindred. Turning from the case of Ákos to general issues, the conclusions formulated at each research stage can be generalized to other contexts.

Results of the General Survey

From about 480 monasteries founded in Hungary before 1400, roughly one half – 234 – of the monasteries were under private patronage. To identify the patrons it was necessary to compile the types of patronage (royal, ecclesiastical and private). I conclude that change in the type of patronage was rather rare and special. The chronological distribution of private foundations reflects the general development of monasticism in medieval Hungary. The origins date back to the eleventh century, although monasteries were founded in greater numbers during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The practice of foundation continued in later periods, but with significant changes in regard to affiliation. While almost all private foundations were Benedictine until the last decades of the twelfth century, during the next century the Premonstratensians became more popular. During the fourteenth century, private foundations were directed toward the Pauline Hermits – which became the most popular order in this period – and toward the mendicants. The number of private Cistercian houses remained rather low in Hungary. This evolution indicates a shift in strategies of patronage and suggests that the roles of monasteries belonging to the classic monastic orders were gradually taken over by mendicants and Paulines from the fourteenth century. People of lower social status practiced private patronage at lesser churches (parishes and chapels), but with identical patterns. The spatial distribution of private monasteries shows that they were rare on the peripheries of the kingdom and in Transylvania, which is explained by the geographical and natural conditions and the special social organizations existing there. Moreover, the smaller number of monasteries in the central part of the Hungarian Great Plain, corresponding roughly to the territories under Ottoman rule during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is explained by the massive destruction in these regions.

Private Monasteries in the Ecclesiastical and Socio-Economic Topography

Cases from Bihar, Szatmár, and Szabolcs counties were analyzed based on papal tithe lists and the estate-map by P. Engel. It became clear that parish boundaries and their network were strongly correlated with the estates and not the settlements themselves. Furthermore, the implication of monasteries for pastoral care assumed by the previous scholarship is less evident. The tithe lists attest a weaker economic status for monasteries under private patronage, while other sources reveal the complex topography of churches inside a settlement; besides abbey churches, there were separate parish churches, and also occasionally other types of churches. Furthermore, it became clear that abbeys were surrounded by the estates of their patrons in almost all cases. Although the

inner topography of the estates remains unclear due to lack of data, from these case studies showed that the site of a private monastery was more or less central in the topography of the estate. The most important feature of this topographic situation was the relation with the patrons' residence – which was fortified in several cases.

The advantages of a monastery being located at the heart of estate and close to the residence of the patrons, however, left monasteries vulnerable to the patrons. The patrons, following cultural custom, were directly involved in administering monastic estates and managing their economic resources. The cases of Zselicszentjakab and Ják show that in the early stage the properties of private monastic foundations were administered jointly by the abbots and patrons. Later, during the fourteenth century, patrons often turned against the monasteries, aiming to secularize their possessions. Zselicszentjakab and Ják are not the only examples in this period of abbeys that lost their properties to their patrons. These examples imply that despite conflicts, both abbeys were concerned to get help and protection from secular patrons. Theoretically (and according to canon law), private foundations were landowners with full control over their properties. In practice, however, they could administer their estates only with the help of patrons.

The economic status of the monasteries was dual; they were proprietors, but at the same time properties. Similarly, the relationship with the patrons evolved dually; income and properties were sometimes lost to patrons, but most private foundations managed to survive in a weakened condition. This suggests that monasteries continued to fill several functions for the patrons and the wider community – probably closely related to the spiritual functions of the monastery, among which the most important seem to have been burial places and the commemorative liturgy performed there. The interdependent relations among patrons and their monasteries weakened through the centuries and were transformed to some extent, but did not cease to exist entirely.

The Ákos kindred and its monasteries: The case of the Abbey of Ákos

The Abbey of Ákos is among the best preserved Romanesque monuments in the former Hungarian Kingdom. Few charters are directly linked to the abbey, but the patron kindred – called, like the monastery, Ákos – was among the most ancient and influential kindreds in the kingdom. Members of the family had important administrative positions as high as the office of palatine during the Árpáadian Age. At a later stage, the kindred disintegrated into several branches and, although some members still had bright careers, others, among them the owners of the village of Ákos and a monastery, gradually lost almost all of their possessions.

The estates owned by the kindred can be grouped roughly into three main blocks: One along the Berettyó River, one along the Éri in Bihar and Közép Szolnok Counties, and a third in Pest County in the lower valley of the Galga River. Three early monastic foundations were made, each corresponding to a block of estates. Among them, the monastery of Ákos in Közép Szolnok seems to have been the earliest, founded during the last decades of the twelfth century. The relations of the descendants of the kindred with the early monasteries weakened gradually and led to the abandonment or the dissolution of the kindred's ancestral monastic establishments.

The architectural and archaeological research on Ákos Abbey is a significant contribution to the study of monasteries under private patronage. The triple-aisled basilica with the western tower and

gallery, the eastern altars, and oratories with the side-chapel indicate the demands and ambitious program of the founder(s), above the average level seen in the region in that period. The monastic complex was surrounded by a ditch in the early phase, but besides the chapel no other buildings are known. The architectural features and finds, among them burials, fit into the group of monastic sites of this period. These discoveries yielded a detailed and accurate picture of a twelfth century abbey under private patronage, probably built in connection with an early residence of the patron kindred.

Conclusions

The general overview on the private patronage proved that this concept is more adequate to describe the relation of patrons with their monasteries, and to explain their evolution. Its validity is wider both in social and chronological sense: it applies for lower social strata, not only to the elites formed by noble kindreds; it can be detected in later periods in relation with Pauline and mendicant foundations. There are no architectural features which can be detected as typical for this group, but several elements related to the functions linked to the patrons can be detected. Among these the most important are the burials which can be detected at all sites researched with archaeological methods. The case study of the Ákos Abbey fits well into these results of the general overview as offers good comparative material: the side chapel, burials and grave goods. The fate of the Abbey is also paradigmatic, as only the abbey church is preserved, transformed to parish church after the dissolution of the monastery.

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Szőcs Péter Levente

Work experience: County Museum Satu Mare, archaeologist from July 1997 to December 2001; researcher from January 2002; deputy director and researcher from March 2005

Studies:

- 1992-1996 Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Physics, licenced in Physics (BSc)
- 1993-1997 Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of History and Philosophy, licenced in History (BA)
- 1997-1998 Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of History and Philosophy, postgraduate studies in International Relations and History of Central and East Europe
- 1998-2001 PhD student at Eötvös Lóránt University, Institute of Archaeology
- 2001-2001, Medieval Studies Department, CEU, Budapest, MA
- 2003-2004, PhD student at Medieval Studies Department, CEU, Budapest

Research activities

- Organizer of eight editions of the conference on *Medieval Ecclesiastical Architecture in Transylvania*, Satu Mare/Romania and Nyíregyháza: December 1998; September 2000; November 2002; October 2004; February 2007; October 2008; Oct. 2010; March 2013
- Editor-coordinator of five volume *Arhitectura Medievală Religioasă din Transilvania / Középkori Egyházi Építészet Erdélyben / Medieval Ecclesiastical Architecture in Transylvania*, vol 1: Satu Mare 1999; vol. 2: Satu Mare 2002; vol. 3: Satu Mare 2004; vol. 4: Satu Mare 2007; vol. 5: Satu Mare 2012.
- Colaborator of the editor of the volume *Középkori egyházi építészet Szatmárban. Középkori templomok útja Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg és Szatmár megyékben* [Medieval Ecclesiastical Architecture in Satu Mare. Route of Medieval Churches in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Satu Mare Counties]. Nyíregyháza 2011. Ed. Kollár Tibor; publisher a Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Megyei Önkormányzat
- Participant in the joint project of the Medieval and Early Modern Department of Georg-August University, Göttingen and the Medieval Studies Department, CEU, Budapest *Medieval Monastic Regions in Central Europe – (The Spiritual and Physical Landscape Setting of Monastic Orders and Religious Houses*
- Participant in the project *Route of Medieval Churches in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Satu Mare Counties* implemented by the County Council Satu Mare and County of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, financed by Hungary-Romania Cross-Border Co-operation Programme
- Coordinator and Manager of the projects Patrimonium, Patrimonium2, Castellum and Cult-Tour implemented by the County Museum Satu Mare and Jósa András Museum, Nyíregyháza, and financed by Hungary-Romania Cross-Border Co-operation Programme
- Introduction in Medieval Archaeology, course taught at the Babeş-Bolyai University, history, archaeology and art history specializations, Hungarian language line, semester II year 2010/2011; and semester II year 2012/2013.

Conference Papers related to the topic of the dissertation

- March 2009, Budapest, Conference on *Monastic Landscapes – Physical and Spiritual*, organized by Early Modern Department of Georg-August University, Göttingen and Medieval Studies Department, CEU, Budapest with paper: *Parishes in a Monastic Landscape: Ecclesiastic Topography in East-Central Hungary from the 12th to 14th Centuries*.
- September 2009, Budapest, Conference on *Ecclesiastical topography in East-Central Europe. Methods, problems and possibilities*, organized by Károli Gáspár University and Medieval Studies Department, CEU, with paper: *Parishes and monasteries in Counties of Szatmár, Szabolcs and Bihar*.
- April 2010, Göttingen, Conference on *Monastic Topography and Ecclesiastical Topography*, organized by Early Modern Department of Georg-August University, Göttingen and Medieval Studies Department, CEU, Budapest with paper: *Monasteries within the Parish Network and Estate System. Case of North-Western Hungary during the 13th and 14th centuries*.
- October 2014, Alba Iulia, Conference on *Monastic Life, Art and Technology, 11th – 16th century* organized by the University of Alba Iulia, with the paper: *Monasteries under private patronage within the social and economic topography: centers, residences, estates. Several case studies of Medieval Hungary*

Published works related to the topic of the dissertation

- „The Abbey Church of Ákos: The Architectural and Functional Analysis of a ‘Kindred Monastery’ Church”. *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*. IX (2003). 155-180.
- „Az ákosi református templom régészeti kutatása” [Research of the Calvinist Church of Ákos]. In: *Középkori egyházi építészet Szatmárban. Középkori templomok útja Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg és Szatmár megyékben*. [Medieval Ecclesiastical Architecture in Satu Mare. Route of Medieval Churches in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Satu Mare Counties]. Ed. Tibor Kollár et al., 60-65. Nyíregyháza: Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Megyei Önkormányzat, 2011.
- „Cercetarea arheologică a bisericii din Acâș” [Research of the Calvinist Church of Ákos]. In *Arhitectura religioasă medievală din Satu Mare* [Medieval Ecclesiastical Architecture in Satu Mare. Route of Medieval Churches in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Satu Mare Counties]. Ed. Tibor Kollár et al., 60-65. Nyíregyháza: Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Megyei Önkormányzat, 2011.
- “Az ákosi monostor és az Ákos nemzetség” [The Ákos Monastery and the Ákos kindred]. In *A Szilágyság és a Wesselényi család (14–17. század)* [The Szilágy Region and the Wesselényi Family]. Ed. Géza Hegyi and András W. Kovács, 7–24. Kolozsvár-Cluj: EME, 2012.