

DEPENDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE. THE FUNCTIONING OF THE CALVINIST COLLEGE OF SÁROSPATAK FROM 1793 TO 1830

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The main purpose of the thesis is to demonstrate the system, financial operation and student community of the Calvinist College of Sárospatak in order to gain an insight into the major aspects of the quotidian life of a school which in its time, dating back 200 years, was of decisive importance. The thesis, which deals mainly with the first third of the XIXth century, endeavours to unveil the connection between numerous initiations unique in their time and the maintainers and economic conditions of the college. According to our supposition the unusual flexibility of its syllabus (the rapid introduction of the Hungarian language and that of the science subjects, the realization of practical reading of the law) and in a political sense comparative radicalism (e.g. Sándor Kövi's "County of Páncél", Lajos Kossuth, Bertalan Szemere and László Palóczy who were among the students) could have been related to the absence of a well-definable and responsible maintainer and to the "dependent independence" of the institution further exacerbated by the necessity of self-maintenance.

Our dissertation, which amalgamates mostly educational, social historical and economic historical approaches, is divided into three main parts. In chapters 2 and 3 the political, social and educational relations of Hungary (and partly that of the Habsburg Monarchy) of the age are depicted, then in chapters 4-6 the system of the college as far as its management, organization and the financial sources of its operation are concerned and the main characteristics of its students are scrutinized. Finally, in chapters 7-9 we were mainly interested in the quality factors of college-life (the housing, sanitary, and disciplinary conditions of students), the changing of the syllabus, the further educational possibilities available outside the college, and other ways of gaining experience besides the college. At the end of each chapter we also attempted to talk briefly about the college in Debrecen, which was the biggest Calvinist one. Although this time a separate research into its history was not carried out, as it had already been dealt with earlier numerous times and plenty of material is provided about it by specialised literature, which, however, offered an opportunity for us to make comparisons with our statements about the college in Sárospatak.

Prior to writing the thesis we tried to map the total source material as far as certain questions were concerned, while in the case of other ones we selected sample years in order to demonstrate. The documents pertaining to the quality factors of the college, the student self-government and to the leading and management of the institution in general as well as to certain emphasized economic problems (e.g. the gathering of donors and of those participating in endowments, the issue of salaries of teachers) belong to the first group listed. By the way of selecting sample years we endeavoured to scrutinize the documents that were at our disposal in large quantities (e.g. lists of students, the affairs of everyday management of the school and the question of the praeceptors and festive collection of donations, which had already been dealt with earlier). There was a special emphasis put on the

working up of certain bigger group of sources (e.g. the total amount of documents about the student rebellion and the autobiographical statements of approximately 200 ministers), as we would hope to draw complex conclusions from these.

The results of the research work and the major statements of the thesis

Beforehand, the absence of a reliable, responsible maintainer regarding it also as a priority to assume his responsibility was usually only of secondary importance and was not stressed out properly when considering and scrutinizing the life of the Calvinist college in Sárospatak. In the course of the historical development no provision was made for the school. Neither the landowners nor the institution itself (i.e. the church) helped in sustenance and the school received no help of individual nature from the community (from the citizens) either. Thus in the period we are dealing with there was a unique amalgamation of voices of different kinds to intervene in the life of the college: the church district and the dioceses, the major patrons, the members of the Calvinist congregation who were not so affluent but sent their donations together with their children to Sárospatak and the school itself, which, due to the insufficient nature of external financial sources, was forced to partial self-maintenance in economic areas. The total indifference of Sárospatak - a town of negligible size and opulence, denominationally also divided - towards its institution is in itself of decisive importance, it is even more so when compared with the attitude of Debrecen. While the citizens of Debrecen made all efforts to promote the life of their college in numerous ways, the superiors of Sárospatak got in touch with the leaders of the institute only in case of examining a scandal or having counter-interests in business affairs.

Considering all these aspects it is to be seen how the power relations influencing the life of the school changed rapidly, almost unpredictably in accordance with the actual balance of forces within quite a short period of time. The consequent carrying out of long-term qualitative and quantitative improvements, which would have been of strategic importance, and immediate decision-making were made almost impossible. This was due to several factors: e.g. the survival of the significance of traditional student self-government; the sphere of authority of teachers, especially that of the rector-professor, which became much more of formal and of negligible nature than it was supposed to be; the behaviour of clerical and non-clerical leaders and forums, struggling with misunderstandings even with one another, although using every opportunity to interfere in the insignificant everyday affairs of the school. Concerning the improvements one of the best examples of facing hindrances is the case of the constructional work, which was for then years dragging on struggling with impediments almost all through our chosen period of time. Pertaining to the measures taken with difficulties the scandalous student rebellion, which was unprecedented and finally abated without consequences, is to be mentioned. However, out of the complicated and hectically changing relations and system of correlations three unambiguously emerging tendencies are to be noticed: the first is the slow but continuous decrease of the sphere of authority of the student self-government; the second - going on in parallel with the first - is the gaining of more and more expertise-like qualities in institutional management; while the third is the increase in significance of the teaching staff in the leading of the school.

Due to the absence of a powerful maintainer the school was forced to get involved in ramifying and versatile management activities, which fossilized its unique alloy of dependence and independence. The quintessence of this at first was provided by landed property and wine-growing economy, which later were replaced by the more profitable granting of credit, thus the institution could obtain a reliable source of income that could have been comparatively well planned and counted on. This supplied a relative freedom for the school, as it was able to establish contacts with its business partners, participating in business affairs as an equal party, thus was able to lessen the sphere of authority of the student self-government. In order to achieve this, there was an increased need for donations and offerings enriching the capital and as these were arriving rather unpredictably, the college got into a dependent pecuniary condition again. In absence of wealthy members of the congregation and their financial contribution the capital could not be increased, thus the amount available for lending and the appropriate results were difficult to augment. Having examined the geographical and social composition of donors we came to the conclusion that offerings arrived mostly from the members of the Calvinist congregation who were of various social and pecuniary positions and were mainly from the immediate surroundings of Sárospatak and from the counties of Zemplén, Abaúj, Szabolcs, Szatmár, Borsod and Gömör. The activity of the members of the Szabolcs and Szatmár congregations, although formally belonging to the college of Debrecen on the basis of their location, is conspicuous as well. It is interesting that the smaller fortunes bequeathed to the school by will came in many cases from people who were not so well-off. On the other hand, by identifying the donors of much bigger, though rarer donations we could also see that there existed a group of prosperous Calvinist patrons, whose members, deeply concerned about the life of the college, were average landowners from the regions of Zemplén and Szabolcs.

The festive collection of donations was of different nature, in the course of which the members of the congregation were stimulated, or, in other words, forced to make their offerings. This traditional source of income was a comparatively certain and secure one, one that made the members of the congregation rather dependent, though. On the other hand, concerning legal matters and affairs of supplication the school appeared to be quite effective when taking firm actions against central institutional prohibitions. Similarly, appearing as an institute bearing with much autonomy, it was quite successful in achieving compromises with the adjacent parent school, in preventing the congregations from changing sides, in storing and transporting of the wheat and wine given as offerings in parallel with the money. Although the tuition fee and other necessary private contributions put a heavy demand directly on the generosity of families, these sources of income were of utmost importance in school-maintenance and in the continuity of education. The biggest amount to be paid on a regular basis was naturally the salary of teachers. Concerning this pecuniary matter we came to the conclusion that teachers did not receive a satisfying and adequate amount of money. Part of their payment was still given in kind and their accommodation and system of superannuation were not settled as well. They often had to credit to the school, which was unable to pay even their emoluments. Similarly, the financial condition of the institution was not sufficient enough to properly honour its most prominent professors. This financial instability exerted an inauspicious influence on the pace of establishing newer departments or introducing new subjects and it had an adverse effect on the quality and fluctuation of the teaching staff.

Geographically the domiciles of the 1000-1700 college students were in accordance with that of the donors. The majority of students – apart from the non-togated – arrived from the counties of Church Districts of cis-Tisza and from the counties of Szabolcs, Szatmár and Bereg, which were from beyond the Tisza. Also, there were students arriving from the counties of Pest and Veszprém. However, it is worth noticing that there were only a few students from Borsod, the county where strong and populous Calvinist churches were to be found. From a denominational and ethnical point of view the college had open and bilateral relations: Evangelical students arriving from Szepes and Calvinist ones from Bohemia were taking part in all levels and forms of instruction on a regular basis. The group of the non-togated students of law was heterogeneous as far as their domicile was concerned: Calvinist, Evangelical and Greek Orthodox Romanian and Serbian students were coming from all over the country. The number of students of noble birth was still preponderant among the students, while in Debrecen the composition was predominantly bourgeois in its nature. Interestingly enough, students of gentle descent happened to be few in the college as their families, who played a crucial role in helping the institution and in the non-clerical management of the church district, educated their children in the school only for a short period of time. Having taken a closer look at the financial condition of the junior students (classists) it became apparent that in parallel with the social provisions the possibilities available were always taken into consideration and adhered to in the college: the number of apprentices who were supported also with a reduction of the tuition fee and with the granting of working possibilities was adjusted precisely to the number of noble students studying there in that very year. It is an interesting fact that only few students were granted scholarships and as the donor patrons had a decisive word in how to use up the alms, parts of the scholarship foundation were only to help the relatives of the benevolent givers. The changing in the age-composition of students indicates that despite the difficulties the social function of the school could relatively well function: the considerable advantage of time of young gentlemen over the other students, which in some cases even went up to four years, decreased to one by the last year in the school. The reason for this on one hand was the faster progress of the apprentices. On the other hand, those young masters who did not intend to carry on further studies finished attending the school well before its actual ending.

The financial situation of the college and of the majority of the students had a decisive influence on the conditions of school-life. The effects of the overcrowded schedule (still traditional in its nature) and the measures, which were leaving the characteristics of the different age-groups out of consideration, were further exacerbated by financial difficulties: the insufficient accommodation provided for the students, the lack of adequate water and exercise together with the complete ignoring of communal meals made it difficult for the students to stay in a good physical condition. Although we did not come across documents giving accounts of major epidemics, it became obvious that the institute could achieve only modest results concerning the prevention and healing of diseases. The frequent student offences, which were in direct correlation with the confinement, the strict and cold rules and the difficult circumstances, pointed to the fact that the school could not render itself independent from its environment and was unable to provide a "tranquil island" for its students.

In the final chapter of our thesis we endeavoured to examine the forms and possibilities of learning that complemented the studies of students outside the college. Every year approximately 10-30 students could

participate in a "student exchange programme" (peregrinatio) in Szepes, which in part made up for the lack of German language teaching. In an ideal case this involved a surprisingly great number of participators. However, due to financial reasons and a considerable loss of time, out of the two possibilities – the studying of the German language in Szepes, and the later more favourable visiting of the academies in the Netherlands and in German territories – only one was possible to take advantage of for the students intending to carry on further studies, which reduced the value of the first part of the time spent in peregrination. In order to promote the financial situation of students, (so that not only the wealthiest but others also could participate in the peregrinations) the college provided possibilities of rural school mastering for the togated seniors. The way this clear-cut institution – available for a considerable number of students – developed in the course of time could in itself symbolize the dependence and independence of the school together with an alloy of backwardness and modernity: while this source of income enjoyed a high popularity among the seniors and even the school insisted on it as a means of providing a continuous influence over the particulars, the members of the congregation were not glad at all about having new, still inexperienced teachers in every two or three years. Moreover, the school mastering, which induced heavy recurrent disputes about the salary of new teachers, fundamentally hindered the organizing of a thoroughgoing (although quite costly) teacher-training within the walls of the college.

As it turns out of the statements about Debrecen, which are at the end of the chapters, the major difference between the two colleges lay in their different maintainers. In a town like Debrecen, which was one of the biggest and most prosperous cities and quite homogeneous in its composition, a school could function in a completely different way. With solid financial support more settled conditions could be provided due to which the professors could exercise their influence more effectively than their colleagues in Patak and could attain an increasingly exclusive role in the internal leading of the college at the cost of the student self-government. Due to the urban provision – and to the city-life – better conditions could be provided for the students. Similarly, new vistas of making a fortune were opened up before the more talented and luckier professors and even the developmental projects could be realized within a shorter period of time than in Sárospatak. It should also be mentioned as an important difference that in Debrecen the proportion of students of noble descent and that of those participating in academic training was much smaller.

Despite the more unified leading and the more propitious financial situation the college of Debrecen was also struggling with sanitary and disciplinary problems similar to those in Patak. It seems that concerning these areas the financial means were not of decisive importance, it was rather the general condition of the society and mentality that left its mark on the internal relations of the school. Similarly, in the history of the two colleges no substantial difference could be pointed out pertaining to the peregrination and school-mastering. Moreover, there are certain signs pointing to the fact that concerning the size of particula-networks and the number and proportion of students participating in the peregrinatio the advantage of the college in Debrecen was actually smaller than earlier supposed.

When comparing the development in the time-table of the two colleges there are informative and edifying differences to be found. According to this in Debrecen the syllabus altered more calculably and at a more regular pace: the regular teaching of science subjects and modern foreign languages was introduced earlier than in Sárospatak, where they were always struggling with financial difficulties. On the other hand, in Sárospatak, when a few

determined personalities (e.g. chief warden József Vay or Professor Sándor Kövi) took action, even exceedingly progressive ideas could be realized at a surprising speed. On the other hand, due to the much more factors deciding the management, a unified regression - like the one that was going on in Debrecen or the one happening in our age - could have no chance whatever on the long run. In the college of Sáropatak, which had a more versatile background, questions concerning the Hungarian language and culture could appear much earlier. In this school of the Bodrog shore (where they kept the demands and interests of wider layers more in view than in the college of Debrecen, which had a more homogeneous base to start from) even more radical political views and public attitudes were granted a greater scope.