

Pázmány Péter Catholic University
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Doctoral School of History

Theses of the doctoral (PhD) dissertation

Political Debates Related To The Practice Of The Right Of Patronage in
Hungary In The Dualist Era

Borbély Tamás

2023

Supervisor of PhD Dissertation:
Dr. Botos Máté

Head of Doctoral School:
Dr. Óze Sándor DsC

I. Research history, problem statement

In 2009, while I was doing my research in the archives of the City of Győr, I came across the archives of the Győr Minion Conflict. I learned that the debate between Sándor Giesswein, perhaps the best-known representative of Christian-social thought in Hungary, and the mayor Károly Zechmeister on the interpretation of the right of the diocese, demonstrates the views and debates on the relationship between church and state in contemporary Hungary. Nevertheless, an examination of the literature relating to the dispute made it clear that this is not a unique and exclusive opposition that can only be linked to the city of Győr. The interpretation of the right of patronage became a source of conflict in many places, the controversies appeared on the agenda of the Parliament, in the national and local press, but the denominational press also dealt with it regularly. A survey of the literature available has also revealed to me that the issue was mainly addressed in the second half of the 19th century and in the years following the turn of the century. This era saw the publication of numerous monographs, studies and even doctoral dissertations.

The difficulty of the research was and still is that the exercise of the right of urban patronage law was not regulated. The study of urban piety has thus revealed an institutional form that was never regulated by law, but was shaped by customary law. Its practice varied from time to time and from town to town.

The towns of free royalty, and jurisdictional rights had the right of patronage law. The problem usually arose, for instance, in the case of the election and remuneration of a parish priest how the town should assert its

rights of patronage. Since the nature of civil legislation made it difficult to interpret legal formulas based on customary law and as of uncertain origin, such questions arose as which body of the town could exercise this right at all. By studying the literature on the subject, it has turned out that the question has never been resolved as to whether the right to urban piety is ecclesiastical or state law. Or, indeed, what exactly it derives from. There was also the question of whether Protestant, Jewish or Greek-Catholic councillors and members of the municipal commission could vote in the election of the Catholic parish priest. If yes, why? Or if not, why not? By considering local traditions, various practical answers have been developed, but the actual solutions have evoked conflicts in several towns. It seems obvious that the controversial cases are most typical of a period already overburdened with serious church-political struggles. It is therefore worth approaching the rather complex issue of urban piety from the perspective of political history.

II. Applied methodology

In my dissertation, I primarily examined the conflicts and political debates that burst out over the practice and interpretation of urban piety. I have therefore, on the one hand, focused on the discourse on piety, on the other hand on the political controversy behind the debates.

I have examined three specific controversial cases of urban piety, as well as the publicist and parliamentary debates of the era. I am going to introduce who the opposing parties were, as well as the arguments and opinions that emerged and how they fit into the political discourse of the period. I am presenting what role local or national politics may have played in confrontations. In addition, I am discussing possible approaches to piety from the

perspective of administrative changes, the legislation of the period affecting the churches, and other denominations and political participants. It is important to highlight that the malpractice of urban piety did not only lead to serious conflicts in the three cities I examined in my study, but a discussion of each city and each controversial case would exceed the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity, I have taken some common practices and categorized them in relation to the free royal cities.

The first important step in the research was a brief review of the literature on the history of the right of patronage, with particular attention to the origins of urban patronage and its relation to the law of the chief patronage. The latter point is inevitable, as the question of origin and relationship was of paramount importance in the debates: the relationship between urban piety and the law of the chief patronage was of fundamental importance to the participants in the debates.

Several volumes have been devoted to the question during the era, but it is the law of the chief patronage that has been the most discussed. Vilmos Fraknói, Ede Mihalovics, Ferenc Kollányi and other historians, law historians and scholars of theology have dealt with the question of urban piety, mainly in relation to the right of patronage, in a shorter or longer volume.

It is surprising that we cannot speak of such abundance in the case of the law of urban patronages, Ákos Timon dedicated a separate monograph to it, and later Andor Csizmadia covered the subject in detail. In the decades of the socialist era, urban patronage was, of course, even less at the centre of studies than it used to be. Andor Csizmadia was the only one who continued his research in this field. After the change of regime, there were again, if not

a large number of historians and theologians who dealt with the issue of urban piety.

From methodological point of view, it was essential not to consider the works written during the period, i.e. contemporary works, exclusively as literature (this is true, for example, of the works of Ákos Timon or István Antal Cserenyey). The authors themselves often "contributed" to the debates, their statements can be interpreted in the political discourse of the era, and the creation of their works was (also) motivated by these debates. Therefore, although their research and findings are inevitable points of reference, they must be treated with criticism. This is the reason why these contemporary works are considered not only as literature but also as sources.

Since the debates concerning the exercise of the right of patronage did not take place in a "vacuum", but were closely connected to the (ecclesiastical) political-, legal-, administrative- and social changes that took place during the period of dualism, it was essential to take into consideration the literature on these processes. Furthermore, the disputes detailed in my study cannot be separated from the examined municipalities, as specific local motivations were involved in the conflicts, and it was therefore necessary to review information on the local ecclesiastical and political history of the area.

In my thesis, in addition to a survey of contemporary and recent literature, I have examined archival and printed sources, as well as publicists and articles. My conditions were fortunate, as the literature published on certain conflicts included the most important sources (submissions, ministerial transcripts, position papers), as well as the positions of the parties in the dispute. Many sources were therefore also published in printed format, because

the parties of the disputes considered it important for the public to be aware of their arguments and the documents were published to support them.

III. New results, theses

I have tried to provide a comprehensive approach to the political debates related to the practice of urban piety by surveying and synthesizing the widest possible range of sources and literature. I have described the 'contributors', the most common arguments and opinions, the underlying political and legal approaches and principles, and the forums in which they may have been expressed. The objective of my thesis was to prove the following theses.

- the conflicts of the period can be approached from both a political and a social historical perspective. The political ideas behind the disputes and the 'political language' can be revealed, as well as how they are reflected in the political context of the period. The most commonly used arguments are highlighted, as well as the positions taken by the participants in the debates. I am discussing the basis on which they defended or criticised the practices they considered correct or incorrect. How were they linked to the political, social or administrative changes of the era?

- disputes concerning the exercise of the right of patronage are not peripheral and not solely theoretical. In my view, researchers often encounter only a single conflict in the course of their investigations, so according to their general perception they are isolated and purely theoretical conflicts. In contrast, I argue in my thesis that the disputes over urban piety can be characterised as a well-

known and apparently irresolvable conflict in the political public sphere of the given time period. The existing conflicts from the 1870s until the end of the dualism era (and even afterwards) were essentially the results of the unsettled status of the Catholic Church as a state church, the lack of Catholic autonomy and the legal tradition that was difficult to interpret within the framework of civil legislation, all of which contributed to the seemingly unresolvable political and legal theoretical dispute. Although to a smaller or greater extent, prominent politicians such as János Asbóth and Vilmos Vázsonyi "joined" the debate, several ministers also took official positions on specific issues. In favour of the Catholic church, among others, János Csernoch, Sándor Giesswein and Béla Bangha, as well as several locally known and prominent parish priests, made their contributions.

- In the specific situations (Szeged, Győr, Sopron), we also seek to answer the question of what local political motivations may have been behind the triggered conflicts. We believe that the controversy surrounding the right of patronage is only the surface of a deeper political-ideological or economic conflict.

- From a socio-historical point of view, I have tried to show how these disputes (along with the changes in the legal framework for churches, of course) have contributed to the social and political organisation of denominations. In my point of view, by the latest years of the 19th century, the often-echoed but increasingly fading slogan of denominational peace was masking denominational and political antagonisms (which had been pushed into the background

by the reform era). It is no coincidence that it is widely believed among Catholic ecclesiastics that the debates have contributed to the formation of Catholic organisations, to the strengthening of Catholic 'consciousness'. In the debates the interests of the Catholic Church are represented by clerics with a strong character, whose personalities are often identified in local or national church histories as having contributed to the strengthening of local Catholic society. In contrast to the Catholic position (which was 'tacitly', and sometimes even practically, supported by the state), the largest number of Catholic representatives were representatives of the Protestant denominations and Catholic representatives who advocated the separation of church and state, who accepted the liberal principles of the 19th century and who almost without exception saw the establishment of Catholic autonomy as a possible solution to the conflicts. After the turn of the century, representatives of the increasingly visible left-wing and radical movements also contributed to the debate, including a radical anti-clerical position.

IV. Publications on the topic, conference presentations

Publications

Borbély Tamás: *Dr. Giesswein Sándor és Zechmeister Károly vitája a kegyúri jog értelmezéséről*. In: Győri Tanulmányok. Zechmeister Károly emlékszáma I. Szerk.: Bana József-Dominkovits Péter-Horváth József. Győr, 2010. 85-101.

Borbély Tamás: A városi kegyúri jog gyakorlása és politikai motivációi a dualizmus korában. Viták a törvényhatósági jogú városokban. In: *Felekezeti társadalom – felekezeti műveltség. Rendi társadalom – polgári társadalom 25. A Hajnal István Kör – Társadalomtörténeti Egyesület 2011. évi, győri konferenciájának kötetete*. Szerk.: Lukács Anikó. Budapest, 2013. 314-326.

Borbély Tamás: Hitfelekezeti segély, kegyúri jog – oktatást érintő felekezeti konfliktusok a dualizmus kori Magyarországon. Sopron esete (1875–76). In: *Iskola, művelődés, társadalom. Az oktatás, nevelés és művelődés társadalomtörténeti látószögei. Rendi társadalom – polgári társadalom 29. A Hajnal István Kör – Társadalomtörténeti Egyesület 2015. évi, sárospataki konferenciájának tanulmánykötete*. Szerk.: Sasfi Csaba – Ugrai János. Budapest, 2017. 72-80.

Conference presentations

A városi kegyúri jog gyakorlása és politikai motivációi a dualizmus korában. Viták a törvényhatósági jogú városokban. Felekezeti társadalom – felekezeti műveltség. A Hajnal István Kör – Társadalomtörténeti Egyesület 2011. évi győri konferenciája. Győr, 2011. szeptember 2.

Hitfelekezeti segély, kegyúri jog – oktatást érintő felekezeti konfliktusok a dualizmus kori Magyarországon. Sopron esete (1875–76). Iskola, művelődés, társadalom. A Hajnal István Kör – Társadalomtörténeti Egyesület 2015. évi sárospataki konferenciája. Sárospatak, 2015. augusztus 28.

A városi kegyuraság és politikai viták a dualizmus korában – Kassa példája. Az Egyházak kultúráközvetítő szerepe Északkelet-Magyarországon a 16-20. században. Eger, 2023. április 4.