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Abstract.

The Evangelical A. V. College in Prešov has been one of the most important Protestant educational institutions in the Kingdom of Hungary since its inception. At the time of its establishment, in the second half of the 17th century, it was not only the first and for a long time the only evangelical a. v. university in the country but also an important political institution, shaping a whole generation of personalities of the social and cultural life of Upper and Lower Hungary. Also for this reason, the activity of the college was temporarily stopped by the state power after several decades, and its planned transformation into a university could not take place. Although in the following century, during the non-violent re-Catholicization, its status temporarily dropped to the level of a secondary school, during the period of tolerance, after 1781, it quickly achieved the status of one of the most important evangelical educational institutions and the title of district college. In the first half of the 19th century, it already had two high-quality university courses, thanks to which it joined a group of universities, academies,

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making up a special form of the lowest level of university education in Hungarian conditions and a kind of institutional transition to a university. Even though its implementation was again prevented by stormy regional events, the college continued to be an important stand of education and research.

Keywords: Evangelical a. v. college, Prešov, Kingdom of Hungary, Protestant educational institutions, university education in Hungary

The Prešov College was the first and for a long time the only higher evangelical school in Hungary and one of the most important educational institutions in the country.

As a result of the changes in the international situation and the deterioration of relations between the Habsburgs and the German Protestant states, the possibilities of studying at German universities had become increasingly limited in the second half of the century, and it became necessary to introduce theological studies in Hungary. Also, the growing activity of the two Jesuit universities necessitated the establishment of a college or a Protestant higher education institution that could be a worthy counterbalance to them.

The best conditions for the establishment of such a school were in the east of the country. While in the west the Counter-Reformation had achieved great success in the preceding years, the Upper Highlands had been only minimally affected. In 1665, the Upper Hungarian Protestant Estates decided to establish the Evangelical College as the only Protestant higher education institution in the country. For a number of reasons, the delegates of the estates chose the free royal town of Prešov as the site for the school and publicly proclaimed the foundation of the college at their meeting in Košice on 18 November 1665.² In view of the high costs of building and furnishing the school – when they could not rely on any state aid –, the Estates appealed for help to all Hungarian and European Protestants.³

² Štátny archív Prešov (ŠA Prešov) [State Archives in Presov]. EKP, 101: Zakladajúca listina Prešovského evanjelického kolégia z 18. novembra 1665 [Founding Document of the Prešov Evangelical College from 18 November 1665].

³ Ibid.

Protestant townsmen, landowners, and magnates donated various sums of money, real estate, and the income from it for the construction. The town of Prešov allocated the revenues of the municipalities of Kojatice and Chmiňany⁴ and two other noble estates for its university. In the following months, the collection continued throughout the country and abroad. In addition to the Estates of Transylvania, German towns, some Protestant German princes, Dutch towns, as well as the Danish and Swedish kings, who themselves donated 20,000 guilders,⁵ contributed considerable sums to the college. Thanks to them, the total amount collected at the beginning of 1666 was more than 50,000 guilders.⁶

Shortly before the completion of the construction, on 16 April 1667, an agreement was concluded between the Upper Highland Estates and the Free Royal Town of Prešov on the joint use and management of the future college. Since the opening of the college meant the disappearance of the former Prešov grammar school, the new school also fulfilled its tasks. Among other important issues, the professors, inspectors, and curators of the college were finally appointed.⁷

All professors and teachers were to be devoted adherents of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession and equally highly educated. The school was initially headed by Dr Michael Pancratius, the last rector of the city school and prefect of the college. His place was taken over in October 1667 by the first rector, Dr Samuel Pomarius, an eminent theologian, a graduate of several German universities. Before accepting the invitation to Prešov,⁸ he was an evangelical pastor in Magdeburg. Among other prominent personalities, the famous philosophers Isaac Caban and Elias Ladiver were especially active at the College. In addition to their many philosophical works, they

⁴ They were the last vassal villages belonging to Prešov.

⁵ KORABINSKY, Johann Matthias (1786): *Geographisch-historisches und Produkten Lexikon von Ungarn* [Geographical-Historical and Product Lexicon of Hungary]. Pressburg. 154.

⁶ HÖRK, József (1896): *Az Eperjesi ev. ker. Collegium története* [History of the Evangelical College in Prešov]. Kassa. 9.

⁷ ŠA Prešov, EKP, 101: Leges Illustris Gymnasii Epperiessiensis.

⁸ ŠA Prešov, EKP, 101: Pomariov list z Wittenbergu, adresovaný inšpektorom a kurátorom kolégia z 15. augusta 1667 [Pomarius's letter from Wittenberg, addressed to the inspector and curator of the college, dated 15 August 1667].

became known for their successful faith disputes with the feared Jesuit theologian Matej Sámbar in Košice in 1665–1666.⁹ Eliáš Ladiver was also the author of popular school plays presented by students in public performances during final examinations.

The College of the Upper Hungarian Evangelical Estates in Prešov was ceremoniously opened on 18 October 1667. According to the school regulations, it became a ten-grade gymnasium with the teaching of advanced subjects, philosophy, and theology in the highest grades. It was precisely these classes and the education they provided that attracted students from across the country and abroad to Prešov, setting the college apart from other evangelical secondary schools. The number of students in these classes alone soon exceeded two hundred (in the academic year 1668/69, there were 258),¹⁰ and the overall number of school students must have been even higher. One of the first and most famous students of the college was Emeric Thököly. He studied in Prešov from January 1668¹¹ until his escape following the failed Wesselényi conspiracy in 1670.

During its short period of uninterrupted existence, the college gained an excellent reputation both nationally and internationally. Its professors achieved such remarkable results that several graduates from the highest grades were placed as school rectors or priests even without a university education. Thus, the College, though not formally, became in fact a university, an academy. In the light of these facts, Pomarius planned its early transformation into a university.¹² However, in the following months, due to an adverse change in socio-political circumstances, there was a violent disruption in the existence of the college and of evangelical education in Hungary.

⁹ FABINY, Tibor (1995): Egy hányatott életű eperjesi tudós Ladiver Illés [Illés Ladiver Is a Scientist from Eperjes with a Hectic Life]. In: Kónya, Peter – Káša, Peter (eds.): *Eliáš Ladiver a Michal Greguš, osobnosti a ich dielo v obraze doby* [Eliáš Ladiver and Michal Greguš, Personalities and Their Work in the Image of the Time]. Prešov. 22–23.

¹⁰ HÖRK 1896, 28.

¹¹ [author missing] (1875): Felsőozoróczi és Kohanóczi Ottlyk György önéletírása [The Autobiography of György Ottlyk Felsőozoróczi and Kohanóczi]. In: Thaly, Kálmán (ed.): *Történelmi naplók 1663–1719*. Budapest. 5.

¹² HÖRK 1896, 31; GÖMÖRY, János (1933): *Az Eperjesi Ev. Kollégium* [The Eperjesi Ev. College]. Prešov. 17.

In the wake of Wesselényi's conspiracy, the College of Upper Hungarian Estates was included among the first to be liquidated, which was certainly not a coincidence. Despite the monarch's prohibition, the subversive plays of Ladiver – which were directly aimed against Leopold I –, Pomarius's efforts to expand the school, and the participation of professors Ladiver, Caban, Pomarius, and others in theological debates with the Jesuits complicated the school's position. Its existence was incompatible with the new absolutist policy in Hungary. The confiscation of the college was carried out by General Spankau on 23 May 1671.¹³

The revival of the college was only made possible by the change in the political circumstances after the outbreak of the uprising of the last Evangelical magnate, Emeric Thököly. When the Habsburg garrisons left all three free royal towns in mid-August 1682, the townspeople, with the support of the Kurutzes, seized the churches and schools. Emeric Thököly, a former student of the school and the son of one of its main benefactors, had a keen interest in its proper functioning and played a personal role in its further development as the leader of the uprising. As the rector, he invited his favourite professor, Eliáš Ladiver, back from exile. Professors Ján Schwartz and Juraj Henrich Sappuhn also worked in the higher grades alongside him.¹⁴ In 1684, Ladiver invited his former student, Ján Rezik, who was teaching in Toruń, to join as a professor.¹⁵ The means to ensure the proper functioning of the college were provided through donations from the leader of the uprising, the restoration of old and new foundations, and other contributions. Part of the expenses, especially salaries of employees, was covered by the city of Prešov. Additionally, with Thököly's assistance, the rector received material support from the Swedish king.¹⁶

After the defeat of the uprising, the possession of the churches and schools remained unchanged for some time. Thanks to the Sopron Articles, all of the town and most of the village parish schools in the capital continued to operate. The College was

¹³ HÖRK 1896, 34.

¹⁴ FABINY 1995, 27.

¹⁵ *Series Primariorum Professorum et Rectorum prout et eorundem collegarum schola, et Collegio Eperiessiensi Praepositorum*. Archív ev. a. v. cirkevného zboru v Prešove [Archive evangelical a. v. church choir in Prešov].

¹⁶ HÖRK 1896, 31.

confiscated together with the churches and parishes in the early days of 1687 by the commission of Upper Highland Chief Captain Count Stefan Csáky. In the following years, there was no Protestant school in the town.¹⁷

These conditions lasted until the beginning of the uprising of Francis II. Rákóczi, when in 1703–1705 Protestants' free exercise of religion was restored, together with the right to their own schools. Shortly after the occupation of the city and a few months before the Diet of Szécsény, Rákóczi sent a commissioner, František Bertóthy, to Prešov, who on 2 January 1705 ordered the Jesuits to leave the college that he then handed over to the Protestants.¹⁸ At the beginning of 1705, after a long break, the Prešov Evangelical College was restored. The only suitable rector deemed as such by the school management was Ján Rezik, a former student and professor of the institute.¹⁹

In the summer of 1705, the inspectors of the College sent a message to King Charles XII of Sweden, who pledged to support four theology students from Hungary at the University of Greifswald among the royal scholars, covering their expenses from the Swedish royal treasury.²⁰

The Ružomberok Synod in April 1707 paid significant attention to the Prešov College. It designated a special position for the college within the structure of evangelical schools in Hungary, instructing all four superintendents to give it particular consideration. Given the institution's challenging circumstances, the delegates recommended organizing nationwide collections to support it.²¹

Despite the ongoing war and financial difficulties, they managed to maintain the regular teaching in all grade levels. Prominent individuals who studied in Prešov in the early 18th century included the future Rector Samuel Matthaides, the physician and natural scientist Ján Adam Rayman,²² as well as the educator and writer Juraj Bárány.

¹⁷ *Annales fata et vicissitudines Ecclesiae Evangelicae Epperiessensis 1671–1721*. Archív ev. a. v. cirkevného zboru v Prešove [Archives of the Evangelical a. v. Church Choir in Prešov].

¹⁸ Op. cit.

¹⁹ *Series Primariorum Professorum...*

²⁰ HÖRK 1896, 31.

²¹ *Evangelikus Országos Leveltár (EOL) Budapest* [Evangelical National Archives in Budapest], I. a 9. 20: *Originale Synodi Rosenbergensis Evangelicae in Memoria serenissime Posteritati conservatur*.

²² Later, he became the first to successfully vaccinate against smallpox on the European continent.

In the summer of 1710, Prešov was struck by a plague claiming the lives of more than 3,000 people, including the college rector, Ján Rezik. Samuel Matthaeides, a young graduate from the University of Greifswald, was elected to replace him. During the final siege by Habsburg forces in November 1711, an agreement between the Evangelical and Catholic townspeople preceded the surrender. According to the agreement, the Evangelicals relinquished the parish church and other buildings, while the Catholics committed to respecting their rights to the college and a small (Hungarian) church.

However, in February 1711, the monarch ordered the evacuation of the college and handed it over – along with the small church – to the Jesuits. As a compensation for the seized buildings, a special commission designated a location on the outskirts, where the Evangelicals were supposed to build a new church, rectory, and school, in accordance with Article 26 of the Sopron Synod.

In the following decades, the college ceased to exist once again and was replaced by a suburban wooden school, built in 1715. It stood in the western suburbs, next to the churches and rectories of both congregations (German and Slovak), which used it together. In 1750, they received permission to build a new school building and in the same year to teach the so-called higher, gymnasium subjects. In the second half of the century, mathematics, theology, and philosophy were also taught at the Prešov Evangelical School, which gave it the character of a lyceum. At the end of this period (in 1779), it had more than 210 pupils and was the largest educational institution in the city. In 1770, the future Emperor Joseph II visited the school.

Upon Emperor Joseph II's direct intervention in 1783, the Evangelicals purchased the college building, along with the adjacent Church of the Holy Trinity. They relocated the suburban school into its premises. In the new facilities, the transformation of the school into a gymnasium began. A pivotal decision for its future direction came from the Convent of the Potisk District of the Hungarian Evangelical Augsburg Confession Church in 1804. According to this decision, it became the district college, thereby serving as the central educational institution for the entire district.²³

²³ HÖRK 1896, 31.

In the following four decades, the College underwent several changes, thanks to which it evolved from an ordinary town school into a complete grammar school with strong university elements, moving towards an incomplete university. Thanks to these changes, the College was established as a secondary school (gymnasium), providing incomplete legal and theological education in the highest grades. Theology, lectured at first in the highest gymnasium class, developed after its extension into a separate two-year course. A Department of Law was established as early as 1815, and from 1822 law was also taught as a two-year course. These two courses constituted a higher school, providing higher education. To the traditional subjects, natural sciences, Hungarian language and literature, drawing, gymnastics, etc. were added. Hungarian was the language of instruction from 1842. In the 1940s, the management of the College tried again to transform it into a university but failed due to political events.²⁴

As the school continued to develop, the number of professors increased from five in the 1820s to twelve by 1847. Almost all of them were graduates of foreign, mainly German universities and were proficient in multiple languages.²⁵ In the 1840s, the office of rector was held by Theology Professor Anton Ľudovít Munyay, Philosophy Professor Andrej Vandrák, and then Fridrich Hazslinszky.

The number of students saw a sharp increase, exceeding 400 in the 1840s.²⁶ These students came from all over the eastern regions of the country, not just from Prešov or Šariš County.²⁷ While at the beginning of the century, the college mainly enrolled Evangelical Augsburg Confession students, in the 1840s, a significant portion of the student body comprised Reformed, Orthodox, Jewish, and even Roman Catholic students.²⁸

²⁴ For the first time, the idea of transforming the College into an evangelical university was born in the 1760s, but it could not be realized due to the coming Catholicization. Another such plan from the period of the uprising of Francis II Rákóczi had a similar fate. During the Synod of Ružomberok, Rákóczi made the decision to build a university in Prešov in 1707.

²⁵ In addition to the traditional state languages, such as Hungarian, Slovak, and German, several of them knew other languages as well, e.g. French or Spanish. ŠA Prešov, EKP, č. 266: *Informationes de professoribus 1821–1852*.

²⁶ ŠA Prešov, EKP, č. 255: *Conspectus examinis anniversarii 1800–1819*, 256: *Conspectus examinis anniversarii 1820–1847*.

²⁷ ŠA Prešov, EKP, č. 246: *Matricula Juventis studiosae in Collegio District. Evang. aug. Eperiensi 1831–1840*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

During the first half of the century, the college educated several future writers, scientists, and politicians. Among the notable individuals who studied there were Ludovít Kossuth, generals Aristid Dessewffy and Artúr Görgey, Michal M. Hodža, politician and archaeologist František Pulszky, politician Daniel Irányi, playwright Jonáš Záborský, Slovak poets Jozef Srnka and Ján Hvezda, poets Gyula Sárossy, Frigyes Kerényi, Kálmán Lisznay, Imre and Sándor Vachottovci, historian Ludovit Haán, ethnographer Ján Hunfalvy, and aesthete Augustín Greguss.²⁹

Accommodation and meals were provided by the college for some of the students. Since the 1940s, the school also had its own gymnasium. Collegiate collections were established at that time: a natural history collection and a coin collection. The so-called Szirmay Library, consisting of 15,000 volumes, was of great importance.³⁰

The student societies, organized on the basis of nationality, played an important role in the life of the College. As elsewhere in Hungary, some of them outgrew the College and earned a distinguished status in cultural and social life. The oldest one was the Slovak society. The Hungarian Society was founded in 1828. Michal Gregus, its first president, a professor of philosophy and later rector, played a major role in its creation and in building the library.³¹ In the following years, it experienced a dynamic development. In 1838, it published its own almanac, *Jácint*. In the 1940s, the society's leaders maintained contact with leading figures of the reform movement and the liberal opposition. The third such was the German Society, founded in 1842.³²

In the second half of the 19th century, the College of the Potisk Diocese of the Hungarian Ev. A. C. Church was in its most – but at the same time the last – prosperous period. The revolution in Pest on 15 March 1848 and the significant democratization

²⁹ More on the College in this period: KÓNYA, Peter (1993): Prešovské evanjelické kolégium v prvej polovici 19. storočia [Prešov Evangelical College in the First Half of the 19th Century]. In: Švorc, Peter (ed.): *Mudr. Ludovít Markušovský a jeho doba* [Doctor Ludovít Markušovský and His Time]. Prešov. 209–218.

³⁰ ŠA EKP 1032.

³¹ ŠA Prešov, EKP, č. 722: Az Eperjesi Magyar Társaság jegyzőkönyve 1840–1844 [Minutes of the Hungarian Society of Eperjes 1840–1844].

³² ŠA Prešov, EKP, č. 129: Gesetztafel des im Jahre 1842 am Eperieser Collegio entstandenen Deutschen Vereins [Law Board of the German Association That Was Founded at the College in Prešov in 1842].

processes in the country were welcomed by the majority of the students and professors at the College. In the spring, a National Guard unit was formed at the College under the leadership of Professor Jozef Benczúr. In the summer of 1848, the building was occupied by the intervening Russian army and turned it into a hospital. After the defeat of the revolution in August 1849 and during Bach's absolutism, the existence of the college was threatened several times. Because of the institute's recent open support of the Hungarian government and the active participation of professors and students in the war, Vienna provided no help and took several steps in the following years to damage or abolish it.

The nearly two-year interruption in teaching, coupled with damage to the building caused by the Austrian and Russian forces, along with the harm inflicted during the era of neo-absolutism, had adverse effects on the college's financial situation. The situation was further exacerbated by Thun's *Entwurf der Organisation der österreichischen Gymnasien und Realschulen* (Draft of the Organization of Austrian Gymnasiums and Secondary Schools),³³ which significantly impacted the school. It necessitated a reorganization into an eight-grade gymnasium, with at least one teacher in each class. It was not until 1855 that the government officially recognized the institution as "public". Despite immense financial difficulties, the school managed to sustain its theology course, expanded it to three years, while the teaching of law temporarily ceased in 1852.³⁴ During these challenging times, foreign Evangelicals provided assistance to the institution. This foreign aid included an initiative by Lajos Kossuth, who leveraged his influence and, as a former student of the institution, appealed to British Protestants for financial support to rescue the College.³⁵

Only the period of dualism brought about a significant improvement. In the 1970s, the College was taking shape as a scientific and educational institution with four institutes. The first and oldest one was the Higher Gymnasium, essentially unchanged since the reform of the 1950s. The three-year theological institute also continued to operate in the form in which it had been constituted in 1851. The law academy was changed to a 4-year school in 1878, thus taking on the character of a college. The

³³ HÖRK 1896, 189.

³⁴ Op. cit. 191.

³⁵ ŠA Prešov, EKP, č. 249.

structure of the College was complemented by the Evangelical Augsburg Confession boys' teaching institute (the only one in Hungary), transferred to Prešov from Nyíregyháza in the academic year 1873/74. A significant milestone came in 1884 when the gymnasium received state support, and the theological institute was expanded into a four-year academy. After a fire in 1887, the building was generously rebuilt.

In addition to the four educational institutes in the historic building, the convent and the refectory, the library and the collections belonged to the college. The library continued to grow and by the 1990s comprised approximately 35,000 volumes. The school museum, consisting of a collection of coins and natural history objects, was of great importance. The coin collection contained almost 6,000 pieces, and the natural history collection consisted of 11,470 animals, 10,500 plants, and 4,840 minerals.³⁶ The founder and administrator of the natural history collections was Professor (academician) Fridrich Hazslinszky.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the College underwent further development. Due to the growth in the number of students in all of the institutes, the school premises were no longer sufficient, and in 1911 a new modern building of the collegiate gymnasium was built. At that time, 43 professors were working in the college, 22 of whom in the academies. Among the most important personalities in the second half of the 19th and in the early 20th centuries were academics Andrej Vandrák (philosopher)³⁷ and Fridrich Hazslinszky (botanist),³⁸ church historians Jozef Hörk and Ján Gömöry, and the lawyer Šimon Horowitz. After the establishment of the new universities at the beginning of the century, the management of the institute made great efforts in the interest of transforming the collegiate faculties into an incomplete evangelical university; however, these plans could not be implemented after all due to the changes in state law after the First World War.

³⁶ HÖRK 1896, 418.

³⁷ DUPKALA, Rudolf – KÓNYA, Peter (1999): *Antológia z diel profesorov Prešovského evanjelického kolégia I.* [An Anthology of Works by Professors of the Prešov Evangelical College I]. Filozofia. Prešov. 167–169.

³⁸ KÓNYA, Peter (1996): Friedrich Hazslinszky (1818–1896). In: [author missing]: *Život a dielo Friedricha Hazslinszkého*. Prešov. 11–13.

Subsequent to the dissolution of Hungary, the collegium disintegrated, and the new Slovak Evangelical Church was not interested in maintaining it. The Theological College ceased to exist, and its professors left for Budapest, where they worked at the newly established Evangelical Theological Faculty of the Elizabeth University. The Law Academy moved to Miskolc. The Teachers' Institute lasted only until 1923 and only the collegiate grammar school operated in Prešov until its nationalization in 1946.³⁹

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³⁹ Initially as a Slovak–Hungarian and from 1926 as a Slovak grammar school.