

Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Humanities

DOCTORAL (PhD) DISSERTATION THESES

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**The History of the Cistercian Order in Hungary after 1945**  
**The Cistercian Abbey of Zirc between 1945 and 1981**

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## **I. The Research Topic**

The history of the Cistercian monastic congregation in Hungary can be traced back all the way to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Although historical science has largely processed the earlier centuries, it is lacking a comprehensive account of Hungarian monastic orders in the 20<sup>th</sup> century till date. The latter is particularly true about the post-1945 era: Here, we only find isolated pieces of a mosaic through personal recollections, individual studies or book segments, which, however, inevitably provide for an incomplete and fragmented picture. The dissertation strives to fill these gaps, or at least contribute to creating a more complete picture.

Our research focuses on the post-WWII history of the order's male branch in Hungary. Through this, we have depicted Wendelin Endrédy's abbot presidency (right until the abbot's death in 1981), as well as the history of litigation against Cistercian monks, whereupon our study puts a special emphasis.

The Hungarian Province, the Congregation of Zirc of the Cistercian Order, was founded in 1923, as a result of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and on the Hungarian Cistercians' own conditions: headquartered in Zirc and headed by the Abbot President of Zirc, that is. In the era of Province, it contained three abbeys: the Cistercian Abbey of Zirc (comprising, besides the Abbey of Zirc, the Abbey of Szentgotthárd, the Convent of Eger, the Convent of Páztó, as well as friaries in Székesfehérvár, Pécs, Baja, Buda, Előszállás; and the friary and preparatory school in Pest), the Cistercian Abbey of Spring Bank and the Cistercian Abbey of Dallas (Irving).

As the scope of the dissertation does not allow for a complex study of several Hungarian Cistercian communities, we have resolved to place the one with the largest male population in Hungary, the Cistercian Abbey of Zirc, in the spotlight of our investigation.

When selecting the timeframe, we combined the methodologies of monastic and public history periodization. From a monastic-history perspective, Wendelin Endrédy's abbot presidency of the Zirc congregation, i.e. the period between 1939 and 1981, constitutes a single era in the history of the Cistercian monastic order in Hungary. Wedged in the midst of it is the liquidation of monastic orders in Hungary, including the Cistercian order, in 1950. Yet, we have selected 1945 for the starting point of our investigation, since this was a historical turning point characterized by fundamental social, political and economic changes in Hungary. Likewise, the Abbey of Zirc found itself functioning under entirely new circumstances, with members of its community facing previously unknown challenges. It is,

therefore, relevant to set the timeframe between 1945 and 1981, with the first six years of Wendelin Endrédi's abbot presidency providing an organic prelude to the study of the period.

In view of the fact that the order's legal operation ceased in 1950, a significant proportion of the dissertation is concerned with retaliation, rather than day-to-day life at the abbey under 'normal conditions'. Whom this retaliation affected and to what extent - these are issues previously scarcely dealt with by historical science, with the exception of perhaps one or two pieces of personal recollections shedding light on certain details. For the above reason, our research focused largely on the clarification of these data, and on gaining a deeper and broader understanding of the retaliation process. Despite the fact that during our research, we came across an overpowering amount of lawsuit materials and other litigation-related legal documents, we have strived not to confine ourselves on the mere processing and presentation of these. Rather, we have targeted the exploration of the post-1945 decline of the Cistercian Order of Zirc, its liquidation by state order, and subsequent (re)establishment as an "illegal" institution within the state framework. In addition, we attempted painting a picture of the Cistercian monks' daily existence, including during dissolution years — at least through a few relevant examples. It was our aim to depict the methods that leading figures of the monastic order were forced to opt for so as to survive the dictatorship, whilst at the same time drawing connections between our topic and aspects of both public and religious history.

## **II. Bibliography and Resources**

In pre-1989 Hungary, it was impossible to engage in studies of merit of "illegally operating" monastic communities and their history after 1945, and certainly not after 1950. This was, on the one hand, due to insufficient "historical distance", and to the state's perception of monastic communities on the other hand, who, as of September 7, 1950, were not allowed to operate legally. This applied to all Hungarian Cistercian communities; however, Hungarian Cistercians living abroad constituted an exception, even in case of existing links to Zirc. The Cistercian Community of Dallas, belonging to the congregation of Zirc, and members of the Zirc order residing in Rome published a brochure, in which Fr. Roch Kereszty, Fr. Placid L. Csizmazia and Abbot General Polycarp Zakar study the post-1945 history of their abbey and congregation. Similarly, writings by Cistercian Fr. Levente F. Hervay appeared after 1989.

The years following the 1989/90 revolution saw the publication of numerous writings, mostly by secular historians (András Gianone, Norbert Spannenberger, Viktor Attila Soós,

Éva Cseszka, András Mezey, Bernadett Wirthné Diera és Eszter Cúthné Gyóni),<sup>1</sup> on the history of post-WWII Cistercian communities in Hungary. The authors of these summaries of scientific research focused exclusively on the post-1945 era, as opposed to studies published by members of the order, revealing precious details of several chapters in the abbey's history.

We have placed in a separate category those monographs and source publications that deal with the life path of a member of the order, or a fragment thereof. Mária Órfi, along with Ede Badál, Csanád Endrédy and Eszter Gyóni Cúth study the life of Abbot Wendelin Endrédy (the latter two are source publications); Viktor Attila Soós, István Császár and Frigyes Kahler, studied the life of Fr. János (John) Brenner; and Roch Kereszty published several volumes on the life of Fr. Lóránt (Lawrence) 'Sigmund' (also a source publication).

The historical processing of the Abbey of Zirc' post-1945 operation, even with the aid of these publications, is rather inconsistent and patchy. Plenty of aspects concerning the order's functioning in Hungary exist of which historical scientists, history enthusiasts, or the order's members themselves, have only a vague knowledge or none at all.

The majority of Hungarian literature on the Abbey's post-WWII history is to be found in state archives rather than religious ones. The reasons can be traced in the dispersion and subsequent illegal status of the Cistercian order. Neither the dissolution, nor the secret operation of the abbeys and orders favoured the documents' genesis and protection. When conducting research of the topic, one must therefore rely largely on sacral documents in state possession, and those produced and collected by state security bodies.

Personal, legal and operational files, as well as investigation materials housed at *the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security* and *Budapest City Archives* constituted an invaluable resource for our research. The Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security are home to numerous files containing, among others, agent reports on members of the Cistercian order. In most cases, these reports can be located as so called 'working files' marked with an "M" [*from the Hun. 'munkadosszié'*]. In other instances, a single-topic object file would contain reports by one agent only. Agent reports reveal a lot about the state security's operating mechanism and areas of interest. Given how thoroughly the authorities would check their reliability, they also represent a valuable source for our research topic.

*The Veszprém County Archives*, part of the Hungarian National Archives, houses fragments of the Abbey of Zirc archives, such as chapter documents, economic reports, and some of the members' bequests. Processing the resources held here was often an experience

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<sup>1</sup> Hereby we only provide a name list of authors; a detailed bibliography can be found in the dissertation's historiographical chapter.

of revelation for us (for instance, when discovering Konstantin Horváth's 22-volume logbook, or the Abbey's chapter documents), besides clarifying some essential data (e.g. the Abbey's proprietary rights after land reform). This venue was of utmost importance to our work, since the Zirc Abbey Archives at Zirc are, at present, in a disorganised state and therefore only accessible for research by members of the order.

At the *Hungarian National Archives'* headquarters, we carried out research related primarily to the public history aspects of the topic. (Documents about monastic orders found here have largely been disclosed, processed and published. Jenő Gergely uncovered the documents related to the negotiations in 1950 and to the functioning of joint committees. The works on Jesuits by Csaba Borsodi and Gábor Bánkuti studied government orders between 1948 and 1950, addressing the dispersion of monks).

Of the religious archives, we continued our research at *the Székesfehérvár Episcopal Archives, the Archives of the Székesfehérvár Cathedral Chapter, Archives of the Mindszenty Foundation, and the Piarist Fathers' Central Archives in Hungary*. Although these are home to much fewer publications relevant to our study than archives mentioned previously, their resources helped us to create a much more nuanced picture in a number of issues, as well as to clarify a wealth of data.

In addition to materials held in state archives, we consulted several mainly post-1989 publications containing testimonies by Cistercian monks, who in some form experienced the retributions against members of the order (Ignác Sulyok, Elizeus Bán, Mojzes Nagy and Ede Badál).

The purposes of our study were aided greatly by memoirs published after 1989 by members of other monastic orders, or collections that bear witness to their stories partly through archive materials, and partly through personal accounts (a series by Károly Hetényi Varga; a publication by Ágnes Kulics and Ágnes Tölgyesi; as well as the "*Mondd el, hogy tudjuk!*" [Eng.: "*Tell us, so we learn*"] commemorative audio-visual collection).

Overall, we can say that despite the relative wealth of literature on the topic, we did also come across issues during our research that could not yet be answered in a satisfactory manner, due to an absence of resources, or their inconsistency.

### **III. Structure of Publication and Research Findings**

The first – introductory - chapter contains the delimitation of the subject matter, the justification of the choice of topic, a broad historiographical preface – pertinent to literature on both the post-1945 religious history and the Hungarian Cistercians post-WWII history; and

an introduction of resources. The second chapter provides an overview of the Cistercian monastic order's history from its early beginnings, throughout the twentieth century - more specifically until 1939, when Wendelin Endrédy was elected President Abbot.

In the third chapter, we open the research topic by presenting Wendelin Endrédy's monastic career and illustrating the Abbey of Zirc's first years of operation. Abbot Endrédy's personality and leadership were decisive throughout the examined period and left a lasting legacy for Cistercian life in Hungary. We therefore considered it vital to include stages of his personal and religious life that preceded our study's set timeframe. Besides Endrédy's life path, special deliberation was given to the lives and post-1945 destinies of several other leading personalities of the Abbey of Zirc, including Cistercian agriculturist estate manager Gyula Hagyó-Kovács, provisor Fr. Lóránt (Lawrence) 'Sigmund, professor of law Justin Baranyay, and Dr. Bernardin Palos, responsible for youth policy within the order.

As mentioned previously, the end of World War II meant a new era for the Hungarian Cistercian order. Chapter four, the most extensive one in the dissertation, deals with the period between 1945 and 1950, which can be qualified as transitional not only from the Cistercian order's perspective, but in relation to all Hungarian monastic orders. The years between 1945 and 1948 were characteristic of path finding and a search for welfare in the world of new opportunities. At this point, it was still possible to find, to a certain extent, opportunities for personal, intellectual and spiritual, as well as material growth amongst losses that could be labelled as ordinary from the Church's perspective. After 1948, however, Cistercian monastic life in Hungary continued to diminish. Leading personalities of the Abbey were preparing for an expected liquidation by the state, and the transformation of the order's intellectual and material valuables for a more favourable world of opportunities and freedoms in relative terms. The fourth chapter is further devoted to the offshoot of new strands to the Hungarian Cistercian order: the establishment of the Regina Pacis Monastery returning to its monastic roots, and the re-creation of the Cistercian Order's female branch. In this chapter, we also look at how the 1945 land reform affected life in the Cistercian order, considered at the time to be of considerable wealth, and how it dealt with the palpably lower material standards that followed; what methods the experts within the order found to at least partially recover the losses on revenue. A separate sub-chapter is dedicated to the Hungarian Cistercians' signature profession, which were teaching and running monastic schools between 1945 and 1948. Another sub-chapter deals with the loss of this area of operation due to the nationalisation of Cistercian schools, and the subsequent path finding and upsurge in pastoral activities. In a longer sub-chapter, we examine the role of Justin Baranyay, Cistercian

professor of law, in the Mindszenty lawsuit. The importance of this sub-chapter is defined by the elderly professor's life, prosecution and subsequent conviction not having been processed by historians insofar. The fourth chapter concludes in a sub-chapter on the events of 1950, their implications on religious life and the Cistercian order. A large part of it is dedicated to the destinies of order members at the Abbey of Zirc, including deportations of monks, amongst whom there were several Cistercians; the creation of the clergymen-for-peace movement, and Richard Horváth's Cistercian role within the movement; the negotiations between state and Church representatives, culminating in the signing of the 1950 Agreement; and finally, the state's liquidation of monastic orders, including the Cistercian order.

In the fifth chapter of the dissertation, we examined the series of lawsuits involving Cistercians, with a focus on József Grósz, Archbishop of Kalocsa, and the domestic monastic order. In this mammoth trial series, twelve Cistercians were convicted in total - President Abbot Wendelin Endrédy, the leader of Hungarian Cistercians, being one of them. Fr. Lóránt (Lawrence) 'Sigmond took over as provisional head of the Abbey thereafter.

Chapter six discusses the first decade of dissolution. Most of the order's members, as well as its new leadership, were striving to keep up the community framework by adhering to the values and principles drawn up by President Abbot Wendelin Endrédy in the summer of 1950. Some members suffered retaliation - since the order's secret operation was against national legislation and regulations in force. Between 1952 and 1955, thirteen Cistercians received prison sentences of various duration in criminal suits (of those thirteen, two Cistercians were not from the Abbey of Zirc but members of the Regina Pacis). These arrests and trials transformed the secret order; and are the subject of examination in this chapter.

The seventh chapter constitutes an exploration of the changes brought by the 1956 revolution and freedom fighting for Cistercian monks. Furthermore, we looked at how the reprisals following the revolution, during the first years of Kádár's regime, impacted the structure and operation of the Cistercian organisation.

The years of consolidation of Kádár regime were marked by grandiose trial series against Catholicism. Thirty-two Hungarian Cistercians were involved - and eleven members of the order convicted (one of them was a member of the Regina Pacis). The eighth chapter explores the background to these trials known as the "Black Raven Series", and the legal cases of their Cistercian participants.

The ninth chapter reveals the background to the disintegration of the secret order. While the secret community held together in times of its illegal status, the last big wave of lawsuits and trials brought a real breakthrough. Partly due to the latter developments, partly

because of the aging and/or deaths amongst its former seniors, a new generation of leaders gradually took over the management of the congregation at the Abbey of Zirc. The resources explaining this multifaceted process have not been uncovered to date, even less so to an extent that would grant an unambiguous understanding. Thus, we could not provide a satisfactory answer to the question of how Károly Kerekes became Wendelin Endrédy's successor as head of the Abbey of Zirc. In the concluding chapter of the dissertation, we summarized our research findings hitherto, including our studies on succession.

A concise summary chapter gives closure to our dissertation, in which we discuss the most notable landmarks in the history of the Cistercian Abbey of Zirc between 1945 and 1981. Moreover, we offer a synopsis of conclusions drawn from previous chapters.

Twelve tables and figures summarising the data collected during the course of our research are included in the Appendix section and form an integral part of the dissertation.

#### **IV. The Author's Further Publications on the Research Topic**

*A szerzetesrendek működési engedélyének megvonása 1950-ben és a ciszterciek továbbélése. (The Disfranchisement of Monastic Orders in 1950 and the Cistercians' Survival Thereafter)* A Vár irodalmi és közéleti folyóirat 2010. évi 1. különszáma. Székesfehérvár, Prohászka kiadó – Szent István Művelődési Ház, 2010.

*Ciszterci szerzetesek a vádlottak padján – 1951. (Cistercians in the prisoner's box – 1951)* In: Vázlatok két évszázad magyar történelméből. Szerk.: Dombovári Ádám – Manhercz Orsolya. Budapest, ELTE Történelemtudományok Doktori Iskola, Új- és Jelenkori Magyar Történeti Program, 2010. 125–138.

*Endrédy Vendel zirci apát fogságának története. (The imprisonment of Wendelin Endrédy, abbot of Zirc)* In: KÚT. Gergely Jenő emlékszáma. Szerk.: Erdődy Gábor – Háda Béla – Majoros István – Pritz Pál. IX. évf. (2010) 2. sz. 12–31. és In: Magyar Egyháztörténeti Vázlatok. Főszerk.: Csóka Gáspár. 22. (2010) 1–2. 163–181.

*Ciszterci kispapok „szökése” 1950-ben. (The “escape” of Cistercian monks in 1950)* In: Visszatekintés a 19–20. századra. Főszerk.: Erdődy Gábor. Szerk.: Diera Bernadett – Cúthné Gyóni Eszter. Budapest, ELTE Történelemtudományok Doktori Iskola, Új- és Jelenkori Magyar Történeti Program, 2011.

*Egy fogoly apát feljegyzései. Endrédy Vendel zirci apát feljegyzései az ÁVH börtönében. (Memoirs of an Imprisoned Monk. Wendelin Endrédy, Abbot of Zirc' Memoirs*

*from the Prison of the State Protection Authority)* Szerkesztette, a bevezetést írta, jegyzetekkel ellátta, valamint az életrajzokat és a mutatókat összeállította: Cúthné Gyóni Eszter. Budapest, METEM – ÁBTL, 2013.