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**THE HISTORY OF THE ABBEY OF GARAMSZENTBENEDEK
IN THE ÁRPÁD AND ANJOU ERA**

The abstract of the PhD thesis

The thesis deals with the history of the Benedictine monastery of Garamszentbenedek (Saint Benedict at the river Garam) during the Árpád and Anjou era, as well as the first one and a half decades of the reign of King Sigismund, too. There are two reasons for choosing this subject. Firstly, the monastery Garamszentbenedek can be regarded as the third most significant Benedictine monastery of medieval Hungary after the monasteries of Pannonhalma and Kolozsmonostor, based on the size of its estates, its leading role in the Benedictine reform movement in the 14th century, its monumental gothic building still present today and its role as a place of authentication. Secondly, in spite of all these, its history has been rather neglected by historians. Nándor Knauz's monograph (*A Garan-mellelleti szentbenedeki apátság / The Szentbenedek monastery near the Garan*), published in 1890, is founded on a wide selection of sources, but its views are of the 19th century. None of the subsequent Hungarian and Slovak essays surpassed Knauz's work significantly. The closing date of this dissertation and source publication, in the same way as it is customary in collections of documents of church institutions, is determined by archontology: abbot Henry III died around 1403. The role and function of the of the authentication of the monastery of Szentbenedek is discussed in a separate chapter. In connection with this all the authentication documents of the convent, yet unpublished, are included in the appendix, with their full texts transcribed, including other documents linked to the authentication functions of the monastery.

The Benedictine abbey of Garamszentbenedek was founded by King Géza I in 1075. He probably began building it in the 1060's while still a prince. The deed of foundation of the monastery was left to us in an interpolated form. The research regarding the deed of foundation is the only field in the past of the monastery where historical science of the 20th century has produced new results. On the basis of the essays of László Fejérpataky, Richard Marsina, József Laszlovszky and György Györffy we can already see that most of the present text of the document of 1075 is derived from the original document, whose content was repeatedly changed because of lawsuits in order to make it a more effective weapon, first in the 1220s and 1230s, then for the second time around 1276/1277 or in the 1320's. In spite of this, the interpolated parts (boundary descriptions) reflect the conditions of the 11th century.

The monastery of Garamszentbenedek was considered as distinguished among the monasteries belonging to the patronage of the king. It received got new land donations and legal privileges until the end of the Árpád era, and even during the age of the Anjou dynasty. The monarch's protection was very important in the estate lawsuits and other lawsuits of the abbey. The statement of Verner, the bailiff (*comes*) of Bars in 1246 is characteristic. He made no secret of the fact that he had no choice but to hand over two properties in Bars to the monastery: "whether we want to or not, we have to obey the king's order". The connection between the medieval monasteries and their patrons (the monks' prayers for the king was reciprocated by his patronage) is even more beautifully illustrated by the request of Garamszentbenedek written to King Louis the Great around

1350, during the lawsuit against the citizens of Újbánya: “since we have no other refuge besides God but You, may Your excellency see to it that we can free of such hindrances to our prosperity in order to be able to worship God more undisturbed and more devoutly for Your and Your relations’ salvation.” Stephen V stayed in Garamszentbenedek in 1272, he dated his document from there. Abbots Ladislaus and Sigfrid, who lived in the first half of the 14th century, are known to have had good connections at court, both of them were given the title of assistant minister of the king (*capellanus noster*). Sigfrid visited Edward III, the English king as Louis the Great’s delegate in 1346.

The monastery was also supported by the Apostolic Holy See. On the basis of Pope Innocent III’s patronage letter it can be considered as an *exemptus* church. Its abbot was allowed to wear prelate’s clothes in the same year. Szentbenedek was granted permission to use liturgy under *interdictum*. The popes made lists of the possessions of the monastery several times (1209), protected it in their bulls (1316, 1328, 1332, 1364), even against the archbishop of Esztergom (1221, 1235). There was one exception: Gregory XI enforced the archdiocese’s standpoint (despite King Louis the Great’s support) against the monastery in the action for possession that had been ongoing on for a century between the two church institutions. Curiously enough, the abbot of Garamszentbenedek was rarely charged with papal missions (1327, 1328, 1348).

In the 13th century the monastery successfully represented its interests against its own people, the bailiffs of Bars and Zólyom and the neighbouring landowners. Only the power of the archbishop of Esztergom proved to be invincible in the more important cases. At times, in less significant cases the archbishop yielded, for example in a tithe lawsuit in 1314. The lawsuit against the bishop of Nyitra ended in mutual renunciation. In the first half of the Anjou era, new opponents emerged: the castellans of Bars and Nyitra counties (Léva, Saskő, Revistye, Hrussó, Gimes). They often worked on their own account and were a nuisance to the monastery more for their despotic measure than for seizing estates. In the middle of the 14th century the monastery also got into trouble with the citizens of the neighbouring towns (Bars, Csütörtökhely, Nagytapolcsány, Buda, Óbuda, Esztergom). It had the most conflicts while Sigfrid was the abbot — on the one hand because of Sigfrid’s personality, and on the other hand because the economic significance of the towns had suddenly increased (Újbánya came into existence in the 1340s). The monastery needed time to learn how to live together with the towns. Sigfrid made efforts to gain a firm foothold in these ambitious settlements, after having felt the (future) importance of the towns, supported by the Anjou kings. He leased out some of the land to the citizens, bought property in Újbánya. The number of lawsuits in connection with tyrannic measures used to lease and obtain land was highest in Sigfrid’s time; the monastery won most of these, but there were several cases that it lost. For example, in 1335 the monastery’s accusation against the bailiff of Bars didn’t prove to be true, around 1339 it lost its case against the noblemen of Győröd, in 1342 it was found guilty of unjust litigation by the palatine and in 1353 it had to pay a penalty to Gregory from Kistapolcsány. The monastery took part in its lawsuits mostly as a plaintiff (*actor*) and the king’s patronage had a significant hand in its successes (see the practice of the annual letters of command). Besides Sigfrid I, who vigorously fought for restoring the appropriated goods of his monastery right from the start of his appointment, Sigfrid II’s personality must be highlighted. In contrast with his predecessors and successors, he or rather his deputy was taken to court over being tyrannical three times, which indicates that

he protected his interests without caring about the means used to achieve them. The vast majority of the cases of the monastery were heard in royal courts.

In the middle of the 14th century the monastery of Garamszentbenedek took the lead in the reform movement of the Benedictine order due to its positions which were considered strong even nationally and to abbot Sigfrid's efficient activity. From among the aims drawn up in Pope Benedict XII's bull in 1336, beginning with *Summi magistri*, the keeping of the province chapters and the return of certain appropriated Benedictine goods were successfully carried through. Besides Sigfrid his predecessor abbot Ladislaus and a monk of Szentbenedek, Nicholas Broda, who previously worked in Dombó and Kolozsmonostor, are to be mentioned because they demonstrably fought against softening the ideals of the order. Garamszentbenedek founded the priory of Stola in the county of Szepes in 1314. There is no known relationship between the two convents. Sigfrid acquired the Basilian monastery of Szávaszentdemeter for the Benedictines in 1344, and in all probability its first new convent partly came from Garamszentbenedek as well. An interesting additional fact about the relationship amongst of the Benedictine monasteries in the Hungarian Uplands, is that in 1393 the abbot of Szentbenedek was represented by the abbot of Zobor in conciliatory negotiations in a lawsuit.

Little data is available about the internal life of the monastery. Garamszentbenedek was considered as a model monastery, since there is no information of any abuses committed within its walls. There was some temporary confusion only at the end of the 1350s, when Sigfrid II, elected in 1355 and also confirmed by Pope Innocent VI, couldn't take over his seat as an abbot, because until 1358 Ulric of Gersten, then between 1358 and 1359 Nicholas was the head of the monastery. Until the end of the Middle Ages a monastic lifestyle was led in Garamszentbenedek, *regentes (commendator)* are only mentioned in the 16th century.

Apart from the names of the abbots and priors the names of the authentication delegates and monks who acted as representatives during lawsuits remained. In 1292 the dean, the guard monk and the (monk) porter are mentioned, and in 1338 the singer monk. The first authentication document of the monastery was dated by master James, its superb title may refer to the fact that as a monk he led the monastery school. It is known from a document of 1292 that special cooks cooked for the monks. The codex Nyitrai (the so-called evangelistarium Szelepcsényi) noted down in the 11th century and the missaé completed by Ladislaus Miskolci in 1394 and presently kept in Eger can questionably be linked to the monastery of Szentbenedek. Abbot Sigfrid I started to build the present church of the monastery, the keystones of the vaulting with their carved Anjou coat of arms, dates the building to before 1382 (maybe 1387).

Some of the noble servants (*familiaris*) of the abbey are known as functionaries for managing the estate, others are known because of their role played in legal affairs. With great certainty, they were members of the lower nobility in the neighbourhood. Ipoly's son Mikó worked as the "professional" lawyer of the monastery, his name appears in several lawsuits.

According to the founding and donation deed, which was left to us in interpolated form, the monastery obtained control of the net of the estates scattered on the territory of the country already at the time of its foundation. The core estates were in the territory of Bars, but the monastery owned properties in counties neighbouring Bars, as well as in the counties of Csongrád and Bihar. Later on the abbey received control of further smaller

properties as a beneficiary of wills. There are examples of donations from individuals from the 12th century until the end of the 15th century, see Adrian's son Stephen's will leaving Barátka to the monastery, dated at the end of the 1150s, known from the document of Euzidinus. There is data of the monastery buying estates only from 1270 (a mill), from 1347 (land for a mill) and from 1354 (a mill and a house in Újbánya). There isn't any data about the monastery selling land, in accordance with the legal notion of the Middle Ages that since the real owner of the properties of a church institution is the patron saint of the institution, they are inalienable, therefore it was not possible to adjust the estate. The basis of the income was the tithe coming in from the properties of the abbey, which belonged to the Benedictines already from 1075. This wasn't disputed until the 1410s, there is only data of three lawsuits of tithe (around 1270, 1312, 1314) against the archbishop of Esztergom, which ended in success for the monastery. The tithe was completed by service by the people living on the properties, by customs and by income coming in from leasing certain pieces of property. The most significant customs duties were situated along the trade routes near the Garam, and leading to Körmöcbánya and Zólyom. The charges coming from leasing — according to national tendencies — appeared in documents in the second half of the 13th century and became more and more frequent from the 1330s. From the middle of the 14th century there are several signs that the monastery managed leasing systematically: the same piece of land was leased out repeatedly, but the boundaries were changed flexibly, the price can be considered roughly constant. There were several crushing and smelting ore-mills among the leased properties. Several leases ended in court. The Benedictines of Garamszentbenedek ran butcher shops in Körmöcbánya from 1394, so they took part in the economic life of the town as the owners of an enterprise in the food industry. They also had interests in Bars and Újbánya (mills, pieces of land).

The monastery wasn't involved in real authentication place activities until the beginning of the 14th century, only two authentic documents remained from the age of the Árpáds (1232, 1282). It became characteristic to give out documents more regularly (1–3 a year) from the 1320s, and from the 1350s we can speak of large-scale documentation (1–10 documents a year). The number of documents issued a year shows an upward tendency until the age of Sigismund. There are 229 declarations (*fassio*) (60%) and 150 reports (*relatio*) (40%) among the 379 genuine documents that remained from the period before 1403. That is in accordance with the general average, since there are more declarations than reports from the whole territory of the country. The 4.7% rate of rewritings is in accordance with those found elsewhere.

The convent of Szentbenedek reported to the bailiff of Bars in 1340 and 1385, its delegate bore witness to an estate registration by order of the authority of the county of Bars in 1355. On the basis of these three reports the county of Bars can be added as the eighth one in the list of seven counties — mainly situated in Transdanubia — that sometimes gave orders to the places of authentication having relatively small region of attraction, which therefore had mobilizable power reserve.

The territory competence of the place of authentication covered the county of Bars before the reforms of 1351/1353. It managed matters on the territories of Nyitra and Hont which were in the neighbourhood of Bars occasionally, in further counties only exceptionally. In the second half of the 14th century the proportion of cases of Hont, Komárom, Nyitra and Turóc counties increased both in the case of declarations and

reports also demanding presence on the spot. The further parts of the counties of Komárom and Nyitra and the county of Trencsén also belonged to the report zone at that time. The main territory of the authentication activities of the convent of Garamszentbenedek was the southern lowlands of the county Bars, where the influence of the chapters of Nyitra and Esztergom as well as the convents of Ság and Zobor has to be taken into consideration, as well. When King Matthias allowed the convent of Garamszentbenedek to have a new seal engraved instead of the one they lost in 1462, he determined the counties accurately which fell within the competence of the place of authentication: the areas north to the Danube in the counties of Esztergom and Komárom, the whole territory of Bars, Nyitra, Hont, Trencsén, Liptó, Árva, Turóc and Zólyom counties. The basis of the privilege may have been customary law, so it can be established that the convent had authentic jurisdiction over a much larger territory during the age of Hunyadi than during the age of the Anjous.

The clients of the authentication place belonged to the lower and the landed nobility, the members of the Barakcsai, Zselízi, Simonyi, Zsemberi and Forgács families counted as the most frequent visitors. The Forgács's often made use of the services of the place of authentication of the convent in spite of the fact that they had been involved in lawsuits with the monastery on several occasions. The fact that András, also called Gyepes Kisheresztényi, committed acts of violence on the estate of the monastery called Szelepcsény in 1392, did not hinder him from becoming a regular client of the place of authentication of Szentbenedek in the following years. In 1358, when abbot Nicholas had no choice but to swear an oath in order to defend a property of the monastery, his oath associates came from those noble families who often made use of the authentication services of the convent. The neighbouring church corporations only rarely applied to the place of authentication of Szentbenedek.

From the 1330s and 1340s the names of relatively many monks of the monastery are known owing to both abbot Sigfrid, who managed affairs vigorously and frequently, and the complete exploration of the relevant sources. The investigation of the staff shows that both the delegates who pleaded the cause of the abbey in countrywide court and in places of authentication in the neighbourhood and those who performed tasks for the place of authentication were separated among the brothers. This is shown by the fact that priest Solomon appears in the sources five times between 1338 and 1341, each time as the delegate of the place of authentication, whereas brother Emery acts solely as the lawyer of the abbot and the convent six times during the same period, in 1341 and 1342. Between 1362 and 1367 there are ten records of the delegate of the place of authentication: in nine cases it is of the priest Valentine. Occasionally he had to travel three times a week. He seems to have been entrusted with this task during that period. However, the examined time periods are too short for a certain conclusion, and besides, there are some contradictory examples. Because of the small number of cases compared to other, busier places of authentication it was not necessary to regulate which member of the convent should do the field work. The delegate's place in the holy orders (subdeacon, deacon, priest) are given accidentally and inconsistently in the documents. Among the monks taking part in the work of places of authentication there are some titled assistant ministers (*capellanus*), which suggests that the monastery took care of the priests of the churches of the villages situated within the monastery's property, and these "transferred" people also had a part in the external work of the place of authentication (for example the

parish priest of Pográny). The overall majority of the delegates were monks in the 14th century, sometimes (1370, 1402) the familiarises of the monastery can be found in such a role.

One of the results of the research is that four documents can be branded as forgeries. (The document of the convent of Garamszentbenedek before 1270: DL 72 507. The document from February 23rd, 1272 of the convent: DL 795, 794. The report of the convent addressed to King Sigismund on June 4th, 1388: 87 580. The document from February 27th, 1351 of the convent of Ság: DF 235 748, MES IV. 47.) In connection with the contradictions of the dating of the documents, it must be firmly stated that the dating does not always indicate the time the text was written but the time of sealing or rather, the time it took effect. The so far questionable opinion, that the archbishop of Esztergom, Nicholas V (1358–1366) was known as “from Apáti” even by his contemporaries, has been proven by authentication documents dating from the same time. (The two documents from September 24th, 1368 of the convent of Garamszentbenedek: DL 5702, 5703.) It has been demonstrated that the Benedictine monasteries Béla and Garáb were united long before 1390, even prior to 1342.