

Cultural identity change of a royal Hungarian town, Székesfehérvár, in the 18th and 19th century

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One of Hungary's oldest historic cities is Székesfehérvár. Never the country's exclusive capital, it has always been among its most significant towns throughout history. This was a royal place where the crown jewels were kept and guarded, and where forty kings and fifty queens were crowned in the cathedral, now in ruins. The first Hungarian king, István (Stephen) I was also buried here, as well as about half of all the country's kings reigning after Könyves Kálmán ("Kálmán the Bookman"). The prosperity of the city appears in its riches and privileges: the royal wine cellar, the right to have fairs and the right of coinage. Its merchants got as far as Jerusalem.

The city lost its previous significance after King Mátyás's (Matthias) death and was soon under Turkish rule. It was invaded in 1543 by the troops of Suleiman II. In the battle, Constable György Varkocs was killed in front of the city gates. Bay Ahmed raided and looted the royal tombs and churches. Yet the worst of its decay came in 1601, after Commander Mercoeur's siege when the Habsburg Empire's paid troops tore its walls halfway down. The walls were strengthened in vain and the Turks recaptured the city, by then reduced to a military stronghold, in 1602. This was the time Vice-commander Ferenc Wathay, who later put down the story of the siege, was captured. The Turkish reign of one and a half centuries left almost no trace. The city can be pictured from Evlia Celebi's journey stories and a few etchings. Today only the frescoes of St. Ann's Chapel, the ruins of Pasha Güzelde Rüstem's bath and of the walls remind the visitor of that age. What is important though is the influence on the inhabitants: the largely Hungarian, French, Belgian, German, Czech and Italian citizens of the medieval times were replaced by Serbians, Germans and Jews. The Hungarians were pushed out to the periphery. In the 1730s the city finally started to recover and even boom, but it never regained its previous role. It was rebuilt in the southern Germanic Baroque style, according to the new inhabitants' standards. The 18th century ambience of the town developed retaining the street structure of the medieval town, now giving the inner city a medieval feeling, in spite of the fact that nearly all of its buildings are characteristically Baroque. In the 18th century Hungary was a post-feudalistic country. The citizenry was underdeveloped in comparison with its western contemporaries, but new research has proved that this citizenry was economically stronger than previously assumed.¹ Until the

1 Domokos KOSÁRY, *Művelődés a XVIII. századi Magyarországon* 1, Budapest, 1983, 69–244. Mainly in the section dealing with the ecclesiastic and secular relations and the position of science, literature, music and fine arts in the age of enlightenment (18th century).

19th century the town's development and role in Hungarian culture was determined by the historical frame roughed out above. The development of capitalism from the 1840s quickly destroyed feudalistic structure and created a modern civic Székesfehérvár.

A New Town Is Born

After long preparations Ádám Bathány arrived with his troops on 29 April 1688 to recapture Fehérvár from the Turks. The siege accomplished its goal on 7 May when the Turks, realizing their hopeless situation, gave the town. For the remaining 4,000 people in the town the bishop of Veszprém performed a service of thanksgiving. With direct military rule over Székesfehérvár fell under military leadership and lost its local autonomy. From 1690 on it had tried several times to restore its civic autonomy. This objective was finally accomplished by 1703. The rights of Pest, Buda, Székesfehérvár and Esztergom were restored at the same time. The charter issued at that time restored the legal status of *Peculium Regium*, ensured seigniorage for the residents of the towns, and *jura regalia*, thus paving the way for development in a feudal society. During Rákóczi's War of Independence for a few months the town was occupied by the kuruc army (from 16 January to 8 April 1704), then till the end of the war it was under German rule. This explains why 79 Hungarian families left their homeland which led to the further dwindling of the Hungarian-speaking population. After the Treaty of Szatmár the population rapidly grew, primarily because of the German newcomers. In 1720 Székesfehérvár was already one of the ten most populous royal free cities. Towards the middle of the century the immigration wave started to wane, and by the last quarter of the century the growth of population almost equalled the rate of natural increase. A new wave of immigrants, this time that of Hungarians, only took place at the beginning of the 19th century but that was smaller than the previous ones.

By the turn of the century the population of Székesfehérvár was 12,000. Only those who were granted civic status were allowed to live in the town, inside the walls. Plying a trade was only possible for the ones with civic status, for the burghers. The majority of them were Germans. They dominated local commerce and industry. The number of craftsmen grew quicker than the whole of the population. By the end of the century 69 crafts were practiced in the town but mainly special crafts (bakers, pastry-cooks, gingerbread makers, spur makers, bookbinders, violin makers) which appeared in bigger centres and fulfilled the needs of a particular clientele. It was in Fehérvár, a county and bishopric seat where a clientele with special needs was formed consisting of noblemen and officials; this clientele was also expanded by the more wealthy population. Local industry fulfilled their needs primarily; food industry was insignificant, metal industry grew stagnant. Craftsmen only produced for the town population. They could not enlarge their district. The town government, which was mainly formed by German craftsmen, did everything it could in order to sustain conditions concerning the guilds in their favour. Town records show a huge number of disputes about the guilds. In 1770 for instance the town council stated in an official order in connection with the dispute between Josef Hockel and the carpenters of Székesfehérvár that "everyone should practice their own trade, and no sculptor should do a carpenter's job". Berfl Jónás's clothier plant, which was the only significant attempt to run a manufacture, was permanently harassed by the town council's court either because of irregularities

or immorality. These circumstances made it inevitable that the manufacture was shut down after four years. Hungarians mainly lived in the Buda suburbs. Very few of them had civic status. The majority of them dealt with agricultural production. (Their community very much resembled a small country town, their cultural history is in the domain of ethnography.) Production of grapes was significant, but cereal production only fulfilled 25% of the needs. Livestock production could not supply sufficient stock for the emerging industry. Up to the 18th century Hungary was an important commercial centre; its inhabitants were provided with tax and duty allowances. Trade between eastern and western countries took place in national fairs organised in the town.² Animals from the Great Plain were exchanged here. Traders both from distant counties (Ung, Gömör, Nyitra, Pozsony) and from the close neighbourhood of the town also appeared in the fairs here. Trade was organised by Raszcians and Greeks. They lived in a close cohort outside the town. (This is the area of contemporary Rác utca.) The German-Hungarian town leadership gradually forced them out of trade. On 25 April 1725 a decree was issued against foreign traders (i.e. from the Balkans).³ The control partly got into the hands of the Germans and the Hungarians, however, they did not enjoy the benefit of distant commerce for long since it diminished and in the 19th century traders' activities satisfied only the everyday needs of the town and its neighbourhood. Its economy described above could not have raised Fehérvár above the national average. „Its leading role could be attributed to its public administration founded in early times. As a county and episcopal seat it held a state and church governing position; while due to its theological seminary, grammar school and theatre it fulfilled public educational and cultural functions that radiated throughout and even beyond the county borders.”⁴ This statement is justified by the grand building projects that formed today's urban landscape. Due to the initial chaos and the Rákóczi freedom fight later, only reconstruction work was being carried out. An example of this reconstruction is the Beermaking Factory (Brauhaus) of the town even in 1694. The architect working on it was Jodocus Schmidt from Schwarzenberg, Switzerland.⁵ Reconstruction work was also carried out in the parish church called Saint Peter and Paul in the city centre.⁶ The first important refurbishment was completed in the Saint Stephen Church in 1702. The Jesuit superior in charge of the church invited Viennese architects Leonardus Sauer and Johannes Georgius to do the task as it exceeded the expertise of local bricklayers.⁷ The first customers were representa-

2 National fairs: Sunday before Easter, St. George's Day, Midsummer Day, St. Bartholomew's Day, St. Demetrius' Day.

3 Sarolta CZAKÓ, Székesfehérvár szabad királyi város igazgatásának története 1711–1740, in: Fejér Megyei Történeti Évkönyv (FMTÉ), Székesfehérvár, 1971, No. 5, 23–44.

4 Vera BÁCSKAI, Fehérvár fejlődése a XVIII. században és a XIX. század elején, FMTÉ, 1974, No. 8, 350–369. The number of residents had been increasing continuously: in 1715 3,360 and in 1777 11,520 people lived in the town. Craftsmen had their significant contribution to this growth, and they played an important part locally. Also, the population grew because people moved in from nearby and farther villages. Thus, the town had become multilingual and multicultural. It was only in the second part of the 19th century that a monolingual and monocultural community had been formed here, while, education-wise, different layers of society were clearly distinguishable.

5 Arnold SCHOEN: Székesfehérvár 18. századbeli festői, Székesfehérvári Szemle, Székesfehérvár, 1931, No. 4, 2–3.

6 Jenő FITZ – László CSÁSZÁR – Imre PAPP, Székesfehérvár, Budapest, 1966, 43–50.

7 Ibidem, 35.

tives of the church like the Prepostry, the Jesuits, the Franciscans, the Carmelites, and the Benedictines. On behalf of the town Lőrincz Vanossi was responsible for the works, a royal representative coming from Italy. Among the first architects were the already mentioned Jodocus Schmidt, Franz Fürst and Paul Hatzinger.⁸ This must have been the time when the number of craftsmen working in the local building industry was below average; however, an extremely high number of workers were employed during the 18th century. This shows that the size of local enterprises exceeded the boundaries of guilds.⁹

The most significant construction works started during the reign of Queen Maria Theresa. This was the era when the still remaining Turkish ruins were cleared and the new Baroque, Rococo and Copf townscape of today's Székesfehérvár was formed. Not only the huge palaces and churches but also the houses of citizens were refurbished into this style by their owners. On its first authorised representation the town can be seen in the 1730s. The city walls and the Turkish minaret on the plot of the Jesuits demolished in 1741 can still be found there, but the characteristic elements of the new townscape, the churches, show a Baroque identity. "The reconstruction process with smaller reconstruction work and creating some significant pieces but remained within the historical boundaries of the town extended beyond the city walls in the forthcoming decades. In around the 1800s the city walls disappeared, the gates were demolished and the district called Víziváros started to be populated."¹⁰ The engravings represent the town without the moorland and the walls. On the part showing the city centre the new Episcopal Palace, the new County Hall, the Zichy-house, the Schmidegg-house, which are most beautiful buildings of today's townscape, can be seen.¹¹

Creating new buildings also meant demolition. The most significant victim of this demolition was the royal basilica, which still existed up to the end of the 18th century and its refurbishment would not have cost a fortune. It is a pity that it was destroyed before the town was able to value its own monuments. "In Székesfehérvár, houses were built and renovated, in addition they were decorated with sculptures, frescos and stuccos. Most craftsmen came from Austria, South-Germany and Switzerland since they were allured to the rebuilding Hungary by the work opportunities galore. However, they were not only Germans in their names and language but also in their education; therefore, the once medieval town was reborn in the spirit of Austrian-South German Baroque."¹²

The most significant local architects of the era were Martin Grabner who became a citizen of the town in 1751, Johann Schattner, who got married here in 1757, and Gerbner's son Johann Michael who was born here.

The last significant master builder of the eighteenth century was Jakob Raider, who be-

8 Ibidem, 38.

9 BÁCISKAI, 358–359. Among the growing number of public and private buildings, a large number of new primary and secondary schools as well as cultural amenities were opened. These played a significant cultural role both locally and within the region throughout the 19th century. Theatre performances were held mainly in the function rooms of the local hotels.

10 Jenő FITZ, 28.

11 Ibidem, 44.

12 Ibidem, 45.

came a citizen of Fehérvár in 1782 and from 1790 he worked as chief architect of the city.¹³ "None of the master builders listed so far rose above the average of the architects working here in the Baroque period. They had a good sense of proportion but showed little originality; they employed the wide variety of forms of the Austrian Baroque and imitated the great masters to the extent that their more modest circumstances allowed. A typical example is the Jesuit church which represents the type of church common in the provincial areas and which was partly developed on the basis of the traditions established by Hillebrandt; it followed a plan often used by the master builders in the 1740s, which started their careers as builders themselves."¹⁴ The works of the local architects were often ornamented by pieces created by well-known painters and sculptors. The Jesuits' demand for works of art of the highest standard created the right conditions in which the most beautiful historic buildings of Fehérvár today could be erected. They invited Josef Codelli, who remained in the city to the end of his life. His paintings decorate the friary. The Jesuits invited the Austrian painter Caspar Franz Sambach to paint the frescos on the ceiling of the church of Saint John of Nepomuk. The joiner's shop also owes its existence to the Jesuits. It was headed by Bernhardt Baumgartner.¹⁵ While it operated for more than twenty years, it produced the magnificent woodcuts of the church, the friary and the dispensary.

Franz Anton Maulbertsch and Johann Ignatz Cimbäl, the two greatest painters of the period also spent some time in our city. Maulbertsch painted the birth of Mary, among others, in the church of the Carmelites. "His paintings in Székesfehérvár include three ceiling paintings different in mood and expression as well as a captivating depiction of the Crucifixion in the oratory and a piece in the side altar. The silky mixed colours of these paintings and their nearly musical harmony present him as an almost unrivalled virtuoso with the qualities of a Tiepolo."¹⁶ The third building of exceptional beauty is the parish church of Saint Stephen. Its construction was close to the heart of Maria Theresa as well. That is why it became possible to have the outstanding Austrian architect, Franz Anton Hillebrandt design the sanctuary. The paintings were also made by a famous artist called Johann Ignatz Cimbäl. These three churches are among the most prominent historic buildings of Székesfehérvár. The last two buildings erected during this period of large-scale construction work were the Schmidegg House (located at Március 15 utca 12.), whose design is apparently connected to Mihály Pollack, and the County Hall, which was really built to plans by Pollack. This building is among the early works of the leading master of Hungarian architecture. It is characterized by calm harmony and dignity illustrating the emerging Neo-Classical style in Hungary quite well. The cityscape did not change after this. The homes of the citizens built at the turn of the century in the Neo-Classical style complemented the Baroque cityscape very nicely. The large-scale building projects in the downtown area had been completed and provided the framework for everyday life.

"At the beginning of the eighteenth century education was one of the tasks carried out by the various churches. The scope and level of education they provided depended on

13 Ibidem, 49.

14 Ibidem, 51.

15 Ibidem, 54.

16 Ibidem.

the power relations of each denomination. They aimed to create believers, and not useful citizens, first of all. The main goal of each denomination in the field of education was to have their own religious intelligentsia – clergymen and teachers – and to provide for their replacement. The other goal next to this, of course, was to educate the young intelligentsia not intending to pursue careers in religion.”¹⁷ It was after the expulsion of the Turks that the Jesuits appeared in Székesfehérvár. The mission already started its own school of two classes in 1688, where the two classes were taught together. At this time, rhetoric and poetics were not included among the subjects, yet. In 1695 it was Emperor Leopold who gave them the plot where the church and friary they built still stands. Their school was also here, although from the time before 1724 we only have sporadic data about its continuous work. In 1708, the magister of the school was one of the people assisting the superior in the festive Christmas mass.¹⁸ From 1724 the school worked without interruption. At that time (in 1724) the school had only few (74) students, but, in the 1740s, 200–300 students attended it already. Before the middle of the century, the level of education offered by this school had not yet reached that provided by other schools run by the Jesuits. However, by that time it had already had students in five, then six classes struggling with rhetoric, grammar and arithmetic. They were allowed to continue their studies in the next class only if they passed an exam.

According to the principles of Jesuit education, these end of the year examinations were often organized in the form of theatrical performances. It was mainly liturgical and mystery plays as well as dialogues debating issues of divinity that the students performed, but tragedies and comedies also appeared on the stage.

Mainly liturgical plays, mystery plays and religious dramas, but their oeuvre included tragedies and comedies as well. All Jesuit schools were striving to put their students on stage as many times as possible, with as many debating partners as possible, reaching the widest possible audiences. Self-study circles and debating societies occasionally had public meetings, which served the same end. Jesuits were determined to raise people who were good at public debates and were able to make their point and convince others. They taught skills and selected methods that could help reach this goal. At the beginning of the century the plays were performed in Latin, but from the 1750s on mostly in Hungarian! In 18th century Stuhlweissenburg, as the town was called at the time, German-speaking parents were watching their children speak Hungarian on the stage of the best school in town. Is this not a milestone on the road towards a Hungarian identity?

The cause of the Hungarian language was first embraced by György Pray,¹⁹ first a teacher then a head master of the school (1758–1760). Thanks to him interest in Hungarian had a high prestige that inspired future generations of students to explore it through linguistic research. Pray’s work was continued by Dávid Baróti Szabó, an early representative of emerging Hungarian literature. School performances reflected enlightenment and the interest in Hungarian. A Hungarian-language nativity play put on stage in 1767 includes ancient

17 KOSÁRY, 88–95.

18 The facts concerning the history of the Jesuit school are from the school’s history by Teofil Buda and Adolf Werner, as well as Zakariás Reichningen, Lipót Müller and György Laudovits; additional oral remarks provided by the diocesan head librarian.

19 Érsekújvár 1723 – Pest 1801, historian, linguist. (Manuscript, Fejér Country Branch of the Archives of Hungary.)

Greek shepherds named Cloridon and Menachos besides the traditional three wise men. The title of the performance is telling: "The Travel of Three Holy Wise Men or Certayne Ordinary Hungarian Verses about the three Holy Wise Men led by a Star to the Nativity of the new King Jesus for Joy and Adoration, performed first and foremost at the Request of the Hungarian dwellers of Székes fejér vár and then also performed in the Township of Győr under due circumstances by worthy young Students in the Year of the Lord 1767 and 1768"²⁰ The title page suggests that this performance was far more elaborate than an in-school examination. At this time a permanent intramural stage was in operation, where students could try their dramatic talents. Subject material was determined according to educational aims, however, not many Biblical stories were chosen and there were even fewer theatre performances about the life of saints.²¹ A frequent topic is the story of the Prodigal Son, since the topic is an excellent reflection of contemporary educational principles. It was on through most of the century.²² Historical plays were frequent, as well – ones featuring Hungarian King Saint Stephen, Polish King Boleslaw II, the Dictator Quintus Fabius, Hungarian King Béla IV to name but the most important. Theatre repertoire included some moral plays, as appropriate for schools, as well as a gradually growing number of entertaining plays, comedies and coarse jokes. The latter include *Cremes* by P Holler (1703) and *Talking Muses* (1758) written in Hungarian. A recently rediscovered play is titled *Farming Sulphur*²³ and it makes fun of avarice. Authors are mostly unknown. The plays were ordinarily directed by the class master of the performing students. A play would then travel all over Europe and it kept changing as it went from one place to another.

The performances were put on makeshift stages, but following major construction works a permanent stage was built in the great hall of the dormitory. Student troupes even had the luxury of a revolving stage here.

They always played to prominent audiences. High officials of the town and the county were present at the performances. The students and the school had the honour to receive as guest County Sheriff Ferenc Esterházy in 1737, and the County Notary in 1753. There were about 4–5 performances per year. Students attending the lower school classes put a play on stage at the end of the school year – it was an examination. On religious holidays and on noble occasions students attending the higher classes put on a performance. New Year's Day was celebrated with a theatre performance in 1753. Similarly to education in general, theatre performances were below state of the art. The Gymnasium was important for Székesfehérvár, but under the Jesuits it had not yet become the cultural centre it was later - at the time of the Order of Saint Paul and Cistercian Order.

Besides the Gymnasium, a town school called by its Latin name *Schola Trivialis* had been operating since 1690. Meagre circumstances were countered by town folks providing for teachers who gave elementary education to their pupils.

The school policy of the enlightened absolutism changed the educational situation of

20 Zakariás REIDIMINGEN – Lipót MÜLLER – György LAUDOVIČS, *A cisztercita gimnázium története*, 1896. (Manuscript), 1–36.

21 1756 – *Jacob's Story*; 1758 – *The story of Joseph, who was sold*; 1760 – *a play on the son of Joseph, Monesses*; 1766 – *Victorious Boldizsár*; 1767 – *a play on the fall of the flattering courtier*

22 1730, 1731, 1732, 1733, 1756, 1761, 1762, 1763, 1764, 1767.

23 István KILIÁN, *Iskolai színjátás Székesfehérvárott a XVIII. században*, FMTÉ, 1976, No. 10, 201–305, 246–248.

Székesfehérvár. In 1776, the Jesuits were forced to leave the Habsburg Monarchy. Their place was taken by the Pauline Order which had played an important role in the national resistance. In line with the instructions of Ratio Educationis, elementary schools, with the task to educate peasants and merchants, and were separated from grammar schools. Outside Pest, high quality four form elementary schools were established only in Székesfehérvár.²⁴ In order to educate craftsmen, 'Sunday drawing schools' were formed where mathematics, descriptive geometry and sample drawing were taught applying the best European methods and practices.²⁵ In the education policy of Székesfehérvár, however, grammar schools played the most significant role. The enlightened spirit, a characteristic feature of Jesuit grammar schools could develop fully under Pauline control, which had a more worldly-minded approach. This is the reason why Pál Ányos, after many vicissitudes, could find peace and quiet in this community.²⁶ In 1782, he was given the task of heading the first grammatical form, which was in concert with his ambitions. By this time, the Pauline grammar school in Székesfehérvár had become one of the country's biggest and best monastery schools. Apart from the first two grades, all forms were divided into groups. This is the reason why Pál Ányos considered it a great honour to have given the above mentioned task from the beginning of his employment there. It was not only his success in his teaching that helped him regain life energy, – indeed, the tone of his previous poems is rather melancholic – but the encouragement and support of his newly found poet colleague, Bertalan Virág was also important for him. Bertalan Virág also started his work at the grammar school in 1782, and continued to teach there until 1797, even after the dissolution of the order. It is likely, that the anthem of the national resistance, titled The Hatted King, was written in our town by Pál Ányos.

Although Pál Ányos, Benedek Virág and their fellow monks did not fully comprehend the political aims of Joseph II, they served a great cause, that of the town to become Hungarian. One achievement of their movement was that apart from the German language teachers, their colleagues were either not able to or did not want to speak German.

The success of a school can be evaluated by looking at the achievements of the pupils who learn there. During this time, an outstanding pupil was György Fejér, who later became a historiographer and teacher.

While the economy of Székesfehérvár was stagnant around the turn of the century, dynamic changes took place in the town's cultural life. However, before we turn to the characteristics of the reform era, it is important to take a look at some features of everyday life in the declining 18th century. The inhabitants of the town had not been interested in high culture exclusively even in earlier times. They sought entertainment, and they could find it in numerous occasions during the holidays of the year. In between holidays, however, the most significant meeting places were the inns in the town despite the fact that most citizens had their own wine which they could also sell within a regulated range. The inns had large function rooms suitable for organizing balls and other programmes. As early as in 1654, Székesfehérvár had two inns already. One of them operated in the suburb, and the other one, the

24 KOSÁRY, 212.

25 Ottóné SZABÓ Klára OLÁH, *Az Árpád Szakmunkásképző Intézet története*, Székesfehérvár, 1983, 1–75.

26 Nagysztergár 1756 – Veszprém 1784, poet of aristocratic resistance.

famous 'Fekete Sas', was also mentioned in the diary of the Jesuit monastery in 1701.²⁷ Parallel with advancements in the town, the number of inns had also grown significantly. In the 1730s, new inns such as the 'Arany Sas', 'Korona', and 'Mór' were opened. In 1768, the first civil society of the town, the fusilier society, which catered for men's specific sport needs, was formed with the permission of the monarch. The society's activities proved lasting, and the street in which its building was situated has been referred to as 'Lövölde' or 'Lövőház utca' since 1775.²⁸ At the end of the century, an inn to the 'Nagybögös' was opened. The name indicates that recruiting music appeared in Székesfehérvár as well, and Hungarian musicians playing the bagpipe and the Turkish pipe gave their place to Gypsy musicians and strings such as the cymbal.

The emergence of a patriotic culture

Due to extensive construction works, by the beginning of the 19th century Székesfehérvár became the town it was to remain throughout the period we are writing about. The feudalistic economy of Székesfehérvár was facing a long decay. Long-range commerce, once rather profitable, was a thing of the past; tradesmen of the traditional guilds were jealously guarding their privileges. The number of trade-people was diminishing as well as the number of trades. Capitalist ventures sporadically appeared, one example is printer's shops. Even the first bank was established as late as 1845. Despite the stagnating economy, this was the period when Székesfehérvár culture flourished for the second time and belonged to the state-of-the-art Hungarian culture.

An emerging Hungarian national identity that had started earlier was now accelerating. By 1791 there was hardly a Hungarian family that would claim to be ethnic German. Immigrations increased the percentage of Hungarians. The role of noblemen in the county is not to be underestimated. County gatherings saw heated debates on reform thoughts, which did have an impact on our town. The major landowners of the county included prominent families like the Eötvös, Batthyány, Esterházy (Counts) and Zichy family. The better known ones of smaller landowners were the Szappári, Meszlényi and Tinodi family. These families gave the county officials who, often by their generous financial contribution, made theatre performances possible in Székesfehérvár.

Let us return to the secondary grammar school, which, slow by slow establishing a high reputation, was the fertile ground of reform thoughts. In 1786 Emperor Joseph II dissolved the monasteries, so the Order of Saint Paul had to discontinue their excellent work in teaching. The town employed lay teachers for thirty years. This, however, meant no harm to the school, as many teachers, among others Benedek Virág himself, were still teaching there.

In 1813 Emperor Francis I donated the school to the Cistercian Order. From the very beginning they taught in Hungarian. In the lower classes oratories were also said in Hungarian, even before the decree to that effect was issued in 1843. The wide use of Hungarian at the school may have been one of the reasons why the minutes and other official documents of the municipality were worded in Hungarian, as well, from 1814.²⁹

27 István KÁLLAY, Székesfehérvár haszonvételei 1688–1790, FMTÉ, 1971, No. 5, 325-330.

28 Ibidem, 336.

29 Fejér Megyei Levéltár (Archives of Fejér County).

Throughout the 19th century a great many alumni of the school became prominent scholars, artists and politicians. A few examples: Antal Reguly³⁰ arrived in this lively town to become a student. This is where he got the inspiration to become a linguist – soon after graduation he set out to travel to the North in order to find cognate languages of Hungarian. In his lifetime he collected convincing evidence for his claim, but death prevented him from publishing it. The greatest poet of the Reform Age, Mihály Vörösmarty, was also heavily influenced by his linguist teacher at the school: it was Vörösmarty who compiled the first rule-book on orthography. He kept in touch with the school well after his graduation. In 1827 he considered settling down in Székesfehérvár, residing in the Bajzáth House (5 István Square). Vörösmarty made friends with his former teacher who was also the local censor. This is how his famous works *Outlaws* (1828) and *Csongor and Tünde* (1830), both banned in Pest, could be published in Székesfehérvár.

Studying Linguistics became a trademark of the grammar school and Finno-Ugric scholar József Budenz was approached and employed as a teacher in 1858.³¹

Patriotic sentiments among Székesfehérvár professionals led to the publication of a volume of poetry by Dániel Berzsenyi funded by a public donation. It was initiated by Seminary teacher and historian György Fejér.³² Another nice example of patriotism is the activity of Székesfehérvár bishop (1831–1835) János Horváth. Horváth made it his ambition to make the vast but unprofessionally managed library available for scholarly research. The library included the literary works of all the contemporary authors, as well as the best literary works that had been published previously.

According to János Horváth' views the literary stock consists of contemporary authors' works and most of the previously published works are also to be found. Bonfini, Istvánffy, Pray, etc., and contemporary works like Szécshenyi' *Credit*, Dessewffy's *Reflections on Credit and Wesselényi's Prejudices*. (Without these György Fehér couldn't have written his groundbreaking work in urban history.) In 1835 the scholarly bishop finally offered his whole public library for the public. His heritage was duly treated by his descendants. Significant donations expanded the library: in 1851 bishop Barkóczy's private library, in 1866 Imre Farkas's collection. In 1877 the library owned more than 10,000 volumes. Its' present day structure was shaped by the scholarly bishop János Pauer from the end of the century. This is how Kálmán Thaly saw his achievement: Bishop János Pauer, a member of the Academy, provost of Fehérvár, whose home is a museum of sciences and relics, owns an exceptional collection of 15th and 16th century printings which consists of very rare and truly lavish pieces, some of them with historically invaluable entries. The scholarly clergyman does not only have a beautiful library, a few outstanding relics, meticulously organized transcripts and original documents, but he is also able to describe and analyze the rare treasures in a skilful way. Now let us return to Fehérvár in the Age of Reforms. There are other signs of the growing scholarly interest. Collection of folksongs in Fejér in the spirit of the age was very much

30 Zirc 1819, Budapest 1892.

31 Rasdorf 1836, Budapest 1892.

32 DORMUTH, Székesfehérvár kulturális élete a XIX. században Székesfehérvár, 1936, in. Székesfehérvári Szemle, 1936, 13–27. It was a manifestation of Hungarian identity that the town's intellectuals and local novices raised money in order to support the publication of collected poems by Dániel Berzsenyi (1776–1836), a remarkable poet of the time.

connected to the first similar social phenomena. In 1843 the Kisfaludy Association issued a 'call to collect relics of folk poetry and prose' the result of which is János Erdélyi's *Folksongs and Legends* (1846–1848) which is based on findings from all over the country and the previous collections of the Academy of Science. The leaflet is from Székesfehérvár on which Erdélyi reflects: "The deceased brother of József Hodosi Karácsony, Lázár Karácsony left behind a collection of 200 folksongs and two volumes of sheets of guitar music compiled by the deceased."³³

Let's examine how the first enterprise of Székesfehérvár contributed to the cultural growth of the town. In 1806 in one of the houses of today's Kossuth Street Mihály Szammer opened his printing house. In the first half of the 19th century in some fields of industry, in printing houses as well, there are no Hungarians. Actually the owners and workers of Szammer Printing House were Germans. Mihály Szammer died in 1806, and his widow ran the small printing house very effectively. After her death her son, Pál Szammer went on with the family tradition. This was the time when the relatively small printing house published the most significant publications. To show his reverence Vörösmarty published some of his works through that printing house. After the death of Pál Szammer with the direction of his widow the printing house was turned into a significant enterprise. In 1848 it published, without official permit, the *Twelve Points*. Pál Szammer's widow was sentenced to a six month imprisonment. For her patriotic act Vörösmarty gifted her with the badge of jurists of Pest. Already in 1825 the town's Hungarian consciousness was clearly expressed in the declaration sent to the first Reform Convention. "Székesfehérvár which in the first five Hungarian centuries was the Sacred Place of the Hungarian Nation and Glorious Patriotic Deeds as the last bastion and fastness of the nation because of its long sufferings and present state it deserves to recapture its ancient royal and national rights."³⁴ The councillors had every right to be proud since working together with the county noblemen they strongly contributed to the very existence of Hungarian theatre playing which was not only a cultural but also a political mission. National theatre playing in Fehérvár belongs to the most glorious episodes of the town's cultural history.

By the end of the 18th century according to the needs of German population of the town and the garrison troupes invited from Buda and Zagreb performed in German. The playbill from 11 March which invites anyone interested for Weber's "Oberon" 'in dem Erbatuen Theater' i.e. in a newly built theatre. This theatre was located in Pelikán Inn. Several well-known troupes visited Fehérvár: in 1804 Czibulka Hoffmann' and Karner's opera troupe, in 1808 Lőrinc Gindl's troupe. The history of Hungarian-language acting started with the invited guest performance of Pest society in 1813. They played László Szentjóbi Szabó's Drama called "Mátyás király" ("King Matthias"). István Balog reported on the financial success of this guest performance. Thanks to this success this relatively big theatre company (11 men, 5 women, 10 musicians) was the guest of the town for longer periods a couple of times. In 1815 the Pest City Beautification Committee ordered the Hungarian theatre, Rondella, to be pulled down; therefore, the company which had been regular was dissolved. The majority of its members moved to Miskolc, where they joined the first regular theatre company of the city.

33 Ferenc PESOVAR, *vagyok, béres*, 1982, Székesfehérvár, 1982, 37–48.

34 FITZ, 72–73.

Encouraged by the Miskolc example the nobility of Fejér County, in cooperation with the leadership of Székesfehérvár, decided to set up a regular theatre company. They managed to raise 37,327 forints from charity.³⁵ Apart from this, the owner of Pelikán Inn offered his theatre hall for free; György Bajzáth, the notary of the county, offered his palace at Fehérvár to the company, where the actors and actresses resided free. Pál Szilágyi writes about him the following: "... there was a set designer working for the company but the principal set designing was carried out by the county notary, Bajzáth (the owner of several villages); and I must admit that I had not seen a man in such a high position working as passionately as he did".³⁶

Gyula Lauschmann, a historian from Székesfehérvár, writes: '...in 1818 the enthusiastic audience of our county made a basis for maintaining acting in our town through charity. They devoted their money for the sake of acting'.³⁷ The county also took the responsibility for the issues related to organisation: the director was Judge Pál Kolozsvári, while the financial issues were handled by Principal Tax Collector Ignác Nagy. The contemporaries felt that 'the cultural importance of Hungarian theatres was that they were the central points of the cultural waves originating from the countryside; therefore, they were the bearers for the development of the national thought. Without them it would have been difficult to find an institution in the country having such a decisive effect on the issue of Hungarianization'.³⁸ Under these circumstances it is no wonder that the best actors and actresses joined the theatre company at Fehérvár. On the opening performance on 11 October 1818 the following actors and actresses were on stage: Deputy Director György Éder, József Horváth, Ferenc Komlóssy, the popular comic István Nagy, Pál Szilágyi, László Kelemen, Erzsébet Baloghné Tenkler, and the excellent dramatic actress Anna Kántorné Engelhardt. The programme of the theatre was varied, but genuine Hungarian plays were missing at the time. They played works written by Goldoni, Schiller, Lafontaine, Zschakke and Katzebue. The year 1819 is significant for several reasons. The company already played outside Székesfehérvár too. Even Mrs. Déry played with this company and in 1821 she signed for the theatre, although her experiences in 1813 did not encourage her to do so. She wrote: "It was an extremely boring town then and I hurried back home to Pest as quickly as I could."³⁹

The performances of the company bearing high artistic value were outstanding compared to those of average contemporary theatres. Being in a good financial position the company could better focus on their artistic work. This was also the year when they started performing plays written by Hungarian playwrights. Among others they performed the plays of György Éder, Imre Babarcsi, Sándor Csizmadia, and József Katona. The sensational news

35 The information and data concerning the collected sum of money is controversial, however this seems valid based on archival material.

36 Mihály CENNER, *Magyar színészet Székesfehérvárott és Fejér megyében*, Székesfehérvár, 1972. 5–6. In the 18th century, most inhabitants of the town's center spoke German as their first language. Also, the German soldiers in the local garrison had a strong influence language-wise. Therefore, theatre performances were held (with only a few exceptions) in German in this century.

37 Gyula LAUSCHMANN, *Székesfehérvár története*, Székesfehérvár, 1899, 29–30

38 József BAYER, *A nemzeti játékszín története*, Budapest, 1887, 25–31.

39 CENNER, 5–6. The diaries of Mrs. Déry.

of the year was the premiere of Károly Kisfaludy's first play. Pál Szilágyi writes about this as follows: Károly Kisfaludy sent his first drama, "Tatárok Magyarországon" (Tartars in Hungary), to the director complemented with some not well-thought-out lines. How glad we were to receive the rising star of the Hungarian sky! It was not due to its excellence but rather its well-written language that we learnt it with joy and to our huge surprise we also performed it on stage."⁴⁰ After that Kisfaludy became the so-called local playwright for the Fehérvár theatre. During the same year they also performed "Kérők", "Ilka" and "Stibor vajda".

The popularity of the Fehérvár Theatre Company was growing steadily. They played as invited guests in Pest regularly. Their repertoire was colourful, among which there were Hungarian and classical authors' works like Goethe, Shakespeare and Lessing.

It seemed to be the case that the lucky star of actors and actresses in Fehérvár would not decline and they could sow their seeds in the Transdanubian town inclined to its traditions. However, without the financial means of the county the enthusiastic support of the audience was not enough to maintain the company. After several years of success troubles arrived for the theatre group.

After years of success, they ran into trouble, and the troubles were multiplied by 1824. Máté Könyves (Máté the Bookman) writes: "Mr. Fehérvári, the Main Director relinquished directorship to Mr. Horváth and Ferenc Komlóssy, along with certain extra sums of money donated. Not only did these Gentlemen finance the company from their small riches, fighting through numerous obstacles until the upcoming National Assembly, but they also increased its honour and merit, through relentlessly attempting to gain the favours of their audience".⁴¹ So in spite of its good intentions, the county was not able to finance the operation of the theatre; however, it monitored the progress of the theatre now becoming independent. Trusting the National Assembly, Fejér County offered contracts for the actors and actresses in Pozsony (Bratislava) as a final attempt to keep the company together, but surprisingly enough this fell flat due to disinterest of the Parliament members. Quoting Máté Könyves (Máté the Bookman?) again, "The light of hope that stirred in the hearts of the National Theatre Company while they were on their way to Pozsony (Bratislava) soon faded. Having been informed, the Noble County saw all its attempts to be unsuccessful or disregarded, and because they did not mean to do anything against the welfare of the Company for making them wait too long, after three months they wished the Company Members good luck and let them go their own ways, providing them with their costumes and books".⁴²

The attempt of Fejér County to promote acting by the creation of a Hungarian national theatre company preceded the events leading to the foundation of the National Theatre by

40 CENNER, 9. Originally cited in: József BAYER, *Déryné naplója* 1–2. Budapest, 1879, 35–45. Déryné insisted on Pest due to emotional reasons. Róza Déryné Széppataki (né Schenbach) (1793–1872) was the first Hungarian opera singer, and the most celebrated artist in the era of trouper groups. Between 1810 and 1847, she appeared on stage in numerous towns of contemporary Hungary. She played several hundred roles in German, Hungarian and Italian, and translated twelve dramas from German into Hungarian. She performed in Székesfehérvár several times.

41 *Ibidem*, 30–31. Máté Könyves was a member of the acting company. Károly Kisfaludy (1788–1830), playwright. A number of his works, which played an important role in forming the Hungarian language and strengthening the Hungarian identity, were put on stage in Székesfehérvár.

42 *Ibidem*, 51. Theatre groups had to face financial difficulties, therefore, managers often changed.

more than ten years. In 1825 the cases of the Academy and the National Theatre were just too much at once for the Parliament patriots. In spite of the failure, those seven years that Fejér county and Székesfehérvár gave to the case of acting in Hungary produced lasting results, the rise of Hungarian drama, which can hardly be imagined without a well-rehearsed and high-quality company.

Although the core of the theatre group stayed together for a while, the years of wandering wore them down to the pale image of their previous grand selves. Máté Könyves' diary sheds light to their conditions. "In 1827 Director Ferenc Komlóssy resigned, leaving József Horváth for its sole owner, who supported it until his wealth, acquired by painstaking work, was entirely wasted on the Institute (where it takes its origins from) in Komárom (Komárno). Here Mr. Horváth stepped out and Ferenc Komlóssy and István Tóth became the owners of the company. The Company was sent to Kaposvár, Somogy county, and its income was not found enough to pay the acting Members; and fearing the lot of József Horváth, they gave up on a part of their salary, thus making the Company a plain company, whose leader remained Ferenc Komlóssy".⁴³ Without the famous characters, the group soon became just one of the other wandering theatre companies.

In those days nearly all theatre companies stopped at Székesfehérvár, e.g. National Acting Company, Kolozsvár (now: Cluj-Napoca) National Theatre, Transdanubian Theatre Company.

The case of acting was greatly promoted by the opening of Pesti Magyar Theatre in 1837 (National Theatre from 1840). Hungarian playwrights wrote more and more; József Gaál's, Ede Szigligeti's and Zsigmond Czakó's plays found their way to the audience. Theatre became important.

Among the members of the small companies wandering around the neighbouring counties in 1841, Sándor Petőfi is there as 'Borostyán'. He was a student in Pápa and joined Károly Szuper's company in Székesfehérvár. As a friend, Petőfi is often mentioned in Szuper's diary. "11 November. Our income has greatly increased, and we invited the national theatre's ballet master Hasenhut for guest roles. Bringing a few dancers with himself, he animated the audience indeed. A student from Pápa has recently arrived, who, being from Kiskunság like myself, from Kiskunfélegyháza, wanted to meet me so as to be recommended to the director. He said he had long been attracted to acting, and even tried it once at Csahfalvi's company, but he immediately gave it up. I was ready to help and got him a place in the company. This young Petőfi, who first stepped on stage yesterday as a groom in 'Idlers of Paris', and laughs at Bizot when the idler drops him. This was when Petőfi wrote his poem 'My first role'. We soon became friends. Petőfi had written a bunch of poems, but few were published since he was not well known among publishers and editors. By that time I knew most of his poems, because after writing one, he immediately brought a poem with him to read it. He regarded my wife to be a competent judge in discussing his poems. Poor Petőfi, I will never forget it, lived in a very cold room in my neighbourhood all winter long, and if he wanted to get warm, he would come only to us and read his poems and the Carthusian Order.

⁴³ Ibidem, 59. The public administration of Fejér county withdrew its support from the theatre groups.

18 November

Today Petőfi brought his collection of poems to my place, and I picked some poems for recitation. He also informed me that the master of the house where he lived had mercifully invited us for pig killing and that he had already written a poem called "Pig Killing" and after reading it in the evening we had great fun together".⁴⁴

Due to the above citations one can get an insight into travelling actors' as well as the poet's everyday life. Nevertheless, Petőfi's residence in Szekésfehérvár played a more important role in his life than one has ever thought of. Those documents, which were recently published in Pápa, prove that our great poet was not only a supernumerary or a flyer distributor but a fellow member of one of the top acting companies in the region.⁴⁵

Certainly as a beginner he had supernumerary roles for example in „Párizsi naplopó" (Flaneur de Paris) in which, as K. Szuper mentioned, his only part was „ha-ha-ha". Fehérvár audience could also see Petőfi acting in the supernumerary role of Faust, a guardian of animals and wildlife, in a musical farce comedy called „The Ape and the Bridegroom". In the next folk performance "Garabonciás diák" (Wandering Scholar) by János Munkácsi actors played two or three roles and hence Petőfi got more roles to play as well. In the first two parts Borostyán performed the role of a man-servant which was a silent role, then in the third part he acted as a village sacrifice who together with his partner was searching for his lost animals. Here he had more sentences to say. And from then on, he was acting on a regular basis every day and therefore the troupe accepted his play. On 13 December the name Borostyán appeared next to a demanding role in an emotional drama Babérfa és koldusbot (Laurel and Beggary) written by Holbei. Regarding the content and the function, his role is considered as a secondary one. Therefore, the actor who plays the part with a genuine passion is applauded by the audience. Petőfi was determined to become an actor, he was consciously working towards a career in acting and made huge sacrifices for it, he quit school, caused grief to his parents, however he always listened to his intuition and that is why he was preparing even for the minor roles with scrupulous attention to details. Success was very important to Petőfi and he obtained it in Fehérvár. Here his name was first published, and here once an unknown student became a member of one of the best-known troupes in the county.⁴⁶

According to the previously mentioned facts, it can be stated that in the first half of the 19th century he undertook such cultural activities which were far beyond Szekésfehérvár's possibilities.

Though, one must take into consideration the fact that within the existing feudal framework the majority of citizens were not involved in the cultural life at all. Who can be found among the students of grammar school, who were the theatre goers? The town's noble and well-off citizens and county's noblemen.

44 Ibidem, 74–75. The home of György Magyar, where Petőfi lived, was on the corner of János Arany and Petőfi street, earlier a cinema had been located here, Sándor Petőfi (1823–1849), one of the most significant poets of the time, was, at the age of 19, a supporting actor in the play "A Parisian Idler" in Szekésfehérvár.

45 Ibidem, 74–75. The playbills were found during the course of research done by the teachers Szabó O. Oláh Klára and Barasits Béla.

46 Béla BARASITS, Petőfi Sándor Szekésfehérvárott, (Manuscript, Fejér County Branch of the Archives of Hungary), 3–11.

In 1838 Széchényi urged to organise the Casino Társaság but in vain because „...a good taste, educated conversations, intellectual and moral growth and therefore the maintenance of intelligentsia” was not possible whereas this society consisted only of 60 noble, 22 ecclesiastic and 82 urban members. In those times 15,000 people lived in the town. Only in the forthcoming epoch in the course of evolution of civil society the majority of its population became an active member of community culture in Székesfehérvár.

The population did not remain uninfluenced by cultural events of national importance in the reform period. At the beginning of the century the town with German feeling stood as one by national affairs in 1848.

Abstract

The paper describes the cultural and social history of Székesfehérvár at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. The author introduces the modernization of a town with medieval traditions in the new age while also looking at the development and alteration of the concept of ‘nation’ and national awareness, as these are some of the main components of identity development during the civilization process in the town. The author investigates the processes by which the majority of the residents became speakers of Hungarian from German, the dominant first language after the Turkish era.

Keywords

Székesfehérvár (Hungary), 18th and 19th century, economic expansion, urban development, embourgeoisement, national culture (theatre play, music, identity in language), education, civil organisations