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György Pray's Unpublished Memoir

In my lecture I would like to briefly present an unpublished work by György Pray which is titled as *Epitome rerum sub Josepho secundo, Leopoldo secundo et Francisco primo regibus Hungariae gestarum*. This work was recommended to me by László Szörényi. This writing which I will refer to as *Epitome* from now on, as it is suggested by its title, is a short, outline-like work. Its topic is the exposé of the main internal and foreign political events of the reign of three kings: Joseph II, Leopold II, and Francis I. In this writing Pray does not break the annalistic tradition which characterizes the Jesuit historian school, in other words he reports the events connecting them to the given years. The 21-year long period which is included in this writing lasts from 1780 (Joseph II comes to the throne) to the April of 1801 (the Battle at Copenhagen). Pray was prevented from continuing his work by his illness and later by his death in September, 1801.

The existence of *Epitome* has not been unknown by those dealing with the oeuvre of Pray. The *Allgemeine Literatur Zeitung* of Jena's critic about Pray's three-volume-long Hungarian History mentions the manuscript.¹ The author of the article assumes that this – like the other elements of the legacy – is worth publishing. In their Pray biographies the two former Jesuits, who were close to the historian, Mihály Paintner and István Schönvisner also refer to the work² as well

¹ Nr. 174, 18 June, 1802.

² Mihály Paintner's (1753–1826) Pray biography *Vitae ac scriptorum Georgii Pray canonici Magno-Varadiensis succincta recensio per Michaelem Antonium Paintner* was first published as the *Praefatio* of Pray's posthumously published sigillography essay. (In *Syntagma historicum de sigillis regum et reginarum Hungariae pluribusque aliis autore Georgio Pray [...]*. Budae 1805, III–XXVI). Rezső Gálos published it based on the manuscript preserved in the Library of the Archabbey of Pannonhalma (PFK, 118 C 1/15): M. Paintner, *Pray György életrajza* [György Pray's biography]. Ed. R. GÁLOS. Győr 1937. There are many differences between the one published as a preface and the one published from the manuscript. I rely on the 1805 publication (Paintner 1805). The biography written by István Schönvisner (1738–1818) is the item of the Manuscript Archive of National Széchényi Library (OSZK) under the signature Fol. Lat. 3818; it is a censorship copy in which we can find the autographical supplements

as Joseph von Hormayr who mentions the manuscript in the *Österreichischer Plutarch*.³ The author of the 1937-published Pray monograph (the only one so far), Gáspár Lischerong SJ, also writes about the *Epitome*. According to him “it has great value especially in the judgement of Joseph the Second and the French Revolution.”⁴ Most recently László Szörényi mentioned the work in his study which presents Pray’s two epic poems, categorizing it as a memoir, unpublished mostly because of censorship problems.⁵

The work was left to us in several copies. The autographical, supposedly final version can be found in the Manuscript Archive of the Széchényi National Library (OSzKK).⁶ This copy together with other Pray manuscripts was donated to the Library by Archduke Joseph in 1809.⁷ The Archduke had bought the works from the executor of Pray’s will, István Schönvisner, for 1000 Forints. Another copy made by the Library’s clerk and archivist, József Alajos Strázsay, in 1810 is also held in the National Library.⁸

In the Manuscript Archive of the University Library in Budapest (EKK) two further copies can be found. One of them is the long-time known one under the signature G 128, which was included in the first organized manuscript catalogue made about 1850.⁹ This copy was probably made in 1803 or in 1804 during the library director period of István Schönvisner. I have not been able to identify its copyist so far. But it can be stated that this copy was copied from the one which had been made by István Schönvisner. Schönvisner copied the manuscript for the request of Mihály Paintner. Paintner the former Jesuit, later chief provost of Győr, was a passionate collector of the manuscripts and books of the Jesuits who had formerly been belonging to the Austrian province. He left his rich collection to the Pannonhalma Archabbey in his will, founding the library’s so-called *Jesuitica* collection with this move. The aforementioned Schönvisner copy of the *Epitome* was held here until 1996. In that year the Library of Pannonhalma

of the author and Mihály Paintner. *Commentarius de vita et scriptis Georgii Pray [...] auctore Stephano Schönvisner*. Buda 1804.

³ HORMAYR, J.: *Österreichischer Plutarch, oder Leben und Bildnisse aller Regenten des österreichischen Kaiserstaats*. XI Bdchen. Wien 1807, 244.

⁴ LISCHERONG, G. S. J.: *Pray György élete és munkái* [György Pray’s life and works]. Budapest 1937, 110.

⁵ SZÖRÉNYI, L.: *Pray György történetírása és alkalmi költészete* [György Pray’s historiography and occasional poetry]. In *Classica, mediaevalia, neolatina, acta conventus diebus undecimo et duodecimo mensis Maii anno MMIV Debrecini habiti*. Edd. L. HAVAS – E. TEGYEV. Debrecini, Societas Neolatina Hungarica Sectio Debreceniensis 2006, 200.

⁶ OSzKK, Quart. Lat. 310 (hereafter: *Epitome*).

⁷ MÁTRAY, G.: *A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum korszakai, különös tekintettel a közelebb lefolyt huszonöt évre* [The eras of National Museum of Hungary, in particular the last twenty-five years]. Pest 1868, 17.

⁸ OSzKK, Quart. Lat. 347.

⁹ EKK, J 61. *Catalogus manuscriptorum. Conspectus circa annum 1850*.

Archabbey transferred several Pray manuscripts to the University Library in return for the *Pannonhalmi Evangelistarium*.¹⁰ Amongst the transferred works there is the manuscript bundle which contains the Schönvisner copy. Along with the other bundle this one was classified as tome 68 into the manuscript collection *Collectio Prayana*. In the first volume of the tome we can find not only the Schönvisner copy but bound after this there are Pray's handwritten notes and drafts too. These must be taken into consideration in the further publishing as they include Pray's roughs, his footnotes and marginal notes, which are different from the final version at many points.

Having presented the copies let us have a look at the work itself. The *Epitome* is worth for our special attention as Pray, who had been dealing with the Hungarian prehistory and medieval times, concentrates especially on the foreign political events of his own age. Pray's interest towards the events of contemporary politics was not new during the time of the birth of the *Epitome*. In the diet of 1790–1791 Pray participated as the delegate of the chapter of Nagyvárad and he took an active part in the discussion of matters of public law and religion politics and also in the replying of the leaflets concerning these matters in the form of pamphlets. The fact that he was concerned by the events of his age is also supported by his epigrams. The publications of these are also credited to László Szörényi.¹¹ Apart from the aforementioned 1790–1791 diet the epigrams were inspired by such events as the execution of Louis the Sixteenth and his wife Marie Antoinette, the Congress of Rastatt from 1797 to 1799, or Admiral Nelson's victory in Abukir over the forces of Napoleon in 1798. In these epigrams the events of the French Revolution and the following coalition wars also appear.

The *Epitome* also illustrates the epigram's historical background. The events which made Pray write these poems also appear in this work. The author only mentions those events that he believes to be important and this gives a short epitome-like character to the writing. However, the relatively few, well-selected subjects are the results of Pray's historian concept. He does not want to allude to all events; he rather tries to emphasize those events which are important from the European politics and diplomacy's point of view. He also tries to reveal the systematical connections of the events. His aim is to explore and explain the processes which had led to historical events. Similarly to his published historical works, he also wrote notes to the *Epitome* and those notes are to give or to quote his sources or to complete the main text. In the work we can find

¹⁰ Cf. *Pannonhalmi Szemle* 5/1 (1997) 120–121.

¹¹ SZÖRÉNYI, L.: *Pray György kiadatlan versei a Pannonhalmi Főkönyvtárban* [György Pray's unpublished poems in the Archabbey Library of Pannonhalma] In *Találkozások. Várszegi Asztrik pannonhalmi főapát hatvanadik születésnapjára* [Meetings, one for the sixtieth birthday of Archabbot Asztrik Várszegi]. Edd. E. SULYOK – M. VARGA. Pannonhalma, Pannonhalmi Főapátság 2006, 221–235.

the other element which characterizes Pray's method of writing and this is the outlining of different viewpoints for the judgement of an event. These features which characterize his historian works are other points in favour of considering that Pray might have wanted to have his work published possibly as some kind of continuation for his Hungarian history, the *Historia regum Hungariae* published in 1801. However, the writing has some strongly worded views which are typical for Pray's denominational and political views. This might give an explanation why this work was not published after the author's death.

For Pray's historical approach Bálint Hóman states: "his historical approach is rooted in the catholic ideology, in the Jesuit data acquisition school's historical approach and in the constitutional class ideology."¹² These statements are more or less true to Pray's views about politics and religious politics. Obviously he is loyal to the king and to the church and he writes with a certain antipathy to those who endanger the two. So in that part of the *Epitome* which deals with the reign of Joseph the Second Pray introduces the Prussian court as Vienna's greatest foe and ill-wisher. All the political steps of the Prussian court serve to weaken the Empire. Pray presents the Prussian king and his cabinet as representatives of an aggressive, timeserver political style whose only interest is gaining territory. The verification of the dishonest behaviour of the Berliner court is a recurring circumstance throughout the work.

Later the French Revolution takes over the part of the main enemy which is a danger not only for the Emperor, but for whole Europe. Pray mentions neither the outbreak, nor the reasons of the Revolution. For the year 1789 he reports the main events of the Russian–Austrian–Turkish war, referring proudly to the military successes achieved under the lead of András Hadik (1710–1790).¹³ He begins to report the French events from 1791 and from this point they become the main point of the writing. For Pray, the embodiment of the revolution is the Jacobins. According to him, they are the ones who captured the Constituent Assembly at a relatively early point and the ones who sowed the seeds of the violence, later, the war. According to Pray's brief description: *Factio pestilentissima, quae in excidium religionis et regum coaluit*.¹⁴ Pray allusions the Jacobin conspiracy being responsible for the sudden death of Leopold II and for the deadly attempt on Gustav III's life.¹⁵ Quite interestingly, conspiracy theories which are related to secret societies were becoming popular in those times. The pioneering work of the topic is the four-volume-long work by Augustin de Barruel *Mémoires pour*

¹² HÓMAN, B.: *Tudományos történetírásunk megalapítása a XVIII. században* [Founding our scientific historiography in the eighteenth century]. Budapest 1920, 26.

¹³ *Epitome* 8^r–9^v.

¹⁴ *Epitome* 18^r.

¹⁵ *Epitome* 22^v.

servir à la histoire du Jacobinisme. The former Jesuit author published his book in London and in his book he blames the encyclopaedists, the Free Masons, and the Bavarian Illuminates. It is not known if Pray had known this book, he states the existence of the conspiracy referring to the contemporary press. In his opinion this conspiracy enmeshes whole Europe and the Convent helped this with laws and voting a considerable amount of money. As Pray writes, nobody could easily resist to the Jacobin madness which was spread slavishly by the French and their delegates. This deadly lues of the mankind – as Pray writes – which, as a cancer slowly and silently wormed its way into the countries because of the rulers' compliance and irresponsibility, found its way to the Hereditary provinces and Hungary. According to Pray the aim of the secret society was to commit the same in Hungary against the nobility and the clergy that they had already committed in France against the king and his family. By getting the wealth of the nobility and the clergy they wanted to ensure the power for themselves.¹⁶ The first step would have been the demolition of the old form of state together with the religion. Pray declares approvingly about the retaliatory measures taken by the king after the unveiling of the Jacobin conspiracy, and applauds that despite his young age Francis handled the situation with the necessary strictness.¹⁷

In Pray's opinion the roots of the Jacobinism can be found in the Masonry. The two movements do not differ significantly as both aim at the undermining and ruining of the kingdom and the church. In the chapter dealing with the reign of Joseph II, Pray notes that the king relied on the work of several people who were members of the Masons. Under the influence of those the king practiced absolutism and ordered everything on his own opinion and not on the tradition of laws. Because of the Mason influence the king found acceptable the ignoring the mag-nates in government offices, the raise of lower nobilities into government positions and most importantly the preferring commons which led to society tensions.¹⁸

In the eighth chapter of the part dealing with the reign of Francis I, Pray obviously declares the Masonry as a forerunner of the Jacobinism. According to Pray the Jacobinism is a very harmful plague of the mankind which had its omens (that is Masonry) in Germany earlier. Those tenets penetrated into Hungary from there during the reign of Joseph the Second. It was so likely for him to oppress these tenets that he even gave legibility to them. But this poison spread even more widely due to this compliance. Since the Masons wanted to entice people with different status and religion into their community, they promised higher positions to the seculars, more profitable benefices to the ecclesiastical persons, and freedom to the monks. Pray finds it remarkable that many notables

¹⁶ *Epitome* 40^v.

¹⁷ *Epitome* 41^r–42^v.

¹⁸ *Epitome* 40^v.

had let themselves be enmeshed. According to him the Masons behave as they were a species which is different from humans and that is why they have different habits and customs. They name their companies as Lodges which have their meetings at night. They lend their names from the Greeks and the Romans and they use a time system which is different from the Christian one. Although they have a confidentiality agreement, their signs, special language, and writing have already surfaced. About the company's organizational structure Pray writes the following: imitating the monks they nominate provincials and visitors for the special areas. They order even stronger obedience to their principals than the monks do, but few of them know those principals. Most members are in the lowest class; they are the apprentices or as Pray names them the *clitellarii*. Anyone from the mass of apprentices can not be easily let in on the secret mysteries which aim at the destruction of the religion and the legal power. Only those can achieve this after years of experiment are found to be eligible for it. In this way – Pray ends his flight of wit – the Masons form a real state within the state by their prestige and this is the most dangerous thing that could happen to an average citizen as they claim the right of life and death for themselves.¹⁹

It is not the *Epitome* only where we can read Pray's opinion about the Masons. In his reply written to two pamphlets by József Hajnóczy (1750–1795) he further accuses the Masons besides the aforementioned.²⁰ He writes about them that they are implacable enemies of anyone who does not share their views but they have strong ties between themselves. These ties whether it is between compatriots or between the members of different nations are stronger than their patriotism. The Masons support themselves extensively especially in getting dignitaries and offices which have political, legal, or economic power. The financial benefits which accompany this complete the financial contribution which is paid by the members on a yearly basis. Pray remarks that if the king intended to impose this tax on them, they immediately would complain about the insult of their exemption from tax and noble privileges. Even though he claims himself to know several Masons personally he was surprised to find that there are Masons even among the principals of the Catholic Church. In searching for the reasons he presumes that the main lure was the possibility of gaining ecclesial statuses. Pray writes that he was also offered a prebend even a possible archbishop position in the long term if he had joined the Masons. Of course he refused the offer.

I would serve you even more details from the *Epitome* which reflects Pray's opinions and findings on his own age, but the time limits of my lecture do not let me do so. However, I hope that I have been able to raise the interest towards this special writing by György Pray.

¹⁹ *Epitome* 41^{r-v}.

²⁰ OSZK, Quart. Lat. 567, Tom. I. 104–107.