

Leonard Stöckel and two Hungarian Reformers

An episode in the history of the Hungarian Reformation

Leonard Stöckel was born in 1510 in the royal free city of Bártfa in the kingdom of Hungary; (in German Bartfeld; today Bardejov in the Republic of Slovakia). During his life he was an influential reformer in Upper Hungary. Stöckel studied in Breslau (now Wrocław in the Polish Republic), in Kassa (now Košice in the Slovak Republic) and in Wittenberg. He was a student of Philipp Melanchthon, the great German humanist and teacher. Stöckel aided in organizing the Lutheran movement in Upper Hungary. He developed a very good Latin school in his birthplace, wrote the first confession of faith, and helped other workers of the reformation. His pedagogical reforms and religious work were influential for generations after his own death in 1560.

Sárospatak and Sátoraljaújhely – towns in Upper Hungary – played an important role in the history of the Hungarian Reformation through their preachers. The owner of both towns was Lord Peter Perényi, one of the richest landowners in Hungary.

In the first half of the 16th century there was a lively contact between Sárospatak and Bártfa, which was apparent both in financial and intellectual aspects.

Peter Perényi kept a regular contact with the towns of the Uplands, primarily with Kassa, Eperjes – now Prešov in the SR – and Bártfa. (These cities were centers of the Lutheran movement; their population was German, Slav and Hungarian.) During his great constructions in Sárospatak he often requested craftsmen and building material from the two latter towns. Correspondence with the towns was mainly run by the parsons of Sárospatak and his court priests, also fulfilling the roles of the court chancellor clerks. Besides, the sources also support the fact that the churchmen surrounding Perényi cherished a personal relationship with the Reformers active here, first and foremost with Leonard Stöckel.

After King Louis II had died (1526), the Hungarians elected two kings, one of them was John, the other was Ferdinand. Around 1540 Peter Perényi decided that he should take the side of Ferdinand I abandoning King John I. He initiated the preachers surrounding him into his plans, who on the contrary, supposedly did not support his political ideas. Therefore, they were dismissed from the milieu of the landlord, one of them was even taken prisoner for a short period.

Two of the dismissed ministers went to Bártfa to Leonard Stöckel. First, it was Michael Siklósi, preacher of Sátoraljaújhely, who visited the town as Stöckel writes “for the sake of seeing him and others of his friends”. Michael Siklósi lived in the

milieu of Peter Perényi even before 1530, when he arrived to Upper Hungary together with him to become the Reformer of Sátoraljaújhely. He spent the last part of his life in Sárospatak, where he was a preacher in 1547 and died in 1567.

We know even less about Andreas Dobai than of Siklósi. He was Perényi's court priest in Sárospatak in 1540, one of the songs he wrote here remained. Already in the spring of 1541 he stayed in Bártfa, where due to the intercession of Stöckel he became the governor of the sons of Lord Francis Révay who were studying there. Furthermore, in the summer of 1544 thanks to the encouragement of Stöckel and the town council, he started preaching in Hungarian for the Hungarian congregation living in the town.

There is no exact data regarding when and where Stöckel, Siklósi and Dobai became friends. (Neither Siklósi nor Dobai attended the Wittenberg University, as far as we know.) We may reckon that it could be the school at Kassa, where before 1530 the excellent Reformer and teacher of Bártfa studied, and both Siklósi and Dobai may have attended this institution.