Theses of PhD Dissertation

CRUCIAL ASPECTS OF FERENC ECKHART’S HISTORICAL WRITING

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I. Defining the aims and subject of the PhD-thesis

The most important aim of the author of this PhD-thesis is to create a framework, in which we can better understand the historical writing of Ferenc Eckhart (1885–1957) and identify its most relevant problems. He approaches this question from a historiographical point of view, thus he doesn’t try to write a biography or to achieve completeness. So far there hasn’t been any attempt to broadly analyze the historical writing of Ferenc Eckhart, hence basic research was necessary. Therefore it is important to note that at the current stage of the research the author cannot write a monograph about Eckhart. He focuses on certain significant problems, as indicated in the title of the thesis. This means that the author discusses the main works of Eckhart and the literature about him – but he also tries to present an overview about the historian and to place (evaluate and analyze) his historical writing in the contemporary scholarly disputes. Certain aspects of Eckhart’s scientific work have received much more attention. There are numerous studies about the debate in 1931 or his work *The idea of the holy crown* 1941. These topics are indeed important and the author deals with them in separate chapters. However, much less has been written about Eckhart’s works during the Dualist Era, his views on social and economic history, and – apart from the Austrian Harold Steinacker – the intellectual influence of foreign authors.

Following the method described above, the author will first present a short overview about the discourse following Eckhart’s death and then proceeds with his analysis generally – but not always – in a chronological way. The author discusses the relevant problems in separate chapters with different lengths, always explaining the reasons. The dissertation covers the period from the beginning of Eckhart’s career in the Dualist Era until the „second Eckhart-debate” (1955) started by marxist criticism few years before the historian’s death.

There are many unresolved problems in connection with the work of Eckhart and there are ongoing discussions among legal historians regarding the interpretation of his books. What did Eckhart think about the spiritual history, social history and professionalism? How can we interpret these concepts and in which way were they present in the historical thinking of the historian? How did he define the Doctrine of the Holy Crown or the Idea of the Holy Crown? Why did he debate the earlier views on legal history, doctrinized mainly by Ákos Timon (1850–1925) who assumed the constant presence of a Hungarian democratic genius in legal history?
From 1929 on, Eckhart was a professor of Hungarian Legal and Constitutional History in Budapest, and the most widely debated element of his scholarly work was (and still is) his evaluation of the Idea of the Holy Crown. It is in many respects unclear, why did he ignite so bitter discussions with his opinion, influencing the Hungarian historical writing and indirectly also the public opinion. In his programmatic treatise 1931, he argued for the re-interpretation of the Hungarian legal and constitutional history with the methods of social and spiritual history, and urged the re-evaluation of the Idea of the Holy Crown (which was a term for the various political concepts regarding the Crown such as the Doctrine of the Holy Crown based on the organic unity of the nation and the king) in an European context. The treatise generated a huge polemics and motivated further historical and juristic research. To name just a few persons with new approaches to the topic: Emma Bartoniek, Gyula Szekfű, Péter Váczy, Elemér Mályusz, Bálint Hóman, József Deér, György Bónis (historians), István Egyed and István Csekey (professors of public law).

The question of interpretation is very important, because the definition and evaluation of Ferenc Eckhart’s role in the field of legal history, his scientific „heritage” is still a relevant question for the legal and constitutional historians. Historiography-writing may also profit from such analyses, as in their monographs about historiography both Béla Várdy and Vilmos Erős have emphasized the role of the legal history „school” of Eckhart in the interwar period. The career of the Hungarian legal and economic historian is a good opportunity to examine the different forms of spiritual and social history present in the Hungarian historical writing and enables us to further discuss the „national” characteristic of historical writing.

In his dissertation the author also tries to give a possible interpretation about Eckhart’s works. This means the reconstruction of their contents and the presentation of interpretations of other contemporary historians. The most difficult task is to reconstruct and explain the message of the abovementioned book on Idea of the Holy Crown, thus the chapter about this topic is the most extensive in the dissertation. The author also writes about Eckhart’s less-known works about economic history. Altogether, this thesis is an argumentation for the usefulness of a historiographical viewpoint as well.
II. Sources and methods used

Source material consists of Ferenc Eckhart’s writings – his books, studies, little known articles and interviews (for example in the Pesti Napló). The writings of his contemporaries (students, colleagues, friends, opponents or even enemies) are essential sources to understand the differences and similarities between viewpoints. Hence the author relies on the writings of Eckhart’s students (György Bónis, Antal Murarik) and uses the studies of historians (for example Emma Bartoniek and Gyula Szekfű) with similar research topics (the Idea of the Holy Crown or the Habsburg economic policy). So far the scholarly literature has dealt only with the main works and the most widely debated studies of Eckhart. In the author’s opinion it is necessary to get to know all of Eckhart’s writings (even the smaller recensions and articles) in order to thoroughly understand the „bigger” works, as the historian was in some cases much more open about his views in smaller articles than in his books.

It is an important methodological principle for the author not to treat these writings as scholarly literature, literature which should be compared to today’s point of view of constitutional history (or to explain, who was right or wrong in certain questions), but rather to evaluate them in the contemporary discourses. The French philosopher/historian Michel Foucault developed a source-reading „method”, which was the problem of document-monument. According to him, the historians always see sources as documents: they want to know if a source tells them the truth or not about a certain past event. To Foucault it was much more important to analyze the power relations and discourses producing the sources, to get to know who speaks/writes about a source and why – hence we should think about the sources as monuments. The monument has no direct connection with anything like reality, rather the actual power relations are „piling up” in it and this culmination is in fact a moment when the broadly understood power (because everyone is a part of it) reveals itself. The writer of this dissertation claimed that his method is historiographical. Historiography, too, focuses on discourse analysis, on the exploration of a certain historian’s concepts, on understanding the inner logic of the historical discourse. Contemporary reception and disputes with fellow historians or non-historians are highly informative sources about a historian’s point of view. Therefore, the author analyzes in depth the various discourses and Eckhart’s concepts about history. This discourse analysis in some respects resembles the historiographical method, but there is a crucial difference to Foucault: the author does not only examine the discourses, but evaluates them.
To elaborate the abovementioned problems, the author relied heavily on Ferenc Eckhart’s manuscript collection in the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (correspondence, notes, autobiographies, preserved manuscripts of his books). This collection provides not only detailed information about the connections with other scholars, but explains a lot about the process of developing certain ideas and concepts of books, and this information sometimes significantly alters the meaning of published sources (the publications of Eckhart). So far there hasn’t been any attempt to extensively research the collection, although through the various theoretical and bibliographical notes, the fragments of unfinished studies we can get an inside view of a historian’s infrastructure.

Since there are numerous written records in Eckhart’s manuscript collection about legal theory and he had a separate folder with comments on contemporary scholarly literature collected about the historical development of the organic state theory (which played an important role in the Doctrine of the Holy Crown), the author examines in depth what authors did Eckhart read and how did he read them. The author’s method consists of reading those German and English books about intellectual and legal history as well as Eckhart’s comments on them, because in this way one can show the process in which the historian gained knowledge for elaborating the new Holy Crown theory or for the completion of economic history books, although about the latter we possess far less documents.

In contrast to the perspective and source material of the earlier literature on this topic, the writer of this dissertation has collected even hardly accessible articles reflecting on Ferenc Eckhart’s program in 1931. These appeared in less-known or hardly accessible newspapers, for example the writings of István Milotay and Sándor Pethő in Magyarság or the articles of Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky in Előörs, or the reflections written by Eckhart for the legitimist Nemzeti Újság. Reading the publicism was a good opportunity to explore Eckhart’s views on actual, historico-political questions, because we can read several interviews with him in newspapers.

Eckhart lived a considerable part of his life in Vienna (as an archivist of Hofkammerarchiv or as director of the Hungarian Historical Institute of Vienna), therefore the author conducted research in the Austrian capital on several occasions. In the Vienna University Library the author read new and fresh literature about the connections between spiritual and legal history. In the Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung he read the letters written by Hungarian historians to their Austrian colleagues. In the Institut library there are many less-known letters written by former Hungarian members of the institute (Árpád
Károlyi, Ferenc Eckhart), who corresponded with their Austrian teachers. The author has found letters from Eckart that proved to be useful for historiographical analysis. For example Eckhart wrote a letter to Oswald Redlich in order to explain him the polemics surrounding Szekfű Gyula’s book Száműzött Rákóczi and to persuade him that it is worth explaining the debate for the Austrian scientific community. He also wrote a fellowship recommendation letter for Antal Murarik, which is a good source for interpreting the master-student relationship (Eckhart–Murarik). In the State Archives (Staatsarchiv) the author went through the scholarly correspondence of Austrian archivists Ludwig Bittner and Lothar Groß (NL Bittner és NL Groß). It is fortunate for the research work that the whole correspondence of a historian is stored in one box, so this way one can soon decide if there are important letters in it or not. In the manuscript collection of Bittner there are letters from Árpád Károlyi, Gyula Szekfű, Ferenc Eckhart and Árpád Győry, while Groß corresponded with Jenő Házy and Károlyi. In the letters of Harold Steinacker there are some information about Hungarian historians, for example Eckhart and Sándor Domanovszky: these pieces can help us to analyze the connections between Austrian and Hungarian historians.
III. Summarizing the results

Eckhart belonged to a generation of historians who began their work in the age of Dualism and had a greater impact first during the interwar period. The most important characteristic of this generation was their opposition to political and event history from a position of social- and spiritual history, but of course research topic and emphasis varied from historian to historian. The oeuvre of Eckhart clearly demonstrates that the ambition to overcome political history could rely on many „tools”. The most continuous element in Eckhart’s historical writing is social history. Moreover, we can also observe the methods of a professional historian (research, criticism, collection and publication of sources, which is often labelled as „positivism” in the relevant scholarly literature), but he significantly exceeded this methodology with the analytical social and economic history, cooperating with other sciences and relying on new types of sources – although sometimes his students were much more open to conceptualize and to put these new methods into practice. Only the position of a „positivist” researcher (as professionalism wrongly labelled by many authors) was effective against the scholars of public law (they falsely interpreted spiritual history as a historical writing praising the – ahistorical – Hungarian genius), and it was useful also when it was better to publicly disavow spiritual history, accused with fascism by marxist criticism. However, the writer of the dissertation does not regard Eckhart as a „positivist” historian and he thinks that his works were not that far from spiritual history as later many scholar claimed (for example Alajos Degré). Relying strongly on datas can be explained by the historian’s past as an archivist and by his efforts to write careful in fear of possible critics – though the latter ambition was not always succesful. He wrote to Gyula Szekfű about this dilemma on many occasions. Compared to Szekfű, Angyal or his younger brother (Sándor Eckhardt) Eckhart’s writing skills were weak, and maybe this explains why are there so big controversies about interpreting his books.

Eckhart’s social network (his main correspondents) can reflect the interpretation above. His Viennese mentors, Dávid Angyal and Árpád Károlyi were two representatives of Hungarian professional historical writing and emphasized source criticism, while the members of a younger generation, István Hajnal and Elemér Mályusz dealt with social and economic history, and finally, Gyula Szekfű together with Sándor Eckhardt were receptive to spiritual history (although Elemér Mályusz also dealt thoroughly with spiritual history and it wasn’t a coincidence that he could help Eckhart in this manner). Among his students, Antal
Murarik and György Bónis represented a scholarly program based on spiritual and social history, and the 1947 book of Bónis combined both methods.

The writer of this dissertation does not agree that Eckhart was first of all a „positivist” scholar and his scholarly views were in fact incompatible with his „battle-cry” of spiritual history, hence the author does not think that „positivism” and spiritual history were opposing methods, although Eckhart rarely wrote openly and clearly about the concept of spiritual history in his studies and articles. Spiritual history was an integral part of Eckhart’s program and it’s impact on him can be observed especially in the period between 1931 and 1941, but the intellectual and spiritual factors were always important historical „agents” in the historian’s books. According to the main epistemological position of spiritual history, the historian have to understand the past on it’s own terms, because the legal theories were constantly changing and reshaping – besides his social-historical approach it was this view of Eckhart that separated him from his opponents. Eckhart read spiritual historians (Otto von Gierke, Hans Fehr, Fritz Kern) whose characteristic was to deal with intellectual and cultural history instead of political event history. He understood spiritual history as a method focusing on the history of changing legal theories and on synthetizing different historical factors (because legal theories can be present in institutions, in the economy and society etc.). Thus his book about the Theory of the Holy Crown is not just about a legal theory (although we can interpret it mainly as intellectual history), but also about society and economy, because the concept of the crown varied according to the constitutional and social elements, which it embodied besides the king (for example: when were the noble present in it?). The author compared the manuscript of the book with it’s printed version and found parts which were omitted from the latter: for instance there was a passage about the Holy Crown-interpretation of the arrow-cross movement. Eckhart criticised their ideology because the Holy Crown-membership of the middle ages didn’t have racial and ethnic background.

Alleged intellectual parallels between Harold Steinacker (the famous Austrian opponent of Ákos Timon) and Ferenc Eckhart are dead-ends in the scholarly literature. In two different ages two persons with different political views (Márton Sarlós and Miklós Nagy) tried to weaken the importance of Eckhart’s scholarly program by claiming that his 1931 study was just a copy of Steinacker’s works. For Steinacker the evaluation of Márton Sarlós about Eckhart (Sarlós maintained that Steinacker is a much better scholar than Eckhart) was a verification of his views that he represented/represents the real scientific position in connection with Hungarian constitutional history. Of course, among other foreign opponents of Timon, Steinacker’s 1907 study was a good source for Eckhart (moreover, it seems like he
shared the critical standpoint of the Austrian historian) elaborating his new program of 1931, but Steinacker wasn’t a serious „intellectual import” for him.

Besides, what kind of novelties had the „school of Eckhart”? In his works the kings were not idealized persons, but he interpreted the kingdom as a function, institution and a center of administration. He didn’t seek after an ahistorical essence of constitution and law based solely on the texts of statutes, but rather examined the working and effect of it’s institutions with thorough source-criticism. He significantly relativised the importance of constitutional history and the constitution itself, as apart from the „center” he portrayed various institutions, too (this ambition manifested itself for example in Eckhart’s program of collecting folkways and researching „hiteleshelyek”, trustworthy places). In contrast to the political event history, examining social, economic and intellectual historical factors represented a much more analytical historical writing.

Coming to the antagonism between Timon and Eckhart, it can be said that they were worlds apart. It is not by coincidence that during the Interwar period those who researched legal history with new methods, held the scholarly debate with Timon’s views (the mystifying of the Doctrine of the Holy Crown and his hungaro-centric viewpoint) their first important task. Compared to his predecessor (Imre Hajnik), Timon signified backwardness in legal history even in the era of Dualism, and contemporary historians like Károly Tagányi (named as a great historian by Szekfű and Eckhart), even László Erdélyi and members of an older generation (Dávid Angyal, Vilmos Fraknói, Árpád Károlyi, Henrik Marczali) represented a much better alternative in historical writing. Furthermore, it is telling that the opponents of Eckhart (István Egyed, Zoltán Kérészy, Kálmán Molnár, Miklós Nagy, Móric Tomcsányi) all relied on Timon’s arguments and point of view when attacked the new constitutional and legal history.

Compared to Ákos Timon and his followers, Eckhart’s historical writing can be considered as a better constitutional and legal history because of his European viewpoint and his use of spiritual and social history in the debates. It remains an important question, however, with what kind of Theory of the Holy Crown did Eckhart replace the Doctrine of the Holy Crown? In accordance with Eckhart’s intentions, we must distinguish between the terms „Doctrine of the Holy Crown” and „Theory of the Holy Crown”, otherwise it is really hard to interpret his views on the subject. In his 1941 Eckhart did not deny that the Theory of the Holy Crown is a real historical phenomenon shaped by time and place and the Doctrine of the Holy Crown (the shared executive power between king and the nation) is a part of it. However, in his book „The theory of the holy crown” Eckhart concluded that Werbőczy’s
theory about the organic membership of the nobles played only a marginal role in his era (moreover, it wasn’t about shared executive power), thus it is not surprising that later the historian avoided calling Werbőczy’s theory as Doctrine of the Holy Crown. He stood up, however, for the most important variant of the Theory of the Holy Crown (a symbol of state integrity, which also functioned as a representation of a quasi-modern state in the middle ages) even in a debate with a Romanian historian, so it should be noted that the national aspects were constantly present his books.

In the field of economic history Eckhart didn’t have as significant impact as in legal history, but the historian was familiar with the contemporary scholarly literature on economic sciences and economic history and in addition he wrote two important works about economic history. He positioned his 1922 book in opposition to political history, but he didn’t exclude the impact of economic policy from it because, according to his views the state policy was a decisive factor in economic modernisation. He drew on Werner Sombart’s theory of capitalism, although he did not accept it completely (for example he didn’t mention any of the negative impacts of capitalism), since Eckhart viewed modernisation as something beneficial for the allegedly backward Hungarian society. The institutional history school of Otto Hintze had great effect on Eckhart’s historical writing (on both economic and legal history), in so far as in Eckhart’s histories primarily the institutions shape economy.

The views of the historian on economic and social history had great impact on contemporary authors and on later debates centering around these problems, because he conceptualised some kind of (not always clearly defined but not in a marxist sense) derailing-theory (elkanyarodás elmélet) in his writings. The heyday of his economic historical writing was before 1945 and not after 1945, as Eckhart’s works of 1908, 1922 and 1941 clearly demonstrate. Representatives of marxist historical writing (Erzsébet Andics, Zsigmond Pál Pach, József Révai) had similar views on the Habsburg economic policy (they evaluated it as “colonization”) but they differed from Eckhart’s concept by significantly expanding the meaning of the term colonization. His posthumous monograph (1958) was by no means as remarkable as his earlier books.

Even though European context was important for him, Eckhart’s works were nation-centered, which should also be taken into consideration. During his lectures at the university he clearly preferred the national history over universal history. According to the new historiographical research („Writing the Nation” series), national narrative was the master narrative in historical writing at least till the second half of the 20th century. Besides their academic related activity, historians were also shapers of national identity: their prestige as a
scholar was further enhanced by these enterprises. Eckhart’s work was representative in this respect, too. He refuted Timon’s ahistorical Doctrine of the Holy Crown, but replaced it with an idea with an important message: from the middle ages on the nationalities were loyal to the Hungarian Holy Crown. Eckhart regarded the history of Habsburg economic policy not just as a research topic but also as a question of the fate of the nation. In his histories he tried to explain the causes of the backwardness of Hungarian development and capitalism compared to the West. His concept of class was filled with ethnic „content”, which can be observed when he wrote about German, Armenian, Greek and Jewish bourgeoisie and merchants. According to him, their ethnic background partly caused and at the same time showed the inadequate capitalist development. Of course, the picture painted by the „Writing the Nation” is only a point of reference, because parts of the national public opinion opposed Eckhart’s views even though he wrote national history.
IV. Publications related to the thesis

Reviews:


Studies:


V. Conference presentations related to the thesis


List of publications related to the dissertation

Foreign language international book chapters (1)

   In: Wissenschafts- und Universitätsforschung am Archiv : Beiträge anlässlich des
   Österreichischen Universitätsarchivkolloquiums, 14. und 15. April 2015, zu den Fragen:
   Historische Wissenschaftsforschung, Universitäten im gesellschaftlichen Kontext,
   Internalistische Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Disziplinen- und Institutionengeschichte / Hg. von
   Alois Kernbauer, Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, Graz, 111-121, 2016, (Publikationen
   aus dem Archiv der Universität Graz ; 45.) ISBN: 9783201020169

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (4)

2. Törö, L. D.: "Több szellemtörténet a jogtörténetbel": Eckhart Ferenc törekvései a jog- és
   alkotmánytörténet modernizálására (1931-1941).
   Századok. 150 (6), 1407-1450, 2016. ISSN: 0039-8098.

   visszhangja.
   Aetas. 31 (4), 57-77, 2016. ISSN: 0237-7934.


   Valóság. 58 (1), 30-41, 2015. ISSN: 0324-7228.

Other journal articles (2)

   Kiló. 26 (1), 95-100, 2017. ISSN: 1216-2965.

   Kiló. 25 (4), 91-95, 2016. ISSN: 1216-2965.
List of other publications

Foreign language Hungarian books (1)

Hungarian book chapters (3)

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (3)

Other journal articles (9)
Kilő. 24 (2), 3-10, 2015. ISSN: 1216-2965.


Világtörténet. 36 (1), 175-177, 2014. ISSN: 0083-6265.


Kilő. 23 (1), 11-13, 2014. ISSN: 1216-2965.

Kilő. 22 (1), 110-113, 2013. ISSN: 1216-2965.

Aetas. 28 (3), 197-217, 2013. ISSN: 0237-7934.


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