Gabriella Erdélyi. *Szökött szerzetesek: Erőszak és fiatalok a késő középkorban.*
Budapest: Libri Kiadó, 2011. 296 pp. 3,990 HUF. ISBN: 978–963–310–073–8.

The chapters of Gabriella Erdélyi's book have two unifying themes. One is the education, social standing, and everyday life of the lower clergy in late medieval Hungary, especially in poorly known rural settings, while the other is the use and legitimization of violence in the same social milieus. Her main source material is constituted by supplications sent from the Kingdom of Hungary to the papal Penitentiary in Rome, predominantly between 1450 and 1550. The purpose of these supplications was to obtain papal absolution, dispensation, or license in cases that were reserved to the pope or in which involving papal authority in the resolution of local disputes seemed expedient in order to settle the legal status of the supplicant. Two thirds of the roughly 3,000 supplications sent to the Penitentiary from Hungary between 1411 and 1559 were written by ecclesiastics, and it was mainly their involvement in violent acts that prompted them to turn to Rome.

The most innovative part of the book is constituted by the first four chapters (out of a total of eight), which formulate a bold but well-underpinned hypothesis

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about career paths in the lower clergy as channels of social mobility in late medieval society. Erdélyi sets out from her observation that whereas in the fifteenth century fugitive friars and monks asked for the pope's approval to stay in the convent or monastery of another religious order, from roughly 1510 they wanted to change their legal status either by getting married or, more typically, by becoming secular priests endowed with a benefice. She argues that this change cannot be explained either by the internal crisis of the religious orders involved — since most of the fugitives belonged to the still flourishing mendicant orders — or by the Reformation that only started to spread in Hungary a decade later. According to Erdélyi, the explanation is provided by a strategy of social mobility typical among supplicants of humble social origin coming from villages and small towns. They became friars in order to get access to high-quality education, but they wanted to become secular priests, especially parish priests, in the end.

Becoming a friar was not the only channel of such a strategy, even if free education of a high standard available in every region was unique to the religious orders. A sort of second-best option in terms of quality and costs were parish schools, and Erdélyi emphasizes their ubiquity in the sources. The combined effect of schooling provided by religious orders and parishes must have produced a relatively high number of educated youngsters who apparently had better chances than their counterparts in Western Europe to get a job as chaplain or schoolmaster in a parish, but many of them did not find a permanent source of living and fluctuation seems to have been high even in the available jobs.

Having shown the existence of a considerable stratum of employed priests (as opposed to beneficiary ones) in rural communities, the author goes on to analyze the relationship of clerics and lay villagers (chapters 5 and 6). She discusses their common involvement in playing and fighting, as well as in eating and drinking even on weekdays, and at night (refuting the modern assumption of a general "fear of the dark" in the period). Erdélyi also examines the manifold similarities between the priests and their flock in terms of secular social roles — being heads of households, relatives, friends, or neighbors — and argues that violent conflicts involving priests were predominantly related to their secular roles.

It is also the theme of violence that connects the last two chapters to the previous ones, but this time it is not interpersonal but collective violence in war. Erdélyi analyzes the retrospective justifications of priests of their involvement in the Hungarian peasant rebellion of 1514, as well as the representations of Ottoman violence in the supplications used to justify fighting for or against them or even of converting to Islam. Whereas the justification of interpersonal violence was centered on the concept of honor, the justification of collective violence was based on portraying the enemy as exceedingly cruel or treacherous. But in both cases, the author argues, violence was a means that needed justification. The main normative dividing line was not between violence and nonviolence or between intentional and unintentional violence, but between just and unjust violence.

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