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**“THEY CAN DEFEAT
BUT NEVER CONQUER US”**

A Biography of General József Schweidel

Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation Theses

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I. Previous Research, Introduction of the Problem

Literature on the revolution and war of independence of 1849–1849 and on the martyrs of Arad is extensive; in spite of the misinterpretations, the period belongs to the familiar chapters of history in the public. Nevertheless, surprisingly, Hungarian historiography has important debts regarding the period. In recent years, Róbert Hermann reviewed previous and present scholarship and quoted an essay by Gyula Szekfű on *The Present Status of our History of Forty-Eight*, published in *Napkelet* (Orient) in 1924, where the author noticed the following: “There is not even a biography about anyone, although this period of two years provides a mass of interesting people, giant statures, intelligent minds, tragic stories of human depths what history otherwise does not present in centuries.” At the end of his essay, Szekfű encouraged “collaboration of historians of war and civilian affairs to produce a real and trustworthy overview of this most historical period of the modern history of Hungary.” This was yet to happen. Pre-war times were productive in terms of publications of sources but no biographies were written. In post-war communist times, especially from the seventies, important monographs were published, but ideological limitations were overcome only slowly after the change of the political system. During the past decades, in the footsteps of Aladár Urbán, Gábor Bona, and Tamás Katona, a new generation of historians started to examine the period with modern methods and scientific scrutiny. The review of current research problems by Róbert Hermann, however, also demonstrates that, alongside great advances, there are and there will be numerous problems to solve. He noted about the historiography of war: “it is still considerably far from clarifying all the important issues of scholarship on the period – not to mention problems that will only arise in the future.” The same holds true for writing the biographies of the martyrs of Arad. While the *Book of Martyrs* of 2007 is an important collection, independent modern biographies have not been written about the martyrs until today, with only a few exceptions.

Although there are biographies of the less-known General József Schweidel available, these are short, usually fragmentary and unsound, recycling wrong information taken over from others at multiple times. Sándor Szilágyi published the first short summary of Schweidel’s life in 1850. Following the compromise of 1867, commemorating the day of the execution of the martyrs, newspapers sometimes published short pieces on their wives or children. The public could read about the general in 1873, later in 1882 in the footnotes of the work of Rikárd Gelich. At the time of the erection of the Statue of Liberty in Arad, featuring Schweidel’s relief as well, several articles were published on the executed leaders of the

Hungarian army. Sándor Márki published a biography of Schweidel in 1890. Five years later, György Gracza wrote a short biography in his great work. On the 50th anniversary of the war of independence, Emil Vajda published a biography of the general. His city of birth, Zombor erected a memorial plaque in his honor and this led to the appearance of important writings, including a publication of excerpts from the document of his baptism. Károly Trischler wrote a longer biography which was also published separately at the occasion of the inauguration of his statue. Then, the works of Ödön Hamvay, Géza Kacziány, and Albert Bartha followed, the latter publishing parts from Schweidel's trial. Afterwards, 43 years passed until another independent work on the martyrs of Arad appeared from Lajos Pintér; this was followed by István Nemeskürty and Iván Ordas. All these biographies relied on a limited source material, usually praising the general's feats without critically assessing the sources. The source collection by Tamás Katona in 1979 was a major breakthrough in the research with Schweidel's biography and trial documents, as well as letters and journals from the prison. Zoltán Kalapits, Gábor Bona, and László Csorba completed this collection later. As a new element in the biography, Csorba implied that the motive behind Schweidel's actions might have primarily been the pursuing of military fortune. Next to the book by Tamás Katona, Róbert Hermann provided the most important publication of sources, examining Schweidel's role in the military organization of November and December in 1848, in addition to publishing his will and declaration written in prison. Lack of published material, besides the writings mentioned above, created a major drawback in exploring the life of the general and in producing a full picture of his role, including his sick leave, his activities as a town commander, and his political views. Therefore, several years or the most important months of Schweidel's life are not clear enough.

II. Research Methods

Given the vast literature on the revolution and war of independence of 1848–1849, the first, continuous, task was the overview of the basic sources and secondary literature on the period. The data in the previous biographies of Schweidel provided the points of reference at the beginning of the research, defining the directions of confirming or refuting different assertions at the same time. Archival research started on the basis of suggestions from my advisors.

The National Archives of Hungary keeps two basic sources with regards to the subject: the documents of Prime Minister Lajos Batthyány, the documents of the National Defense Committee, and the documents of Governor Kossuth (H2) on the one hand; and the general documents of the Ministry of Defense on the other (H75). Archival basic research included documents in the Archive of Military History (documents of the revolution and war of independence of 1848–1849), containing records on Schweidel's activities in Szeged in 1849, in addition to the general sources of 1848. Documents of fundamental importance were acquired from the Kriegsarchiv of Austria that contributed to the study of Schweidel's military career in the imperial and royal army as well as his family relations.

I have intended to collect data not only on József Schweidel's personality but also on the activities of the 4th (Alexander) hussar regiment.

Writing a biography also belongs to complex works because one needs to discover the political, economic, and social aspects of a period in order to describe and interpret the actions of a given character. It is therefore not sufficient to describe the actions of a person, the biography needs to be located in a given time and place, especially if one wishes to consider personal motives and factors of influence. This gives a biographic research depth, beauty, and excitement. I have intended to find data on every year, sometimes every month, and even every week or day of the months of 1848 and 1849 in Schweidel's life and to explore the personality, character, and the motives of the general.

Regarding Schweidel's childhood, in addition to genealogical data, I examined the circumstances of German settlers in Bácska, including German sources, birth registers and the documents of the National Archives of Hungary (E125 Impopulationalia). The German origin of Schweidel was also important with regards to the later developments. In the context of his studies, I had to consider the schooling conditions of Zombor, Pozsony, and Vienna, as well as the relevant passages of the *Ratio educationis*.

Most of Schweidel's military career coincided with the period following the Napoleonic wars, a period not very rich in relevant documents. The evaluation sheets of Vienna and the journal of Count István Széchenyi (a comrade in Schweidel's regiment) proved to be useful. Schweidel's family conditions and the number of his children had to be defined as well. Developments in Galicia in the 1830s and 1840s played an important part in his life; his wife was of Polish origin.

The events of 1848–1849 had to be treated separately from the point of view of Schweidel and his regiment. Regarding the revolution, I also studied the political views and statements of this hussar officer. Likewise, due attention has been paid to his role in the

battles of Pákozd and Schwechat and the military organization of November and December in 1848; the Görgey archive (P295: correspondence of General Artúr Görgey, the minutes and registry of the Upper Danube army) provided useful material for the latter.

The period from January to April 1849 proved to be decisive: the illness of the general had to be demonstrated with archival data; this provided an insight into the health care system during the war of independence.

Work on other spring activities of Schweidel relied on court documents (H69: Ministry of Justice, Department of Penal Legislation, H84: Ministry of Defense, Department of Justice).

Secondary literature on his role as a commander of Pest, Szeged, and Arad never existed; basic research had to be carried out in this context where the documents of the Metropolitan Archives proved to be helpful.

Special attention was given to Schweidel's journal, declaration, statement, and will, written in prison that appeared to be useful sources on his earlier career too. Regarding the trial and the execution of the martyr and the relevant developments of the tyranny, memoirs, journal articles, and archival sources were used (E340: K.K. Liquidierungs Commission, HL: documents from the age of absolutism).

Documents of accountancy (H83) were useful for establishing statistical data on the army and for the evaluation of the morning reports. Review of the registers might appear somewhat monotonous but they provide helpful information as the location of the general can be connected to specific dates.

It was also important to collect data on Schweidel's network of friends and his civilian connections.

In addition to memoirs published in print, I used unpublished writings and autobiographies. These are kept in the Manuscript Department of the National Széchényi Library; other sources are available in the National Archives of Hungary (R31: journals, memoirs, and records on the revolution, war of independence of 1848–1849 and on the emigration), in the collection of studies of the Archive of Military History, and also in the Budapest collection of the Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library. Discovery of sources providing an insight into the general's everyday life was particularly joyful.

Regarding the subject, other metropolitan archival sources were examined as well as valuable documents in several archives in the countryside.

Research also included the review of contemporaneous newspapers, especially the *Közlöny* (Bulletin). I also relied on the newspapers and periodicals of later times that could be

expected to contain writings in the memory of or related to Schweidel, including major national newspapers and the papers of Baja and Arad, as well as those of Southern Hungary and Bácska, the general's place of origin.

III. New Results

A review of the new results has to follow the chronology of General József Schweidel's life.

Schweidel's childhood and younger years have been examined, his studies in Pozsony and Vienna explored through the sources. In his academic enrollment, he indicated *Hungarus* nationality. This self-identification was rather characteristic of the nationalities in Hungary, especially of Germans. The German urban citizenship had been strongly established by the second half of the eighteenth century and it was connected to Hungarian citizens economically, due to the detrimental politics of Vienna. The *Hungarus* consciousness provided a territorial connection, an identification of the peoples living in the kingdom of Hungary. With the beginnings of the civil national movements in the nineteenth century, this approach remained stronger in the German communities than in other nationalities. It became one of the ways of assimilation. Germans had no nobility in Hungary and this could have been one of the reasons why they attempted to look similar to the Hungarian nobility in customs and costumes. One can detect in the community of the Germans settling in Southern Hungary later that the notion *Hungarus* had meant more than territorial establishment by the middle of the nineteenth century; it represented an emotional tie for the Swabians in Hungary, with Schweidel included.

Schweidel enrolled in legal studies at the university of Vienna. His military career was reconstructed through records and evaluations in Vienna; his advancement in the hierarchy and his qualifications were explored. He entered the army, the 6th (Rosenberg) regiment, in 1813; he joined the 4th hussar regiment only a year later. The stations of his regiment and everyday life in the military were also described. He met his wife during his service in Galicia; the number and the identity of his children were established (he had five children). Some episodes of his daily life were presented through the sources.

In discussing his role during the summer and fall of 1848, maybe the most important task was to prove that Schweidel was willing to fight not only against the Serbians and the Croats but also against the imperial forces. He regularly set a good example for his

soldiers, demonstrating his committed character to the contemporary military leaders as well as to posterity.

He was on sick leave from the middle of December 1848 to the beginning of May 1849. This period was explored through letters and medical reports. Schweidel had suffered from real illness (tetter and hard hearing) for years. He remained loyal to the Hungarian authorities during his sickness. He also participated in a mixed court trial as a chairman in this time.

Investigating his activities as a town commander proved to be an entirely new field of research. We managed to describe the complex work of Schweidel on a daily basis: we revealed the figure of a committed military officer and a magnanimous man. The relationship of the military command to other authorities was also discussed, including his ranks in service and the circumstances of subordination. It was also demonstrated that he continued his activities as a town commander in Szeged.

Through a detailed analysis of the records of his days in prison and his execution, we have refuted misinterpretations and legends in previous secondary literature and confirmed certain events established by others. The cult of Schweidel, along with his historiography, afterlife, and the fate of his family, has also been discussed.

We hope to publish the sources collected during the course of the research in order to provide useful material for other researchers.

IV. Publications Related to the Research Project

A hadi parancsnok. Schweidel József tábornok pesti városparancsnoksága 1849-ben. (The military commander. The command of General József Schweidel in Pest in 1849.) In: A források bűvöletében. Ünnepi tanulmányok Katona Tamás 75. születésnapjára (Fascinated by the sources. Jubilee studies on the 75th birthday of Tamás Katona.) Ed.: Róbert Hermann, Péter Zakar. Szeged, 2007. 199–220.

“Hűség, becsület és tettek által...” Németek az 1848–49-es szabadságharcban. (“Faith, through honor and deeds...” Germans in the freedom fight of 1848–49.) In: Németek a Kárpát-medencében. Konferenciakötet (Germans in the Carpathian basin. Conference volume). Ed.: István Nagy, Eszter Bacskai Kutnyánszkyné. Bonyhád, 2009. 431–455.

“Gondolatban szorosan magamhoz ölellek.” Az aradi vértanúk özvegyei. (“I embrace you closely to myself in mind.” The widows of the martyrs of Arad.) *Múlt-kor*. 2010. 3. 40–55.

“Huszáraink hűsége körülményeinket megváltoztató.” A 4. (Sándor) huszárezred hazatérése 1848-ban. (“The honor of our hussars changed our conditions.” The return of the 4th (Alexander) hussar regiment in 1848). In: *A mában élő tegnapok. Tanulmányok a XIX. és XX. század történetéhez.* (The yesterdays living in todays. Studies on the history of the 19th and 20th centuries.) Ed.: Sándor M. Kiss, Iván Bertényi Jr., Gergely Fejérdy. Piliscsaba, 2011. 15–45.

“Mi a sors által reám méretik...” Schweidel József tábornok szerepe a hadseregszervezésben 1848 telén. (“What the fate gives me...” The role of General József Schweidel in the military organization in the winter of 1848.) In: *Utak és útkereszteződések. Ünnepi tanulmányok M. Kiss Sándor tiszteletére.* (Roads and crossroads. Jubilee studies in honor of Sándor M. Kiss) Ed.: Frigyes Kahler, Barbara Bank. Budapest, 2013. 75–84.

Other:

“Rajta Magyar! Mit akarsz?” Egy ismeretlen ismerős: Benyák Bernát és 18. századi hazafias verse. (“Go Hungarian! What do you want?” A familiar stranger: Bernát Benyák and his 18th century patriotic poem). *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények*. 2008. 3. 357–366.

“Az ő költői szellemének nagyságát, érzelmeinek mélységét senki jobban fel nem fogta mint méltóságod.” Adalékok Vörösmarty Mihály és a Batthyány család kapcsolatához. (“Nobody understood the greatness of his poetic spirit and depths of his emotions better than your dignity.” On the relationship of Mihály Vörösmarty and the Batthyány family.) (In: *Magistrae discipuli. Tanulmányok Madas Edit tiszteletére.* (Studies in honor of Edit Madas.) Ed.: Előd Nemerikényi. Budapest, 2009. 127–139.

“A’ Hazámnak fel-szenteltem fogytomig az én éltém.” Benyák Bernát hazafias költészete. (“I have dedicated my life to my country.” The patriotic poetry of Bernát Benyák.) In: *A Piarista Rend Magyarországon.* (The Piarist order in Hungary.) Ed.: András Forgó. Budapest, 2010. 469–496.

“Akkor megtudom azon nagy titkot, melyet levélben közölni nem lehet.” Deák Ferenc levelei a Batthyány családnak (1845–1865). (“I will then know the great secret what cannot be written in a letter.” The letters of Ferenc Deák to the Batthyány family.) Századok. 2010. 3. 617–637.

“Te mindig jó angyalom voltál.” Gróf Batthyány Lajosné élete. (“You have always been my good angel.” The life of the widow of Count Lajos Batthyány.) Múlt-kor 2010. 3. 69–73.

“Nődnök jelentsd szíves tiszteletemet.” Gróf Batthyány Lajosné Zichy Antónia és Deák Ferenc kapcsolata. (“Report my cordial respect to your woman.” The relationship of Countess Antónia Zichy and Ferenc Deák.) In: “Jól esik köztetek lenni...” Női sorsok, szerepek Deák Ferenc környezetében. (“It feels good to be with you...” Female lives and roles around Ferenc Deák.) Ed.: Gábor Kiss. Zalaegerszeg, 2015. 91–109.

“Küzdve a hontalanság fájdalmaival...” – Rónay Jácint levelei Szemere Bertalanhoz. (“Fighting the pain of homelessness...” – Letters of Jácint Rónay to Bertalan Szemere.) Századok. 2015. 3. 625–660.

“Íme szerencsésen ide érkezénk valamely kegyes csillagunk láthatatlan pártfogása alatt” – Gróf Batthyány Lajos szentföldi utazása 1845-ben. (“We have happily arrived here under the invisible patronage of some of our pious stars” – Count Lajos Batthyány's travel to the Holy Land in 1845.) Aetas. 2016. (In press.)

Furthermore: articles, summaries in daily and weekly papers and online portals.