

PhD Doctoral Theses

Gali Máté:

**LIFE AND WORKS OF BERZEVICZY ALBERT
1853–1936**

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1. Research Background

Berzevicy Albert de Berzevice and Kakaslomnic (1853-1936) is an unfairly forgotten figure of 19th-20th century's Hungarian history. To date, no comprehensive and professional biography of his life and works have been created, in spite of the fact that he was in major public offices first in the era of dualism and then in the era of the Horthy-regime, wrote several monographies on historical and art-history subjects and had great achievements in journalism.

After he passed in the spring of 1936, in the period during the two world wars, the life works of Berzeviczy were not explored by any biographers. From this period - other than the necrologies immediately after his death, which had minor value as historical sources - only two brief summaries can be considered as competent. In 1938, Balogh Jenő, once General Secretary of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1920-1935) held an academic memorial speech of Berzeviczy - previous President of the Academy (1905-1936), where in the framework of an appreciating commemoration he made an effort to outline in details the long and wide ranging life of the deceased.¹ Four years later, in his book titled "*Tudós fejek*" cultural politician published a more extended study about Berzeviczy Albert. In his writing, in addition to the pure biographical data,

¹ Balogh Jenő: *Berzeviczy Albert emlékezete. (Memory of Berzeviczy Albert)* Budapest, 1938, MTA.

Kornis attempted to outline also the intellectual and ideological sides of Berzeviczy. According to his evaluation, Berzeviczy's ideas in the fields of politics and were rather liberal, while on the cultural-aesthetic fields, he had rather conservative views. He highlighted that Berzeviczy Albert was a "genuine cultural politician", a committed believer of a cultural policy of Hungarian national spirit.²

Berzeviczy did not gain much attention after 1945, either. The small number of authors who mentioned his name in their works, uniformly labelled his person and works as "conservative". In relation with him it was mostly highlighted that he was considered as supporter of Tisza István and as leader of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and of the Kisfaludy Society he opposed the modern trends in literature and art.³

After the change of regime, two excellent education historians, Mann Miklós⁴ and Felkai László⁵ discussed in their works the career of Berzeviczy at the Ministry of Religion and Education and his concepts of education politics. Both authors agree that the education in national spirits and spreading the Hungarian as official language

² Kornis Gyula: *Európai magyar műveltség. Berzeviczy Albert (Hungary and European Civilization. Berzeviczy Albert)*. In: the same author's: *Tudós fejek. (Learned Heads)* Budapest, 1942, Franklin-Társulat, 61-120.

³ Please refer to - among others - Horváth Zoltán: *Magyar századforduló. (Turn of Century in Hungary)* Budapest, 1974, Gondolat Kiadó, 412. and Vörös Antal: *A dualizmus évtizedei 1867-1918. (Decades of Dualism 1867-1918)* In: Pach Zsigmond Pál (chief editor): *A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia másfél évszázada 1825-1975. (One and a Half Centuries of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences 1825-1975.)* Budapest, 1975, Akadémiai Kiadó, 181.

⁴ Mann Miklós: *Kulturpolitikusok a dualizmus korában. (Cultural Politicians in the Era of Dualism.)* Budapest, 1993, Országos Pedagógiai Könyvtár és Múzeum, 112-123.

⁵ Felkai László: *Berzeviczy Albert, a művelődéspolitikus. (Berzeviczy Albert, the Cultural Politician.)* Magyar Pedagógia 98. Volume (1998), No. 1., pp 27-40.

in the schools were key elements within Berzeviczy's ideas of education. However, in evaluating Berzeviczy as Minister of Religion and Education, they came to different positions. Mann claimed that since Berzeviczy could not achieve his major goal - the revision of the Act on People's Schools made by Eötvös József in 1868 - practically he could be considered unsuccessful as a Minister of Education. As opposed to this, Felkai László considered that Berzeviczy had seriously market the field of Hungarian education and culture, even without being able to realize the reform of the people's school act. As he created over twenty five ministerial decrees, affecting the entire Hungarian educational system starting from kindergartens up to the higher education.

In addition to Mann Miklós and Felkai László, Tőkéczki László historian from the recent past is also worth to be referred to, who depicted Berzeviczy in his informative book titled "*Történelmi arcképek*" as an outstandingly educated person representing rather solid, classical liberal ideological and political views.⁶

Consequently, in my researches that started in 2013 I could lean on previous references only to a limited extent. Apart from that, my goal was still to reconstruct the overall pathway of Berzeviczy's life. For more information about my source publications, studies and articles published on the subjects so far please see the list of my publications.

2. Objectives

⁶ Tőkéczki László: *Történelmi arcképek. (Historical Portraits)* Budapest, 2002, XX. Század Intézet, 41-43.

In my doctoral thesis my objective was to make an overall study of the life works of Berzeviczy Albert. To ensure this, I included not only the political but also the cultural organizer and sports leader career paths of Berzeviczy in the scope of my research. In addition, I made efforts to collect the most possible information related to the private life of Berzeviczy Albert, to understand and illustrate his personality.

In my thesis keeping to the chronological sequence, first I tried to reconstruct Berzeviczy's childhood and youth. I focused on the environment in which he got socialized, and which later on determined fundamentally the direction of his career as politician, writer and scientist.

When discussing Berzeviczy's long lasting parliamentary works, I attempted to introduced three major topic groups:

1. Approach of Berzeviczy to the social and political points of tension of the era of dualism: civil issues, Jew and gentry issues, nationalities' issues, lands issues or issues of peasants' rights.
2. Outlining the educational policy concept, with special regards to his role as a Minister of Religion and Education between 1903 and 1905.
3. The way how Berzeviczy represented the liberal-conservative or in other words the noble liberal ideology also in the Horthy era. Among others in relation with the issue of neo-nationalism or of the numerus clausus.

When discussing the operations of Berzeviczy Albert as scientific and cultural organizer I had a dual goal:

1. To introduce Berzeviczy's writings on art history and historical subjects, and compare the key points of those with the results of latest researches on history and art history.
2. To refute or confirm the statement of previous authors claiming that Berzeviczy, as a President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Chairman of the Kisfaludy Society was mainly a supporter of conservative efforts as opposed to the modern trends.

In the end, when assessing Berzeviczy's career as a sports leader, I was looking for the answer to how Berzeviczy Albert's standing up for the importance of physical education and for the Olympic spirit was expressed in the sports life of Hungary apart from the educational policy.

3. Means and Methods of Analysis, Sources

In the first chapter I mentioned that in writing my doctoral thesis, I could rely on the professional references on Berzeviczy's life only to a limited extent. Therefore, I set out to do the research mainly based on historical archive, bibliographical and press materials.

It was to my support that the descendants of Berzeviczy Albert, the Szalay-Berzeviczy family made available to me the memoirs and the world war diary of their renowned ancestor, letting me gain invaluable information that could never be accessed in any other places.

During my work I visited not only Hungarian public collections but I was also in Eperjes (in Slovakian: Prešov) of Slovakia. For the archive inheritance of the Berzeviczy family is found in the Regional State Archives of Eperjes, including several documents related to the person of Berzeviczy. Among these, his letters he wrote to his father, Berzeviczy Tivadar were of great importance, letting me know about his early years as a Member of the Parliament. These letters are abundant in details, outlining several individual experiences and impressions, unlike the later dated Berzeviczy mailings, which were mostly short and not too informative.

Related to the childhood and youth of Berzeviczy Albert I could explore relevant documents also in the manuscript archives of the Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum (Petőfi Literary Museum), including among others his literary translations, school exercise books, first poems and his election keynote speech. In the National Archive Office of the National Archives of Hungary in addition to the personal files of Wlassics Gyula,

Minister of Religion and Education (P. 1445) and Berzeviczy Albert (P 52.) I also investigated the general files of the House of Representatives and of the national assembly (K 2.) and of the Hungarian National Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (K 604.). I used the cabinet meeting minutes made between 1903 and 1905 (K 27.), as well as the so called “lithographic” news of the Magyar Távirati Iroda (Hungarian official news agency) (K 428.).

The testament and the inheritance files of Berzeviczy are kept in the Budapest City Archives. These documents allow a relatively accurate assessment of Berzeviczy’s financial status in the mid-1930-ies. In the university archives of the Eötvös Loránd University I collected the documentation related to Berzeviczy’s doctorate in political sciences. In the Synodical Archives of the Reformed Church in Hungary, I could get a read access to Berzeviczy’s mails addressed to Tisza István, among which I integrated several ones into my doctoral thesis. In the Archives of Political History and Trade Unions it was the diary notes of Andrassy Gyuláné Zichy Eleonóra that was hiding valuable data.

In the Letter Collection of the National Széchényi Library letters both from and to Berzeviczy Albert can be found. Also I used such letters for my research. Further, in the Manuscript Archive of the Library you can read two important reminiscences: one is about the parliamentary struggles of the first Tisza cabinet, while in the other one Berzeviczy reported about the reasons and circumstances due to which he had to leave the chair or the house of representatives of the parliament.

I processed the press materials in chronological order. For the time period while Berzeviczy Albert was in the public life of Sáros, I studied the daily and weekly papers of the county (*Eperjesi Lapok, Sárosmegyei Közlöny*). From 1881, when as a representative of the city of Eperjes he stepped on the ground of national politics, practically his name can be found practically in all major journals.

Further, Berzeviczy made considerable journalistic works, as well. As a young representative he regularly published writings in the “*Nemzet*” and “*Ellenőr*” journals of the Liberal party, and in the Horthy era in addition to the liberal spirited “*Pesti Napló*” he published mostly in the conservative-liberal “*Budapesti Hírlap*” and in the (German-language) “*Pester Lloyd*”. In his writings in those days he mostly addressed foreign affairs, but also he touched on the problems of reforming the Hungarian suffrage. Review of this press material had a key role in the preparation of the thesis, since it was an essential aid to understanding Berzeviczy’s way of thinking.

Also the parliamentary publications documenting Berzeviczy Albert’s parliamentary operations of over five decades deserve to be pointed out (*Képviselőházi Napló, Főrendházi Napló, Felsőházi Napló*).

4. New Scientific Results

In my doctoral thesis I am willing to provide detailed and comprehensive overview of Berzeviczy Albert's life works. In addition to facilitating a better understanding of a major politician of the age of dualism and a leader of the cultural life in the Horthy-era, my work is expanding our knowledge about the cultural policy, the artistic and scientific life and the external relations of Hungary throughout half a century from the 1880-ies to the 1930-ies.

My researches give a picture of the role that Berzeviczy Albert played at the end of the 1870-ies in the public life of his native county, Sáros. In my doctoral thesis I am presenting Berzeviczy's career in the county administration and at the academy of law of the Evangelic Lutheran College of Eperjes, where he taught legal history, social economy and politology. In my work I outline the curriculum that he taught at the academy of law, and his first politology essay titled "*A politika és a morál*".⁷

Then I highlight Berzeviczy Albert's election campaign in 1881 representing the Szabadelvű Párt (Liberal Party), and the following career in the House of Representatives and the House of Magnates during the period of dualism. From these chapters we learn that with regards to the issue of Jews, Berzeviczy kept representing the liberal assimilation model of the age of dualism all over the time, and held a brief for the equal rights of Hungarian Jews and for the theorem of the

⁷ Berzeviczy Albert: *A politika és a morál. (Politics and Ethics)* Eperjes, 1880, Eperjesi Bankegyelet Ny.

freedom of religious beliefs several times in parliamentary struggles. With regards to nationalities' issues - which was one of the pivotal issues of the historic Hungary - he was solidly insisting on the theory of Hungarian supremacy, he was recognized as a devoted believer of the existing social and cultural order.

When analyzing the education policy concepts of Berzeviczy, my research confirmed the positions of previous references. Among his concepts included the spread of Hungarian as official language, the education and public education in national spirit had a key role. However, between 1903 and 1905 as Minister of Religion and Education he did a lot for the development of public library network and issued minor decrees, he failed to implement his major goals - founding a third university, reform of professional legal education, revision of the act on people's education issued in 1868 by Eötvös József. Therefore, altogether - in agreement with the findings of Mann Miklós - heading his Ministry instead of active creation, much rather he played a preparatory and transition role.

As a result of my researches, in 2014 a publisher in Kolozsvár,⁸ and in 2015 a publisher in Budapest⁹ published Berzeviczy Albert's diary on the First World War - owned by the Szalay-Berzeviczy family. The memoir is a testimony of the age with great importance providing the readers with information that could not be obtained from contemporary

⁸ „Az ország belepusztul ebbe a háborúba.” Berzeviczy Albert kiadatlan naplója (1914-1920). (*“The Country will Die of this War” - Unpublished Diary of Berzeviczy Albert 1914-1920*). Kolozsvár, 2014, Komp-Press Kiadó.

⁹ *Búcsú a Monarchiától. Berzeviczy Albert naplója (1914-1920). (Farewell to the Monarchy. Diary of Berzeviczy Albert (1914-1920).)* Budapest, 2015, Helikon Kiadó.

press, archive documents or from the journal of the House of Representatives. The memoir on the world war was closely integrated into my thesis, supplementing my previous finding with additional my research results.

With regards to the Horthy era, based primarily on Berzeviczy's publications issued in the press and his speeches made in the house of magnates I could reconstruct the picture of such a conservative-liberal politician, who remained to be a man of the late 19th century even in the period between the two world wars. He deprecated antisemitism and the racial ideas, and therefore, he criticized the view of Hungarian racist and the German national socialists. In 1928 at the Hungarian parliament he urged the cancelling or at least the modification of the numerus clausus act (Act No. XXV. in 1920).

The part of my doctoral thesis discussing the period between the two world wars the role of Berzeviczy Albert in shaping the foreign relations is highlighted. The primary focus is on Berzeviczy as a chairman of the Hungarian National Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). My research will outline how Berzeviczy represented the issues of protecting the minorities, disarmament, and then of equal rights to armament in the IPU and in international fields. This part of my work - which is leaning on the archive materials of the Hungarian National Group of IPU - in several points concretizes and supplements the literature on this field.

In my thesis, just like with regards to the educational ideas of Berzeviczy Albert, I found the observations of previous authors

basically sound regarding his cultural politics convictions. As Berzeviczy had predominantly conservative aesthetic and cultural views. His individual taste was opposite to the more recent trends of art and literature, like the circle of *Nyugat*. As a President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and also as head of the Kisfaludy Society he represented the conservative streams.

In sum, it can be stated that my research related to the life and works of Berzeviczy Albert extends our knowledge about Hungarian cultural politics, foreign relations and sports history in the age of dualism and in the Horthy-era. In addition it may open the door to Berzeviczy, whose course of life was so extremely rich and wide ranging, to finally take his well-deserved place in the pantheon of Hungarian national remembrance.

5. List of Publications¹⁰

1. Tisza István és az I. világháború. Részletek Berzeviczy Albert kiadatlan naplójából. (Tisza István and World War I. Details from the unpublished diary of Berzeviczy Albert) *Korunk*, 2014/September, 84-90.
2. „Az ország belepusztul ebbe a háborúba” - *Berzeviczy Albert kiadatlan naplója (1914-1920)*. (“The country will die of this war” unpublished diary of Berzeviczy Albert.) Editor and author of introductory study and notes: Gali Máté. Kolozsvár, 2014, Komp-Press Kiadó.
3. *Búcsú a Monarchiától. Berzeviczy Albert naplója (1914-1920)*. (*Farewell to the Monarchy. Diary of Berzeviczy Albert (1914-1920)*.) Editor and author of preamble and notes: Gali Máté. Budapest, 2015, Helikon Kiadó.
4. Mindent a sportért! 168 aranyérem, 15 elnök, egy sikertörténet fejezetei. (Everything for the Sports! 168 Gold Medals, 15 Chairmen, Chapters of a Success Story.) In: Siklós Erik (chief editor): *Sport 2015*. Budapest, 2015, Magyar Olimpiai Bizottság, 58-77. [jointly with dr. Szabó Lajos]

¹⁰ In my thesis booklet only my publications related to the subject of the thesis are included. The full list of my publications is available at MTMT (The Store of Hungarian Scientific Works).

5. A Magyar Olimpiai Bizottság alapító elnöke: Berzeviczy Albert. (Founding Chairman of the Hungarian Olympic Committee: Berzeviczy Albert) *Kaleidoscope*, 2015/No. 11., 303-309.
6. Berzeviczy Albert élete és munkássága (1853-1936). (Life and Works of Berzeviczy Albert (1853-1936)) In: Rakita Eszter (editor): *PhD-hallgatók III. konferenciája 2014. május 16. (3rd conference of PhD students, May 16th, 2014)* Eger, 2016, Publications of the Doctoral School of History of Eszterházy Károly College, 109-124.
7. Berzeviczy Albert, a márványarcú ember sokrétű életműve. (Life Works of Berzeviczy Albert, the Man with a Marble Face.) *Magyar Hírlap*, October 3rd, 2016, 8.