

The Introduction of Hydrocyanic Acid into Medicine

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SIXTH HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE FIRST UNIVERSITY OF HUNGARY

IN 1367 King Louis d'Anjou (1342–1382) founded at Pécs or Fünfkirchen (in Latin, *Quinque Ecclesiae*) the first University of Hungary. It was the first centre of higher education to be established in the south-east part of Europe, and its foundation was a sign of the cultural development of Hungary, then a great political power in Europe.

In 1345 King Louis wrote to Pope Clement VI, commenting on the difficulty of obtaining a sufficient number of counsellors trained in the humanities. Although talented students were sent to the Italian universities, especially to the universities of Bologna and Padua, the expense was great, and the time necessary for the completion of their studies too long. King Louis therefore decided to found a University in his own country where Hungarian, Croatian, and Dalmatian students could be educated together. In 1360 he wrote to the Duke of the Carrara family in whose territory the University of Padua was situated at that time, to ask him to send the Professor of Humanities, Bartolomeo Piacenti, to organize the school² on the model of the University of Padua. But Bartolomeo Piacenti could not come. After long discussions Galvano di Bologna (known also as Galvano de Bettini),³ Professor of Roman Law and Saraceno di Padova (known also as Giovanni Saraceno), an apothecary and presumably a physician also, came in the year 1367 from Padua to Hungary, where, with the help of King Louis and Wilhelm von Bergzabern, Bishop of Pécs, the new humanistic university was organized. Bishop Wilhelm was a native of Pfalz, Germany, and was the son of Henrik of Bergzabern. He had had an excellent education, and by the year 1357 he was a high ecclesiastical dignitary and privy

counsellor to King Louis. In 1360 he became Bishop of Pécs, and in 1361 he visited the Pope at Avignon and helped the Papal Court financially on behalf of Hungary.³ He discussed also the question of the foundation of the university that had been planned, and shortly afterwards Pope Urban V in a Bull dated 1 September 1367 confirmed the foundation of the University of *Quinque Ecclesiae* for the study of arts, civil and canon law, although a faculty of theology was excluded.

The first professor at the University of *Quinque Ecclesiae* was Galvano di Bologna, formerly Professor of Roman Law at the University of Padua. He received as an honorarium for his teaching and administrative activities three hundred silver marks a year, the village of Urög in the vicinity of Pécs, and a private house at Pécs.⁶ Galvano di Bologna was also a counsellor at the royal court, and in 1372 he visited, on behalf of King Louis, Pope Gregory XI at Villa Nuova, Italy. In 1374 he returned to Italy and as a result of the express wish of Pope Gregory XI received the Chair of Roman Law in the University of Bologna. In 1379 he returned to Padua, where he was re-elected professor at the university, and where he later died.⁴

Saraceno da Padova came to Hungary at about the same time as Galvano di Bologna. He was an apothecary and probably a physician also. His honorarium is not exactly known, but we know that he occupied a house very near Galvano di Bologna's at Pécs—a gift from King Louis. He received the title and fortune of a count of the royal court, and worked in Hungary until his death.⁵

Jacopo d'Arqua was previously Professor of Theoretical Medicine at Padua University. For about ten years before the foundation of the University of *Quinque Ecclesiae* he lived in the court of King Louis as personal physician to the King,⁷ who was in poor health and was particularly interested in medicine. It is certain that Jacopo d'Arqua taught at the new university. He later returned to Italy, and was re-elected Professor of Medicine at the University of Padua, where he wrote his famous commentaries on the works of Galen.

Conversano da Ravenna, also a physician, lived for a long time at the court of King Louis. Louis had given him the library of the royal court of Naples,⁸ which contained a great number of medical books from the universities of Salerno and Naples. Part of this library was lost during transportation to Hungary; a small part was integrated into the library of the Bishop of Zagreb—which belonged for many hundred years to Hungary; and part, almost certainly containing medical books, arrived in Hungary, where it was used for the study and teaching of medicine. Conversano da Ravenna's son was also educated in Hungary and became one of the great figures of Italian humanism.

At the University of *Quinque Ecclesiae*, canon and Roman law, the liberal arts and medicine, were taught but there was no theological teaching. The town of Pécs was chosen as the seat of the university because it was the greatest town in south-west Hungary, near to Croatia, Dalmatia, southern Austria and Italy. The town was at that time a well developed commercial, industrial and ecclesiastical centre (hence the name *Fünfkirchen* or *Quinque Ecclesiae*—five churches). Pécs had at this time an Italian quarter, on the river Tettyo, where the houses of the university professors and some university buildings were situated.⁶

Pécs also had a hospital dating from the thirteenth century, which was dedicated

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to Saint Elizabeth (a member of the Hungarian royal family of Arpád), known as the protector of the poor. In Germany this saint is known as Saint Elizabeth of Wartburg, as she was the wife of the Count of Wartburg. The hospital had as governor a theologian named Father Gál, who entered the Order of Saint Paul. For this reason the Bishop of Pécs, Valentinus Alsáni, removed him from his post and nominated a layman, Nicolas, son of Lukácsfia Miklós, as director of the hospital.² Nicholas received his medical education at the University of Pécs.

The next King of Hungary, Sigismund, of the Luxemburg family, later to become Roman-German emperor, put an end to the Italy-oriented politics of the family d'Anjou. He changed the site of the university⁴ from Pécs to Buda (now Budapest), the capital of Hungary. This university began its activity in 1389 a few years after Sigismund came to the throne, with professors and teachers who had received their education partly in Italy, but mainly at the University of Pécs. In the last years of the fourteenth century the University of Buda played a significant political role, helping in many ways the cultural and religious trends of the University founded by Charles IV, King of the Romans and King of Bohemia, at Prague. Students and professors participated in the different political conspiracies and demonstrations against King Sigismund, who closed the University of Buda for a few years and imprisoned some of the professors and students. The King wished to execute the leader of this university revolt, the Professor of Humanities, Benedek Makrai, a Hungarian by origin.¹ The active demonstrations and protests by the communities of the French universities of Paris and Montpellier, by the Italian universities, and not least also by the universities of Vienna and Cracow, forced King Sigismund to pardon this great jurist and champion of spiritual freedom. It seems that this common protest was the first in the history of education where students and professors joined in fighting for the privilege of university freedom. Within a few years the University of Buda was restored to full activity. In the year 1415 five university professors, three of theology and two of law, took part as representatives of Hungary in the Council of Constance in Germany. A professor of medicine at the University of Buda also participated,⁷ demonstrating that at this time medical education still existed at the University of Buda. The inner troubles, the external difficulties, the Turkish wars, and the fact that Sigismund was much more interested in Bohemia than Hungary, contributed to the gradual exhaustion and closing of the University of Buda. The great national King of Hungary, Mathias Corvin, a century after the foundation of the University of Buda, wrote to the Pope expressing his regret that in Hungary humanistic education at a high level no longer existed.

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BALÁZS BUGYI