# Migration in the history of universities

In the beginning of the history of universities (12th-13th century), long-distance migration was a necessity in order to attend university, because such institutions were few and far between. Although the long list of universities that emerged within two centuries after the foundation of the first one in Bologna (1088) is fascinating, large territories of the continent remained without a university. The cities where the most ancient universities were founded include Oxford (1096), Paris (1150), Cambridge (1209), Salamanca (1218), Padua (1222), Naples (1224), Siena (1240). Yet migration for the sake of studying and teaching, academic pilgrimage (in Latin peregrinatio academica) preceded the emergence of the university as such. Masters and scholars had set out long before for renowned centres of learning, either a monastic or episcopal school or a specialized centre such as the school of medicine in Salerno or the translators’ school in Toledo.[[1]](#footnote-1) Historians define academic pilgrimage as the journey(s) undertaken by students and teachers in a European country or countries for the purpose of study. As the term peregrination shows, migrant students and teachers were seen as pilgrims (peregrini in Latin), even though their pilgrimage was to a university town rather than to a saint’s tomb.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In fact, a very thin layer of society could be involved in higher studies, since very few had the chance to study at any level at all. But this was true even for the territories where the earliest universities existed. As a consequence, these institutions did not aim to attract those from their geographic surroundings only, but from long distances too. In addition, those few in the Western civilization who could aspire for higher studies, shared the knowledge of a common language, Latin, hence, they could study abroad. The “lingua franca” function of Latin greatly facilitated the spread of the university as a type of institution to emerge in various territories.

A less well-known aspect of the early history of universities is that the study and the related academic peregrination to distant places of study of less wealthy would-be intellectuals was more encouraged then than later. As the number of students from the upper layers -lay as well as clerical - grew, such encouragement on the part of rulers became less common. The university became an aristocratic institution in the 15th century. Due to such social selection, on the other hand, university graduates were very likely to later hold positions of power in their native countries and thereby their knowledge gained during their studies probably influenced politics. Hence, the impact of peregrination was out of proportion when compared to the numerically low number of university students. In the meantime, universities emerged all over Western and Central Europe. Hence, academic peregrination did not necessarily involve long-distance migration. Peregrination to distant universities was still possible for poor scholars, mostly if they followed and served a rich student.

By the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries, nearly every ecclesiastical or political unit in (Western) Christian Europe had an own centre for higher learning. It was an ambition of ecclesiastical as well as secular rulers to establish their own ‘studium’ to train their subjects there rather than encouraging their peregrination abroad. Hence, from this time on it is customary to distinguish between external (when students peregrinated abroad) and internal migration of students (when they attended one or several universities within their home country). Even penalty (exclusion from offices back home) for preferring a foreign university over the domestic ones was a phenomenon, thereby university founders tried to ensure their institution’s survival, like Emperor Frederick II did when he founded the University of Naples in 1224 and forbade his subjects to frequent any other university. Similar protective measures were in place for the sake of the universities of Pavia (1361, 1392 and 1412), and Padua (in 1407 and 1468).[[3]](#footnote-3) As a result of new foundations and protective measures, a process of regionalization took place and external academic migration came to a halt to regain its popularity later thanks to Italian humanism. However, in the end of the Middle Ages, three quarters of all students went to the university nearest to them or at least stayed in their own region. Even the remaining quarter (especially English, Spaniards, French, Italian and to a lesser extent German) who left their region, remained within their own countries, thus, they performed internal migration.

A major reason of conflict between university founders was the power struggle between the papacy and secular monarchs. Importantly, the beginning of the history of universities in the late 11th and the 12th century unfolded during the period of the Investiture Controversy where the primacy of power between the church and the states (in the Western Christian world) was at stake. In the first few decades of the 12th century neither imperial nor papal authorities intervened in the institutionalization of the emerging new schools, because the institutional location of education was less important than the personality of a teacher attracting a group of pupils who would follow them anywhere.[[4]](#footnote-4) The first manifestation of imperial interest was the Authentica Habita, a constitution issued by Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa in 1155. This document declared those who in pursuit of knowledge went far away from their own countries as praiseworthy and deserving of protection and granted professors and students the privilege of freedom of movement and safe residence in all seats of learning. Although just a few years later the emperor himself violated the Authentica Habita when he expelled from Bologna students who had come from Milan, Brescia and Crema,[[5]](#footnote-5) the text of the constitution is memorable as an early recognition and encouragement of student migration.

Pope Alexander III, the great enemy of Frederick I Barbarossa also played a significant role in the early history of universities. He declared at the third Lateran Council of 1179 that the right to teach as well as education should be free of charge and masters should be paid by benefices. Thus, in the beginning, becoming a student or a teacher depended on the individual’s intellectual merits rather than wealth. By the late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period, however, peregrination was a type of the elite’s (temporary) mobility, as opposed to the mobility of vagrants and itinerant beggars which was stigmatized as “vagabondage”.

Students from the Kingdom of Hungary travelled to study to the most ancient universities as soon the late 12th and especially the 13th century. Their early presence is documented in the universities of Paris, Padua, Bologna.[[6]](#footnote-6) Yet, from the foundation of universities in Prague (1348), Cracow (1364) and Vienna (1365), most of them remained in Central Europe. Intensive academic pilgrimage notwithstanding, astonishingly few Hungarians graduated. According to the medievalist historian András Kubinyi, the demand for university graduates was too low in Hungarian public service, even within the church. Therefore, it was not important to gain a degree. For Hungarian students, the functions of university training were of more general nature: to make contacts abroad and to cultivate group loyalties. For this reason, the earliest universities of Hungarian foundation did not survive for long.[[7]](#footnote-7) The University of Buda, founded by King Sigismund, functioned from 1389 to approximately 1450, the University of Pécs, founded by Louis I the Great, from 1367 to approximately 1400 and the University of Bratislava, founded by King Matthias in1465 merely until 1492.[[8]](#footnote-8) In turn, in lack of a permanent university in the country until the mid-17th century, peregrination remained an important phenomenon of cultural life.

Thus, peregrination was a habit of the elites of the Hungarian Kingdom from early on, however, it gained a greater impetus in the aftermath of the Reformation when the churches of all denominations took the education of their ecclesiastic as well as secular intelligentsia in their hands throughout Europe. In the territories that had become Protestant, the states tended to overtake the medieval universities and – possibly with some intermission – relaunch education with new curricula, compatible with the state’s denomination.

On the whole, Catholic students typically studied at Catholic universities, while Protestants at Protestant ones. This was not only important for transmitting the religiously “appropriate” erudition, but also for the sake of forging, maintaining and strengthening transnational connections and thereby alliances within the denominations. The University of Padua was exceptional for accepting students of various faiths, even Protestants and Jews.[[9]](#footnote-9) The interest of would-be-scholars from Hungary in enrolling in Padua was very remarkable since the age of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. This had to do with the religious division of the country partitioned after the Ottoman victory in the battle of Mohács (1526) between the Habsburg-ruled royal Hungary, the central territories annexed to the Ottoman Empire and the Principality of Transylvania. The Habsburg dynasty promoted Counter-Reformation and successfully established the dominance of the Catholic faith in Royal Hungary, while a number of Transylvanian princes were ardent advocates of Calvinism. Over the centuries, Calvinism took up the function of an identity marker for anti-Habsburg Hungarian gentry, while many of the wealthiest aristocratic families were Catholic by the end of the Counter-Reformation.

Following the Reformation, Catholic scholars from Hungary mostly enrolled in the universities of Vienna, Graz, Prague and Cracow (occasionally in Rome), while Protestants peregrinated to German, Dutch and English universities. The Calvinist church of Hungary was led by priests who studied at foreign universities. Particularly after all of Hungary became Catholic Habsburg-ruled in the end of the 17th century, Calvinists felt their position endangered and were eager to network with fellow Calvinists abroad which made peregrination particularly cherished and supported by their church. A major historian of Hungarian peregrination, László Szögi, argues that the wide geographical scope of Hungarian peregrination was exceptional for the region, most of the similarly peripheral countries had academic ties to the universities of only one foreign region.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Certainly, there was competition and grave conflicts between the different Protestant denominations too, they did not represent a “united front” against Catholics. Calvinists marginalized and pushed out the competing Protestant denominations from the Kingdom of Hungary and the Principality of Transylvania, for instance, the Sabbatarians who found refuge in the Unitarian church, formally converting to it. Unitarian leaders, from the foundation of this church, were eager to send Unitarian youth to study abroad, in order to catch up with the more established (i.e. the Calvinist and the Catholic) churches in the level of education.[[11]](#footnote-11) Thus, education and peregrination that enabled it, were considered important for the status of a denomination. Importantly, nearly all *peregrini* came back after their studies and put their knowledge in the service of their community. This was considered a moral obligation, and sometimes even enforced. For instance, the Calvinist collegium of Debrecen had a budget called “Bursa Nigra” dedicated to cover stipends for their alumni to study abroad and these migrant students were obliged to return and join the Calvinist clergy or otherwise pay the money back.[[12]](#footnote-12) The same collegium did not even hire “domidoctus” (trained only in the home country) teachers until the 20th century.

From the 16th century, more Hungarian migrant students enrolled in Protestant than in Catholic universities abroad. The volume of the peregrination of Catholics caught up to that of the Protestants only in the middle of the 18th century and mostly enrollments to the University of Vienna account for this. For a while, it was assumed that the Habsburgs purposefully and successfully impeded Protestants’ peregrination from Hungary in the 18th century, but this is not the consensus any longer.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Under the leadership of the above mentioned historian of universities, László Szögi, a voluminous database of migrant students from historical Hungary[[14]](#footnote-14) from the medieval beginnings to 1919 was constructed, containing the date of immatriculations of all those born in the territory of historical Hungary in 27 European countries.[[15]](#footnote-15) Conerning the 19th century, between 1850 ans 1880 an intensive growth of Hungarian students‘ interest for the universities and colleges of Vienna is conspicuous. Thanks to the expansion of higher education withon Hungary by the end of the 1870s, however, Vienna lost much of its attraction. External peregrination in general declined as most students pursued higher education withon the country. Peregrination for the sake of post-gradual training, however, was still popular, particularly to Germany which became the an internationally recognized center of science and scholarship. Hungarians also discovered the famous technical college of Zürich, the ETH (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule).[[16]](#footnote-16) Other institutions of Swiss higher education attracted Hungarian female students because they pioneered in the admission of women in an era when Hungarian women could get secondary schooling but were still excuded from Hungarian academia.

For the current study, the “overrepresentation” of Jews among Hungarian migrant students is the most important aspect of modern Hungarian peregrination. It is noteworthy that since the bulk of the Jewry of Hungary stemmed from Moravia and Galicia and their massive immigration (particularly from Moravia) began in the late 18th century, many Jewish families had strong ties to the Czech lands. Therefore, they were more likely to pursue studies there, particularly in Prague, than other students from Hungary. Before 1848, over half (52%) of Hungarian migrants students in Prague were Jewish.[[17]](#footnote-17) Between 1851 and 1919 the proportion of Jews (25,21%) was five times as high among migrant students than in the country’s population (5%). Although the religious affiliation of every migrant student is not known, therefore it may have been lower, but there was certainly a great overrepresentation.[[18]](#footnote-18) In this period, they were still likely to pursue higher education in Hungary as well as abroad. Considering the German speech area -which was the main target of Hungarian peregrination -before 1919, Szögi estimates the proportion of Jews at 20%.[[19]](#footnote-19)

The expansion of higher education in the second half of the 19th century concerned all of Europe including its newly founded nation-states in Southern and Eastern Europe, because it was a prerequisite of modernization and economic success to train professionals. Until institutions for certain fields were missing, states supported their talented youth to study at prestigious foreign universities, with the expectation that they would return and use their knowledge in the service of their home country. Hence, for a while, studies abroad even functioned as a vehicle to succeed in the native country and professors of newly institutionalized study field were necessarily trained abroad.

The First World War and its consequences dramatically changed the patterns of peregrination. Unlike in the 19th and early 20th century, the typical peregrini of the interwar period were members of ethnic, national and political minorities pushed out from their native countries by nationalism, antisemitism and political persecution rather than voluntarily mobile intellectuals.Hungary was the case most in point, as the first state to legislatively introduce an anti-Jewish law in the 20th century and this law, known as “numerus clausus” concerned admission to universities.[[20]](#footnote-20) The law stipulated that the proportion of all nationalities should be the same in the students body as in the general population and its executive ordinance listed the citizens of Israelite faith as if they would be a national minority. They were the only minority present in the student body in greater numbers than they should have been according to the new quota and the limitation of Jews’ access to higher education was indeed the aim of the legislators. After the quota was set up, Jewish enrollment as first-year students could not exceed the Jewish proportion in the general population (6 %). Since in the last academic year during the Great War (when all secondary school graduates were entitled to university enrollment) Jews constituted over one third (34%) of university students,[[21]](#footnote-21) the quota meant a grave limitation of the formerly free and indeed large-scale educational mobility of Hungarian Jewry. Due to such limitation of study possibilities in Hungary, thousands of Hungarian Jews became part of the broader story of Eastern and Central European Jews’ westward student migration. Although the idea of establishing a university in Hungary for Jewish youth came up,[[22]](#footnote-22) emigration to existing foreign universities and fundraising for that aim became incomparably more popular.

Yet, the text of the numerus clausus law itself excluded revolutionaries more than Jews (who were explicitly mentioned only in the law’s executive ordinance and not in the text of the law). The law defined “loyalty to the nation”, thus non-involvement in the 1918 Aster revolution and the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, as a prerequisite for enrollment in the universities. Universities set up committees to determine who were considered participants in the revolutions. Even previously enrolled students of the older cohorts were excluded on this ground. Needless to say, in a few years the revolutionaries disappeared from the cohorts of applicants to universities. Yet, “loyalty to the nation” remained a requirement for admission. Revolutionary students became either political emigrants or were excluded from universities and had to keep a low profile if remaining in Hungary. Younger cohorts of “subversive” students of the interwar period tended to belong to the underground communist movement and if their activism was discovered, exclusion from all universities of the Hungary was part of their punishment. Besides the migrant students pushed out for their Jewish origin or their politics, peregrination of women also continued because numerous faculties excluded female students.

At the same time, the Hungarian state did support the peregrination of other types of students which was part of the cultural politics of Kuno Klebelsberg, minister for religion and public education (1922-31). He organized a network of “collegium Hungaricums” and institutionalized stipends for Hungarian students and scholars to go on study and research trips in Vienna, Berlin, Rome and Paris. Klebelsberg was remarkably successful in fundraising and lobbying which culminated in the stipulation of Law 1927:XIII. about the Hungarian cultural institutes abroad and the stipends for study and research trips.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Occasionally intellectuals of Jewish origin could benefit from such stipends, however the typical intellectual who got these stipends, were typically non-Jews and students of humanities who spent a few months or at most two years abroad to polish their linguistic skills in preparation for a career as high school language teachers in Hungary.[[24]](#footnote-24) The typical Hungarian peregrini of the interwar period, were on the contrary, Jews, mostly students of medicine and engineering who pursued their higher education entirely abroad.

1. Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, “Mobility,“ in *Universities in the Middle Ages,* ed. Ibid. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 281. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ridder-Symoens, “Mobility,” 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ridder-Symoens, “Mobility,” 285. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Paolo Nardi, “Relations With Authority,” in *Universities in the Middle Ages,* ed. Hilde de Ridder-Symoens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Nardi, “Relations With Authority,” 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Elemér Balogh, *A salvus conductus és a magyar peregrináció* (Szeged: József Attila Tudományegyetem, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. András Kubinyi, “Städtische Bürger und Universitätsstudenten in Ungarn am Ende des Mittelalters,” in eds. Erich Maschke and Jürgen Sydow, *Stadt und Universität im Mittelalter und in der früheren Neuzeit* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1977), 161-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ridder-Symoens, “Mobility,” 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Between 1517 and 1721, the University of Padua conferred 228 doctorates upon Jews. Jewish Virtual Library: https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/universities (Accessed: November 4, 2022) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. László Szögi, “Peregrináció és reformáció. Milyen külföldi egyetemekre jártak tanulni a 16-18. századi magyar diákok? [Peregrination and reformation. Which foreign universities did Hungarian students go to study in the 16-18th centuries?],” in *Rubicon* (2017): 12, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Sándor Kovács, “A magyar unitárius peregrinatio academica vázlatos története 1848 után,” in *Keresztény Magvető* 115 (2009): 4, 561. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Viktória Molnár Tamusné, “Peregrinatio academica : külföldi egyetemjárás a Debreceni Református Kollégiumban a 16-17. században [Peregrinatio academica: studies abroad and the Calvinist collegium of Debrecen in the 16-17th centuries],” In *Módszertani közlemények*, 47 (2007): 5, 239-242. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Szögi, “Peregrináció és reformáció. Milyen külföldi egyetemekre jártak tanulni a 16-18. századi magyar diákok?” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. “Historical” Hungary refers to the much larger territory of the country before its borders drastically changed after the First World War. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The results are published in a book series: Magyarországi diákok egyetemjárása az újkorban [Peregrination of students from Hungary in the Modern era], ed. László Szögi (Budapest: 1994-). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. László Szögi, “A külföldi egyetemjárás tömegessé válása a 19. század második felében,” in ed. Helga Csóka-Jaksa, Éva Schmelzer-Pohánka, Gábor Szeberényi, *Pedagógia, Oktatás, Könyvtár. Ünnepi tanulmányok F. Dárdai Ágnes tiszteletére*. (Pécs: Pécsi Egyetemi Könyvtár és Tudásközpont, 2014), 109-123. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. László Szögi, “Magyarországi zsidó egyetemi hallgatók a német nyelvterület egyetemein és főiskoláin, 1789-1919. [Jewish students from Hungary at universities and colleges in the German-speaking territories, 1789-1919.]” *ELTE Egyetemi Könyvtár Évkönyvei* 10 (2011), 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Szögi, “A külföldi egyetemjárás tömegessé válása a 19. század második felében,” 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Szögi, “Magyarországi zsidó egyetemi hallgatók a német nyelvterület egyetemein és főiskoláin, 1789-1919,” 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. 1920. évi XXV. törvénycikk a tudományegyetemekre, a műegyetemre, a budapesti egyetemi közgazdaságtudományi karra és a jogakadémiákra való beiratkozás szabályozásáról [Law 1920:XXV on the Regulation of Enrollment to University, Polytechnics, Faculty of Economics at the University of Budapest and Law Academies] <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=92000025.TV> (Last accessed: November 5, 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Mária M. Kovács, *Törvénytől sújtva. A numerus clausus Magyarországon, 1920–1945* [Smitten by Law. The Numerus Clausus in Hungary, 1920-1945] (Budapest: Napvilág, 2012), 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Gyula Gábor, *A numerus clausus és a zsidó egyetem* [The Numerus Clausus and the Jewish University] (Budapest: Fráter Nyomda, 1924). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Márta Schneider, “Magyar ösztöndíjasok külföldön [Hungarian stipendees abroad],” in ed. Imre Békési, József Jankovics, László Kósa, Judit Nyerges, *Régi és új peregrináció. Magyarok külföldön, külföldiek Magyarországon* [Old and new peregrination. Hungarians abroad, Foreigners in Hungary], Vol.2. *A peregrináció a magyar irodalom- és művelődéstörténet különböző periódusaiban* [Peregrination in different periods of the history of Hungarian literature and culture], (Budapest-Szeged: Nemzetközi Magyar Filológiai Társaság, 1993), 876-888. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century,* 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)