SUMMARY

GIRLS’ EDUCATION AND FEMALE CULTURE IN MODERN HUNGARY
(WITH AN INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK AND SET IN WOMEN’S HISTORY)

The book aims to provide a synthesis of the history of female education in modern Hungary on the basis of printed Hungarian-language resources. The geographical area explored in the research and the origin of sources were principally Hungary and Transylvania.

It must be emphasized, however, that the author’s investigations are internationally embedded and performed in a comparative manner, as foreign ideas and events had a significant impact on the theory and practice of women’s history and girls’ education in Hungary, especially from the second half of the 18th century. The fairly broad subject matter covered by this work has been elaborated with an eye on women’s history.

The book is centered on a period covering more than two hundred years from the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries to the beginning of the 20th century. This time frame embraces a number of eras worthy of exploration in themselves from an educational, cultural, social, female, ideological, political or economic history perspective.

The author’s choice of this broad time frame enables her to present how the initial steps of women’s modern education bearing the traditional female ideal eventually evolved into the “modern” woman at the beginning of the 20th century who first had the chance to be educated at every level of schooling similarly to men – even if with limitations – and could use the cultural opportunities of the period in a way never seen before. The book identifies the unfolding of female education as a subprocess of diverse emancipation which gradually disrupted the feudal society.

The nearly three decades of research forming the basis of the book mainly addresses the history, including educational and cultural history, of girls and women belonging to the middle and upper classes, and essentially deals with Hungarians from Hungary and Transylvania excluding nationalities.

The book starts with an extensive historiography part in which the author presents an overview of hundreds of thematic works written mostly in the 19th to 21st centuries both abroad and in Hungary. It shows that the exploration of
the history of women’s education is an eminent area among the numerous topics of educational history often researched in previous centuries. Long and short monographs, collection of papers, readers, articles and essays were written about the results of previous research in the history of girls’ and women’s education, along with summaries dealing with overall female emancipation from various perspectives. The volume provides an analytical, comparative and critical evaluation of all these.

Along with an analytical review of the thematic literature, the work is focused on presenting the most important features of the history of modern girls’ education and female culture in Hungary and Transylvania. The author was set to find out how changes to the different levels of institutionalized and non-institutionalized education for girls were embedded in the international processes of social, female and educational history.

To explore this, she looked at the impact the rich foreign literature of querelle des femmes had in Hungary and Transylvania, which included hundreds of sources of varied contents and genres already from the middle ages and the Renaissance period. She reviewed the translations and adaptations of foreign works published in contemporary Hungary. The volume presents not only the sources that supported women and their cultural rights but also a number of pieces of anti-woman literature. Along with opinions about women and girls’ education, professional and political disputes on different levels and forums, whether local or national, or even crossing over to the international stage, are also presented in the book.

The primary sources for the research include the substantial body of thematic articles of the Hungarian-language press, particularly those of Tudományos Gyűjtemény, Atheneum, Felső Magyar Országi Minerva, Fillértár, Családi Lapok, Nemzeti Nőnevelés, Magyar Paedagogia, as well as Vasárnapi Újság, Új Idők, Erdélyi Múzeum, Budapesti Szemle, Élet, Pécsi Közlöny, Borsszem Jankó, Veréb Jankó, Kerékpáros Hölgyek Lapja, Magyar Lányok, Élet, Természettudományi Közlöny, A Nő és Társadalom, Szocializmus, Magyar Iparművészet, Zalai Közlöny, Néptanítók Lapja and articles from various other fashion and women’s magazines.

Valuable sources were the protocols of the 2nd Universal Educational Congress; the related records from the data series of censuses held between 1880 and 1910; legal documents (mainly laws and regulations) produced in relation to education and women’s rights in modern times; and, additionally, the cartoons associated with female education and emancipation, and the humorous writings about women as they could be extracted from contemporary press. The volume’s material, as far as was possible, are complemented by personal memories (details taken from contemporary journals, memoires, letters, and travel diaries), which allow a glimpse into the everyday life of women, girls’ education and female
culture, a world of micro history. The study of the ideas of girls’ education – in a way mostly considered unconventional in the research practice of educational history – was also supported by certain romance novels popular in the period and other literary works (poems, novels, short stories) as well as needlework and household guides, conduct and child-rearing manuals.

Drawing on these rich resources, the volume presents a wide-ranging analysis of the highly complex process of how institutionalized girls’ education in Hungary had changed from the second half of the 18th century. A particularly important part in the book is the presentation of arguments that flared up in the 1880s and 1890s about the introduction of girls’ high schools complete with graduation and women’s access to university.

Diachronic and synchronic approaches are applied together in the volume: as well as describing the formation of lower, middle and higher education, central historical problems are presented too, such as girls’ preparation for the role of housewife, housekeeper and mother, building the female body, health education for women, and contemporary actions of educating women to become readers.

The book is not only rich in terms of resources but also presents a considerable number of contemporary authors, enabling future researches and a more specific exploration of the subject matter.

The contents of this volume clearly demonstrates that the modern history of girls’ education and female culture in Hungary and Transylvania formed an organic part of the European history of education. The thinking of Hungarian pedagogical theorists, education professionals, school organizers and teachers, as witnessed by contemporary sources, was very much in line with their Western peers, i.e., they considered the development of girls’ education important and essential for the destiny of the nation and mankind.

Women deserved particular attention not only because of housekeeping, bearing and rearing children but also for sustaining and cultivating good morals, religion, the Hungarian language and national values. However, preparing them for paid jobs, academic and artistic professions progressed sluggishly even in the 19th century, and entailed a number of disputes and issues.

The unfolding of girls’ schooling which started at the end of the 18th century only partially followed the way of boys’ schools, its development – especially on middle and higher levels – displays a specific and non-general history. However, as confirmed by this book, it is not a marginal one but rather worthy of studying and learning from. Its important sources and analyses clearly deserve a place among the great canons of educational history.

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