

The abstract of the PhD thesis

“THE ONES UNDER THE WINGS OF SZIKRA...”

**VARAD AND THE PURITANISM UNDER THE RULE OF
GYÖRGY RÁKÓCZI II, THE PRINCE OF TRANSYLVANIA**

Tiborc Szabolcs Pénzes

Ph.D. Supervisor: Dr Mihály Imre



UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

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Justification for the choice of the theme and the aims of the thesis

The specialised literature uniformly uses the term *Puritanism* for the initiatives triggering vivid social debates urging various reforms of the Reformed Church and the ecclesiastical practices that appeared with great intensity in Transylvania and the northern counties along the Tisza in the second third of the 17th century. This is probably the only statement that every author agrees on regardless of the period, although the term itself is determined by the ecclesiastical and social events in 16–17th century England and implies that the aspirations of the English puritans are mapped onto the territory of the principality. The contemporary usage of ‘puritan’ is intrinsically parallel with the one in England: the ones opposing the ‘puritan’ reforms sarcastically called their opponents puritans, charged them with religious deviation, sectarianism, and even with heresy. The Reformers firmly rejected being called Puritans and to avoid further debates the synod in Szatmárnémeti in 1646 banned the usage of the term, though too late as it had already been naturalized in the everyday language.

Through reading the complex literature about Hungarian Puritanism one can encounter the intrinsic tension of the term in various ecclesiastical, cultural and social historical experiences. Without having the intention of being exhaustive it could be mentioned the role that the ‘Independents’ assumed in the clerical hierarchy, their lack of organisation facing the movement and local character. The list also includes the aspirations allegedly aiming at the rise of the serfs, which is in contrast to the plan of increasing the ratio of the nobility in academic education, or the intentions of those promoting pedagogical reforms and being discussed in relationship with the Puritans but having no genuine Puritan impulses.

While reading the Reformed Literature from the mid 17th century one may have rather antagonistic impressions. A corpus with a wide range and large spectrum called Puritan literature was given birth partly *accidentally* to compensate for *certain gaps* and in this process the personal inventions played greater parts than the sporadically found organisations. In the majority of printed books from that time, innovations that would have justified the firm actions taken against the Reformers could barely be discovered. It is questionable if this all happened under pressure of the contemporary censorship, or the authors being aware of censorship practised self-control, or most of the authors lacked radicalism that, according to several researchers, is one of the main features of the Hungarian Puritans. One may wonder if instead of planting the English Puritans’ radical aims which were far from the Hungarian Reformed Church history and tradition, the readers actually witness the innovative process of Reformation and of the (late) Humanistic traditions as a process of *semper reformanda* where

the Puritan doctrines are only present if filtered through the universities of the Netherlands and in agreement with the Calvinist traditions. In my point of view the gap between the Orthodox and the Puritans is smaller than I thought it previously.

In the present thesis I intend to survey and analyse a relatively narrow corpus from the local aspect through which I propose a new view of the period of ‘radical Puritanism’ under the principality of György Rákóczi II. I also search for the reasons of the above mentioned anomalies and for the working principles of the literary perception of the time. The scene of my investigations is Varad (Oradea in Romanian, Nagyvárad in Hungarian), the ‘capital’ of Partium. The town, inhabited mainly by noble families, was one of the most important strategic, economical and cultural centres of Transylvania in the mid 17th century. After the devastating siege of 1598 the town was methodically reconstructed with infrastructure and cultural institutions that had great influence on the entire principality. Taking into consideration the alleged socially motivated forces and the receptive environment of Puritanism the *town* itself was a completely atypical medium. However, the specialised literature regards the town as the setting of the largest attempt of achieving Puritanism in Hungary at the time of Prince György Rákóczi II. The above hypothesis was born in the vacuum caused by the lack of sources as the primary sources relating to the period, i.e. the majority of the documents directly related to Varad were destroyed in the siege of 1660.

The applied methods of the thesis

The methodology of the study was greatly determined by the lack of sources, which had been acknowledged by many researchers of Varad and Bihar County as well. According to the data of the specialised literature one should not expect new, revealing sources that can create a context that is substantially different from the existing one. Consequently, although I have carried out several studies of sources, I have primarily reinterpreted the published data and put them into a different perspective.

The thesis deals with the processes going on in Varad in six larger units. The first chapter presents the statements referring to Varad in the literature of Puritanism examining the following question: how could the key town of the Principality have become the exemplar town of Independentism in Hungary in the view of some authors? In other words, how could László Makkai’s Marxist perception of Puritanism have prevailed, reaching, and in some cases, stretching over the turn of the millennium, and how could it have determined the

scientific researches into their essence and overshadowed some significant conceptions such as of József Bodonhelyi or Pál Berg?

The second chapter reconstructs the Puritan image of the participants at the synod in Szatmárnémeti on the basis of the summary of the synod written by Benjámín István Szilágyi, schoolmaster in Varad from 1643 to 1645. The text was written in high literary standards by Szilágyi, who is considered to be a pioneer of Reformed Church history, and I can identify those (mis)conceptions related to the English Puritans which hindered the causes of Reformation from the very beginning. Furthermore, on the basis of the relationship between the theory of the fatal periods founding the arguments of *Acta Synodi Nationalis* and the historical perspective of Wittenberg, I can also enlighten the motivation of the Conservatives for their rejecting attitudes towards the apocalyptical premonitions such as the appearance of false prophets and the fear of separation from the Church. In connection with the terminology used by Szilágyi, I discuss the Hungarian occurrence of the name Puritan, its altering meanings and the issues of the early receptions of the Puritan authors.

The third chapter describes the receptive environment and clarifies certain misunderstandings related to the history of the grammar school in Varad. I point out the circumstance in which the apparent Puritan turn was caused by the devastating plague in 1645–1646. The deceased or escaped pastors and schoolmasters were replaced by young graduates, and the majority of whom had János Tolnai Dali as their master in Sárospatak. Through the examination of the grammar school's functioning I can disprove the opinion stating that the school could have reached a university level in the 1650s.

The analysis of the *Pasquillus* of Varad, which is the marrow of the present thesis, is presented in the fourth chapter. The satirical poem, having been created immediately before the synod in Debrecen in 1655, gives a tableau vivant and ridicules the pastors and schoolmasters from and around Varad who professed the Presbyterian concepts or just sympathised with them. It also marks the most significant part of the group and indirectly their works that should be examined. The poem, which uses Gáspár Károli's '*Két Könyv*' as indirect reference, and which deviates from the general characteristics of the pasquillus on several points, strongly illustrates the apocalyptic fear that grew stronger year by year, and that offered fertile ground to the preachers who urged spiritual reform. To justify the usage of '*Pasquillus*' as source for social history, I briefly present the history and the features of the genre.

In the fifth chapter, after I explain why the unknown author used the genre, and after I present the elements of erudition appearing in the poem, I describe the paths of life of the

identifiable characters, and, for whom it is possible, I also present their literary activities, including Benedek Nagyari, Sámuel Enyedi, András Szilágyi Tarpai, István Komáromi Szvertán, Ferenc Pankotai and Mátyás Diószegi Bónis. In their cases I reveal the circumstances in which their books were born, their sources, the linking points to the contemporary literary discourses, and with the help of previous texts with similar content, I define the elements which in the country were considered novelties. I diverge from the order and the characters present in the *'Pasquillus'* only when I study the *'Metamorphosis'* of Ferenc Pápai Borsati. One of the reasons for this divergence is that this writing was edited by Tarpai and Enyedi, the other is that Borsati's writing is one of the best-known pieces of work of the time, and besides, a lot of conjectures were aroused in connection with it.

The varied topics present in the books needed different strategies of analysis. Through the study of the volumes which used to be the property of Péter Kovásznai, and which can still be found in Kolozsvár, I examine the contents of the priest's library looking for books that theoretically founded his radical action. In the case of Benedek Nagyari I try to demonstrate the differences between the reserved writing, lacking straightforwardness and the determined and unwavering oral statements that he had presumably on the basis of the resolutions of the synod. The early appearance of the doctrines of Descartes and Regius in Transylvania is presented through the lectures in Nagyenyed given by Sámuel Enyedi, who had a similar education and way of thinking to János Apáczai Csere. Since I identify the source of school play that Borsati wrote in memory of Zsigmond Rákóczi, I deprive it of the concepts that connected it with the Rosicrucian and Roman-Catholic mysticism. I analyse the basis of the arguments Tarpai used in his works in which he had debates with the Roman Catholics. I also examine the novelty of his commentaries on canon laws that give answers to the problematic issues of divorce and usury, going back to the time of Reformation. From the case of Ferenc Nagybánai, who was charged with having a relationship outside of marriage in *'Pasquillus'*, I briefly comment on the issue that starting from the Middle Ages some authors connected heresy with illegal sexuality. I compare the theory of worship written by István Komáromi Szvertán, who also translated works of Ames, with the concepts of Pál Medgyesi. In this comparison I look for similarities and differences in the works of the two 'Puritan' authors. When presenting Ferenc Pankotai, I try to find an explanation for the unprecedented long cooperation between the town of Szalonta and its priest. While presenting the course of life of Tamás Kisfalvi, I call the attention to the moments related to the double publishing of the Bible. Lastly, among the major authors, I study the commentaries of Mátyás Diószegi Bónis against drunkenness. I look for the Puritan ideas present in the text translated form English. I

try to put the shorter biographies and the more lengthy analyses in a fairly uniform structure, as the quantity of attainable information permitted, in order to make the paths of life of the characters comparable. Because of the significant differences in content and nature of the texts – translations, adaptations, and autonomous work – I did not have the opportunity to compare and contrast the texts according to their linguistic features as well.

The sixth chapter describes the period of 1657–1660. In the view of the Marxist paradigm of Puritanism this is the time of Independentism in Varad. It is when, under the pressure of the priests, the democratic government of the town was created following the model of the Presbyteries. The governing body led by János Szalárdi could actually mean the secular institutionalisation of the Presbyterian ambitions. I thoroughly examine this possibility on the basis of the chronicle written by Szalárdi. I also deal with the circumstances of the publishing of the so-called '*Várad* *Biblia*' in the same chapter. This short summary obviously cannot compensate for the minute analysis of the '*Várad* *Biblia*', which the literary history should have done for a long time. However, I believe that a thesis on 'Puritanism' in Varad can not ignore the work which keeps the fame of the scientific Varad, and the memory of the century of the Reformed Varad alive. The heritage of Varad can be recognised not only in the new edition of the Bible translated by Károli, but in the educational system of the grammar schools in Debrecen and Nagyenyed. I present the proof for it in the third part of this chapter, where I also compare and contrast the functioning of the reformer generations and the different features of their communication.

The results of the thesis

1 My thesis offers the most complex picture of the events of the period right before the siege of Varad along with the appearance of the scientific and theological school of thoughts after I summarize the sporadic publications of data and the results of the studies of sources which validate new points of view.

2 From the analysis of the summary of the synod written by István Sziágyi Benjámín, I observe that in the synod in Szatmárnémeti, where the case of Tolnai's reforms was discussed, under the surface of some spectacular formalities, an exciting hermeneutical debate of two different ages started. The two opponents were the theological concept of Heidelberg and the Puritan theological concept. In the outbreak of this debate the habit of János Tolnai Dali had an important role. Tolnai demanded instant reforms of the ecclesiastical

organisations, of liturgy and education in Puritan spirit, but he gained the antipathy of the synod due to his determination and his behaviour rejecting authority. Tolnai's closest disciples strove for the introduction of the reforms with the same intransigence their master had and, hence, they attracted the reprisal of the secular authorities as well. They demanded strict clerical discipline with violence and obstinacy, and while the ecclesiastical and the secular authorities tolerated it, they probably applied it in their everyday clerical practice. They preferred the psalms of Geneva; they did not perform the nuptial ceremony or the baptism in private houses, and they ignored the changed political atmosphere following the decapitation of King Charles I, even in Transylvania. They were apparently divisive personalities just like Tolnai. They acquired the attention and then the reprisal of the authority mainly by infringing the nobility's clerical privileges.

3 Puritanism in England had a greater direct influence on the first generation of the reformers – Tolnai and his closest followers –, and a much lesser one on the second generation – those who were born after 1620. The second generation looked to Holland and they held the views of the professors from the Dutch universities, the representatives of the continental Calvinist theology's tradition: Ames, Voetius and Coccejus. The sources and the references of the books I examine refer to the same, just like the content of Péter Kovásznai's library. One can observe this methodological trend in Varad, too. Regarding the ecclesiastical reforms, this trend does not demand less than Tolnai and his followers, still its adjudication was definitely improved since the communication is not radical, it does not provoke the existing political system, and it does not refer to English examples in general. To the contrary, it calls for the help of prestigious and renowned authors of the continental Calvinism to support the views of reform. Apparently, the younger generation wanted the changes to be carried out with more careful and less radical steps.

4 The second generation's attitude of avoiding open conflicts made it possible for the modern Calvinist theological writings from Holland to be introduced in our country. These Calvinist theological writings were refreshed partly on English influence. When referring to Varad, I firstly allude to the teachers of the grammar schools who, along with Ábrahám Szenczi Kertész were the pioneers of publishing the writings of William Ames in the country and the usage of them as syllabi. The mentality of the grammar school in Varad can be characterised by the theology of Ames and the philosophy of Descartes and Regius and, last but not least, by the pedagogy of Comenius. Sámuel Enyedi transposed the rules of the house written by Comenius in hexameters for the students of the school and also introduced Cartesian philosophy in Varad.

5 The paths of life of more priests playing important roles in that time are revealed, e.g. Mihály Debreceni Hentes; their roles are specified, e.g. András Szilágyi Tarpai; and are summarized, e.g. Sámuel Enyedi and Benedek Nagyari.

6 I identify the source of the *'Metamorphosis'* written by Ferenc Pápai Borsati emphasising the significance of the publication of textbooks in Varad.

7 The complete oeuvre of András Szilágyi Tarpai is explored and presented through its contexts. I also identify its two policies being in correlation with the theology of Ames: the controversial and ethical lines. Tarpai commented on the dogmatic debate in Sárospatak in the spirit of fight against Counter-Reformation. He also published the refutation of the dogmatic infallibility of the Pope in the *'Toldalék'* at the end of *'Libellus repudii...'* I state that both *'Pápisták kerengője'* and *'Toldalék'* are texts, documents of dogmatic debates that the researchers have not studied so far. In addition, I also suggest that his efforts to create the Hungarian literature of the Calvinist ethics are much more important than his debates. On the basis of his writings, dealing with the issues of divorce and interest on a loan, following the concepts of Calvin, Beza and Ames, I put Tarpai into the vanguard of the 17th century Hungarian Calvinist thinkers.

8 While presenting István Komáromi Szvertán's views on prayer following the opinions of Ames, I show the differences appearing in connection with Medgyesi's point of view and through this, I notice that the so called Puritan approach is not necessarily unified, thus different authors answer certain questions differently. In the lights of this result, it is essential that in the future texts, having similar topics, with innovative spirit, have to be examined in comparison with their theological positions.

9 In the present thesis I analyse for the first time in literary history the *'Sanctus Hilarius'* by Ferenc Pankotai, which is a translation of a text written by Vedelius. This text offers a guidance of biblical support to overcome the problem of sadness, reaching an almost social level, a problem that nowadays is called depression. I declare that this writing belongs to the new stoicism rather than to the literature of Puritanism.

10 While contrasting the original Vedelius text and the paper on teetotalism written by Mátyás Diószegi Bónis and published in Leiden, I reveal that Diószegi systematically extirpated every English reference from the translation. One does not know the reason why he did so, either because the Geleji canons came into effect, or because he practiced self-censure in self-defence. What is a fact, though, is that leaving the English references out of the translation neutralised the text from religious and political aspect at such an extent that the

Hungarian translation can not be considered 'Puritan literature', but rather it can be examined as part of the history of the English literary reception.

11 In the presentation of the functioning of the Board of Curators, the governing body of the town of Varad established in 1657, I describe the practice having its roots in the medieval town law, and which served as a model for the governing body. I also refute Makkai's opinion about the organisation of the governing body on the pattern of the Presbyteries. Through this refutation one of the most important proofs of the Marxist paradigm of Puritanism supporting the practical realization of political Independentism is overthrown.

12 In reference to the '*Várad* Biblia' I summarize all the data and opinions available in the specialised literature, and point to the tendencies that characterised the work of Sámuel Köleséri while editing and publishing the text in Hanau and while modernising the marginalias of the text.

13 I demonstrate that the heritage of the grammar school of Varad was passed on not only to the one in Debrecen, but, due to the activities of Sámuel Enyedi and other ex-students of the school of Varad, to the grammar school in Nagyenyed as well.

14 On the whole, I state that the Hungarian reformers did not have any political ambitions and 'Puritanism' in terms of politics did not have the Independentist stage.

15 I demonstrate that the standpoints in the specified literature suggesting discord among the 17th century Hungarian Reformed authors are untenable. There is no valid distinction that presents the reformers as dissidents either in the political or in the ecclesiastical field.

16 In spite of the apparently essential statements, the works studied in the present thesis are not duly representative or, quantitatively are not enough to draw conclusions on the basis of which one could overwrite the existing paradigm of Puritanism. However, while studying them I gained experiences that could be the guidelines in future research with a new perspective. It would be important in that research to examine the way the different schools related to the different theologians are built one upon the other, and when they enter the discourse, as the answers could lead to the decentralisation of the concept of Puritanism. One should clarify which theological aspirations could be related unequivocally to Ames, Voetius, Coccejus and to his followers, what is the common feature of their opinions, what they disagree on, how they approach the heritage of Calvin and what is their attitude towards the innovative philosophy. Following such selection, the usage of Puritanism as an umbrella term would become unnecessary and we could clearly talk about the followers of Voetius, of Coccejus and of Ames, and we could talk about Puritan Piety, Precisism and Pietism.

List of publications referring to the subject of the thesis

Books (Edited)

1. Tiborc Szabolcs Péntzes (ed.) *Petrőczy Éva – „...mi lelünknek élető abra”*. (Budapest: Fekete Sas, KRE Puritanizmuskutató Intézet), 2008.
2. Tiborc Szabolcs Péntzes (ed.) *Septempunctata. A volume of studies presented on the 60th birthday of Éva Petrőczy* (Budapest: rec.iti), 2011.

Publications in scientific journals and volumes of studies

1. The genre of Pasquillus and the remarkable features of the Pasquillus of Varad, in: *Studia Caroliensia*, 2009/4, 45–59.
2. New points of view for the study of the Bible of Varad, (with Éva Petrőczy), in: János Heltai (ed.) *Biblia Hungarica Philologica: Hungarian Bibles in Philological Researches*. (Budapest: Argumentum), 2009 (A Magyar Könyvszemle és a MOKKA-R Egyesület Füzetei, 3), 147–159.
3. The absence of political dialogues in Transylvania between 1657–1662 and its reflections in two contemporary narrations, in: István Dobos – Sándor Bene (eds.) *The Self-interpretations of the Hungarian Studies: Conference Volume of the 2nd International Conference of Doctoral Schools, 22–24 Aug. 2008*. (Budapest: Nemzetközi Magyarstudományi Társaság), 2009, 35–39.
4. Sámuel Enyedi: a scarcely known scientist, teacher and poet, in: Tiborc Szabolcs Péntzes (ed.) *Septempunctata. A volume of studies presented on the 60th birthday of Éva Petrőczy* (Budapest: rec.iti), 2011, 41–50.
5. A priest with paternal soul at the end of the 17th century, or István Czeglédi in the memories of his son and foster-son, (with Éva Petrőczy), in: *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis: Acta Historiae Litterarum Hungaricarum XXX*, 2011, 382–392.

6. „Dicsérlec tégedet a poganyoc között Vram...”: The places and roles of the psalms of Balm of Gilead in the oeuvre of János Kemény, in: Éva Petróczi – András Szabó (eds.) *The Psalm in the Medieval and Early Modern Hungarian Literature, Conference Volume of the Lectures in Csurgó, 24–27 May 2007*, (Budapest: L’Harmattan), 2011 (Károli Könyvek), 255–256.

Critical editions

1. *András Tarpai Szilágyi, The poor men’s advocate. A Critical Edition*, Csaba Péter Horváth – Tiborc Szabolcs Péntes (eds.), introduction: Éva Petróczi, (Budapest: Fekete Sas, KRE Puritanizmuskutató Intézet), 2010 (Medgyesi Pál Puritán Kiskönyvtár, 1).

Review essays

1. [*The old stock of the Library of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Varad*], Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények, 2006, 565–567.

2. [Éva Petróczi: *Puritánia*], Egyháztörténeti Szemle, 2007, 233–239.

3. [Gergely Tamás Fazakas – János L.Győri (eds.), ‘Pál Medgyesi Redivivus’, Studies on the Oeuvre of a Seventeenth-Century Calvinist Court-Preacher, (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Egyetemi és Nemzeti Könyvtár), 2008 (Könyv és Könyvtár 2007 special issue)], Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények, 2008, 749–754.

4. [Mihály Balázs – Csilla Gábor (eds.), *Memory and Devotion in the Early Modern Hungarian Literature*, Conference volume of the lectures at the International Conference organised by the Institute of Hungarian Literature Studies, Babeş – Bolyai University, Cluj, 24–27 May 2006., (Kolozsvár: Egyetemi Műhely Kiadó – Bolyai Társaság) 2007, (Egyetemi Füzetek, 3)], Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények, 2012/1 (forthcoming).