

# PHD THESIS

Gergely Tamás Fazakas

**CONCEPTS OF COMMUNAL IDENTITY IN HUNGARIAN CALVINIST  
PRAYER BOOKS OF THE SECOND HALF OF SEVENTEENTH CENTURY  
(GRAMMATICAL, RHETORICAL, GENERIC AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL  
QUESTIONS OF LAMENTING PRAYERS)**



Faculty of Arts, Univeristy of Debrecen  
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### ***Prior research and the importance of topic***

While some of recent Hungarian historians who are engaged in the early modern concepts of national identity had already examined sixteenth- and seventeenth century Protestant sermons from the 1980s, they did not take enough notice of prayers and prayer books, as I argue in the first chapter of my dissertation, in which I look over the antecedents and future directions of my research. But prayers are very important in some ways. Prayer books were reissued several times, because these volumes were more popular on the one hand, smaller and cheaper than the collections of sermons, on the other. While sermons were published for fellow-preachers, prayer books were written mainly for laypeople to read in their private piety (or to be read by the head of the family at home services). While sermons were preached and written by a preacher in second person plural to admonish and exhort their congregation (and readers), prayers were formulated in first person singular or plural, and users of these books who read the prayers frequently, could easily identify themselves with the 'I' or 'we' pronouns of the texts.

### ***Research approaches and methodology***

My PhD dissertation argues that some of *early modern prayer books* (and some of the grammatically similar congregational songs as well) *had more important role in shaping the ideas of communal identity in the early modern period than any other texts*. Interpreting seventeenth century prayer books written in tragic historical situations and connected to the tradition of mournful rhetoric against the Ottoman Forces and/or the Habsburg Catholics, I claim that these texts had considerable political and social significance. Prayer books helped to consolidate the idea of the Hungarian nation for a wide range of Hungarian Calvinist readers, which means that confessional identities played a major role in the formation of national identity.

Besides several Puritan conduct books and treatises (both with original texts and translations from works of William Perkins and William Ames), the necessity of 'shedding grievous tears' was also emphasized by the authors of Hungarian puritan devotional literature. Some Puritan prayer books in the seventeenth century were influenced by the tradition of Western mysticism, such as St. Bernard of Clairveaux. On the one hand, they regarded crying as an important device in averting further sins. On

the other hand, they interpreted it as an external sign of lamentation over sins, which induce further repentance. Quoting the most important statements of English Protestants on performance of (lamenting) prayer I claim that Hungarian Calvinists represent a conformist point of view in early modern English debate against Puritans over performance of prayer. My anthropological approach focuses upon the meaning of crying, and some other gestures of praying.

While earlier academic research concentrated on the spreading of English and Dutch Calvinist (Puritan) influence on Hungary, less emphasis was laid on the characteristics of the Hungarian Puritan devotion in connection with crying. Lamentation was a very important genre of the Hungarian literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The rhetoric of lamentation spread in the Hungarian devotional literature not just because of the sufferings of the individual, but rather as a result of the desperate situation of the Hungarian nation harassed by the Muslim Ottoman forces and the Catholic Habsburgs. These texts also called for repentance, however, the rhetoric of lamentation is much rather applied by preachers as a result of the diversity of destitution.

### ***Results and new scientific achievements***

Coming to God is the only way for the individual to alleviate his/her sufferings, to heal himself/herself, or to free himself/herself from his prison. Epidemics, wars, starvation, and the 'Babylonian Captivity' of the Hungarian people, which is—similarly to the Jews—elected but sinful, will come to an end only, if people convert themselves to God. Not only sermons but prayers of contemporary preachers also presented Hungarians with 'catalogue of sins', which had been inherited since the sixteenth century, and besides urging people to practice repentance, they became the advocates of keeping collective penitence, just like prophets in the Old Testament. These texts can be regarded as specific modifications of *prayers against the Turks ('Türkengebete')* and *jeremiads* spread both in Europe and in New England. Lamentation with its apocalyptic characteristics was a very important genre of Hungarian literature in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

According to the Protestant theology which makes use of Hebrew-Hungarian historical parallels and typology similar to the English, Huguenot, Dutch, and North American practice, these tribulations came about owing to the sins of the individuals and the nation, thus can be considered as punishment. Most of European and North

American Calvinist preachers, kings, princes and politicians, cities and societies were equally described as the revived individuals and communities of the Old Testament. While the ways in which Calvinists drew from the model of Israel and its relationship with God were not unique or novel, they were, according to Graeme Murdock, “at least distinctive in their intensity and frequency”. This model was a source to help the Calvinist communities in Europe “structures a sense of collective identity and to make sense of their history and current circumstances”. (Naturally, there were several historical differences between seventeenth century Hungary and England, from where some of the Congregationalists migrated to the New World, and explained their migration to America as a similar movement to the escaping of the Jews from their Egyptian captivity.) However, in some texts of the seventeenth century devotional literature, mostly in prayers, the enumeration of sins is thrust sometimes into the background and less emphasis is laid on the call to repentance and conversion. Much rather the detailed description of the miseries, the mournful rhetoric is moved to the focus of these works.

The Calvinist preacher, Miklós J. Técsi, who pursued his studies in the Dutch Republic and later attended Cambridge, published his prayer book (*Lilium Humilitatis*) in Franeker, 1659, two years after the disastrous campaign of the Transylvanian voivode (prince) György Rákóczi II into Poland, and one year after Polish, Tartar and Ottoman invasions in Transylvania, when principality lost of one-fifth of its territory to Ottoman control. The bulk of Transylvanian soldiers in Poland, remaining the control of János Kemény (later prince of Transylvania) were surprised by an attack from the Tartars (who were supported by the Ottoman Army), and thousands of them who survived were taken prisoner to Crimea. Técsi is for some degree related to the Puritan tradition, which considers the sins of people as the cause of suffering, and calls upon conversion. Still, he depicts the Hungarians’ miserable situation in more details, and asks for the cease of ‘the terrible bloodsheds and fighting’ from God.

The Calvinist archdeacon, Sámuel Köleséri, who studied in Leiden, Oxford and Cambridge, keeps a similar repentance in his prayer book (*Bánkódó Lélek Nyögési*) and beseeches God for forgiveness of sins. Texts of the book were written six years after 1660, Rákóczi György II prince of Transylvania had died of his wounds, and when Transylvania lost Várad, the most important border fortress and city. The prayers mostly deal with the losses and ask God to rid them of their sufferings.

In my dissertation I examine how prayers of Köleséri, Técsi and some other books of Calvinist devotional literature in the middle of seventeenth-century described

the miseries, applying those texts from the Book of Psalms, Jeremiah, etc. as pretexts that are connected to the tradition of the laments and mournful rhetoric. Köleséri, Técsi and their fellow ministers drew many parallels between the history and tragedies of Israel and Hungary. Técsi and Köleséri concentrated on the enumeration of sins of 'Hungarian Israel', and not only urged their nation to repent of their sins, but as advocates did penance on behalf of them. I also outline the role of Köleséri's and Técsi's prayer books both in church service and private piety.

Técsi's prayer book was very popular in the seventeenth-century. *Lilium humilitatis* ran into four editions (1673, 1675, 1679: 2) during the *persecutio decennalis* (decade of the bloody Counter-Reformation of Habsburg Catholics against Hungarian Protestant ministers) and one in the first year of Ferenc Rákóczi's war of independence against Habsburgs (1703). Publishers did not revise the text of the first edition (1659), because both the historical context of the original edition and the latter issues required similar biblical tropology. I also examine the prayer books of Mihály Szöllösi (1676) and Gergely Filepszállási (1694), which were written in a new tragic historical context, but also quoted the tradition of mournful rhetoric against the political and military enemies. But because of different historical tragedies caused by Ottomans and Habsburgs in different decades of seventeenth century and in variant regions of Hungary, there were some niceties between the meanings of the tropes, which I try to explore.

At the same time, it was not only Técsi who prayed for the liberation of the captives, but the leader of the sufferers of Tartar bondage, János Kemény, too. Together with his own prayer, Kemény edited the Book of Psalms as a prayerbook (*Gilead Balsamuma* i. e. *Balm of Gilead*) in 1658. It was sent out from the captivity in Crimea by Kemény in order to be published next year in Sárospatak, Northern Hungary. His several thousand Transylvanian soldiers in the captivity were the original audience and users of prayers. Kemény, as the leader of the Hungarians who fell into the power of Tartars, considered the attention paid to the soldiers' spiritual life as important as the Puritan practice. The book he compiled put a great emphasis on expanding the army's education, which was characteristic of the Hungarian Puritanism that interpreted the education of people as a religious mission.

Kemény did not publish the 150 psalms in their original sequence, but in his own thematic arrangement. The consequence of the unique, seventeenth century historical situation was that he connected most of the psalms to the genre of lamentations – distinctly from the listing of the commonly accepted psalm-interpretations. My aim is to

shed light on the less examined questions concerning the genre of prayers in the seventeenth century. I discuss Kemény's particular attempt to group the psalms (lament and comfort) according to the notions of contemporary Latin and Hungarian teachings on prayer, which effort on his part enables us to define a typology of seventeenth century prayer books.

In the last chapter I analyse Zsuzsanna Vitéz's unknown hand-written prayer-book of 1684 from a philological and a rhetorical perspective. The author who was the wife of Pál Béldi, the influential Transylvanian politician in the seventeenth century is not even well-known but at certain times a relatively important figure of the political life of Transylvania. Her name survived principally because of her alleged participation in witchcraft, as according to the contemporary grounds for litigation she quite often asked for help of supernatural powers against the princely court and especially for the corruption of Anna Bornemisza, wife of Mihály Apafi I, prince of Transylvania.

Zsuzsanna Vitéz wrote her prayer book during she stayed in prison in Szamosújvár (Gherla, Romania). It contains prayer paraphrases for each of the 150 psalms from the Bible. Investigating the structure of the book of this lay woman one can see that even compared to the contemporary prayer books written by non-laymen, how carefully structured this work is. My intertextual analysis examines how Zsuzsanna Vitéz's prayers apply those texts from the Book of Psalms as pretexts that are connected to the tradition of the laments. The rhetorical analysis interpret those forms which make the staging of the laments possible. Not only contemporary preachers, but Vitéz also employed the psalms traditionally belonging to the lamenting rhetoric, but when writing the paraphrase, she is also frequently orchestrating the praising or thanksgiving psalms according to the lamentations' pattern.

I examine the textual self-representations of Zsuzsanna Vitéz, who performed herself as a helpless widow who calls on God's help. There were a lot of early modern widows who represented themselves 'orphans'. Topology and tropology of their self-representations had a long cultural tradition in early modern women's self-writing (ego-documents: autobiographies, letters, wills etc.). There were a few chapters and verses of the Bible as well as some manuals which had shaping power, and might have had both direct influences on widows (and other woman and man readers), and fashioned them through intermediaries, such as published sermons and prayers for instance.

Cultural pattern of widowhood (orphanage) is very important for concepts of Hungarian communal identity in seventeenth century, because there are a lot of lamentations (prayer books, congregational songs, sermons, letters etc.), which use the

'rhetoric of orphanage' for representing the Hungarian Nation and/or the Church in a tragic historical context. Moreover, the narrative of 'helpless orphanage' for communities were created and prescribed by some early modern texts, which were based upon the Bible. ('How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!' Lamentations 1, 1.)

Three chapters of the dissertation can be considered as preliminaries for the first full modern critical editions of Köleséri's, Técsi's and Vitéz's prayer books. I have already published these editions recently.

**List of publications referring to the subject of the thesis  
(Books, Critical Editions and Essays in Hungarian)**

**I.) Books (Edited)**

- 1.) 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.
- 2.) István Bitskey–Gergely Tamás Fazakas (eds.), *Humanism, Religion, and Identity in Early Modern Hungary* (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó), 2008.
- 3.) Gergely Tamás Fazakas–Gábor Hollósi (eds.), *Studies on the Oeuvre of Professor Imre Bán* (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem, Történelmi és Néprajzi Doktori Iskola), 2006.

**II.) Publications in scientific journals and volumes of studies**

1. The Performance of Prayer in Early Modern English and Hungarian Puritanism. (Iconographical and Philological Questions of Praxis pietatis (1643), in 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, 95–147.
2. A Hand-Written Copy of Praxis pietatis in Debrecen from the Eighteenth-Century (with János Győri L.), in 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, 230–237.
3. Nation and/or Church. The Self-Image of Hungarian Calvinist Society in Early Modern Prayer Books, in István Bitskey–Gergely Tamás Fazakas (eds.), *Humanism, Religion, and Identity in Early Modern Hungary* (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó), 2008, 186–210.
4. Endeavours for sweetening the „bitter blackthorn” (Research History of the Protestant Prayer Literature), in László Szelestei Nagy (ed.), *Conference Volume of the Research Group for History of Devotion* (Piliscsaba: Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetem), 2008 (forthcoming).
5. 'It Pleas'd the Lord [...] to Register Me in the Host of Helpless Orphans' Kata Bethlen's Autobiography and Representations of Widowhood in Early Modern Culture. In: Csilla Gábor–Mihály Balázs (eds.), *Memory and Devotion in Early Modern Hungarian Literature* (Kolozsvár: Scientia), 2007, 46–59.
6. Miklós J. Técsi's *Lilium Humilitatis* (1659) in the Context of its Edition History and History of Prayer, *Könyv és Könyvtár*, 2007, 53–108.
7. English-Speaking Historiography of Hungarian Calvinism, *BUKSZ*, 2006/4, 142–152.
8. 'The Glory is Departed from Hungarian Israel' Lamentations of Sámuel Köleséri (1666), *Könyv és Könyvtár*, 2005, 65–110.
9. Self-Representations of Widows and Orphans in Early Modern Hungary and Europe, in: Zoltán Bertha, Andrea Ekler (eds.) *'Active Literature'. In honorem András Görömbei* (Budapest: Private edition), 2005, 99–114.
10. 'A Polemic of 'Two Professional Arguers' (János Tolnai Dali vs. András Váci P.)', in: István Bitskey–Szabolcs Oláh (eds.) *Religion, Rhetoric and*



- National Identity in Early Modern Hungarian Literature* (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi, 2004), 401–423.
11. Lament and Consolation in János Kemény's Gilead Balsamuma. Genres of the Seventeenth Century Hungarian Prayers, *Könyv és Könyvtár*, 2004, 27–63.
  12. Philological and Rhetorical Analysis of Zsuzsanna Vitéz's Handwritten Prayer Book (1684), *Könyv és Könyvtár*, 2003, 39–63.
  13. A Polemic of 'Two Professional Arguers', 2: A Reinterpretation of Replica by András Váci P. and the Tolnai-Váci Debate, *Studia Litteraria*, 2003, 111–131.
  14. 'Labyrinth of Canons and Traditions', *Hitel*, 2000/12, 93–103.

### **III.) Critical Editions**

- 1.) *Hand-Written Prayer Book of Zsuzsanna Vitéz (1684). A Critical Edition*, ed., notes, introduction Gergely Tamás Fazakas (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó), 2009 (Csokonai – Források, Régi kortársaink), (forthcoming).
- 2.) Miklós J. Técsi's *Lilium Humilitatis* (1659), *Könyv és Könyvtár*, 2007, 109–146, with introduction, see II/6.
- 3.) Interview with Imre Bán by István Bitskey (1988), notes and introduction: Gergely Tamás Fazakas, in Gergely Tamás Fazakas–Gábor Hollósi (eds.), *Studies on the Oeuvre of Professor Imre Bán* (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem, Történelmi és Néprajzi Doktori Iskola), 2006, 72–85.
- 4.) Lamentations of Sámuel Köleséri (1666), *Könyv és Könyvtár*, 2005, 111–124, with introduction, see II/8.
- 5.) János Győri L. (ed), *Sermons of József Nagyari* (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó), 2002 (contributor).

### **IV.) Review Essays:**

- 1.) [Pál Medgyesi: *Praxis Pietatis* (Kolozsvár: Koinónia), 2003], *Egyháztörténeti Szemle*, 2005/1, 116–122.
- 2.) *History of Literature and Culture in Transylvania as a Hungarian Researcher of Cambridge Understands* (Erdélyi merítések by György Gömöri), *Debreceni Disputa*, 2004/6, 46–50.