
Meet the Puritans, the Hungarian Edition: a Problematic Chapter of the Hungarian Reformation



Zsombor Tóth
ILS, RCH
Hungarian Academy of
Sciences



Introduction

- Reformation as a process of renovation and (re)invention of the extant inherited late medieval native tradition
 - Reformation as a process of transfer and translation serving the reception of an assimilated tradition
 - a case study on Hungarian Puritanism
 - *transfers* and *translations* as complex hermeneutical processes of understanding
-

I. Hungarian Puritanism as a chapter of the Calvinist Reformation

- The internal account: the findings of the Hungarian scholarship: Zoványi (1911), Bodonhelyi (1942), Berg (1946), Makkai (1952), Molnár (1994), Ágoston (1997)
 - The contributions of literary history:
Csorba (2008, 2011), Fazakas (2012), Luffy (2015), Péntes (2014), Tóth (2007, 2017)
 - The external account: Murdock (2000), Keul (2009)
-

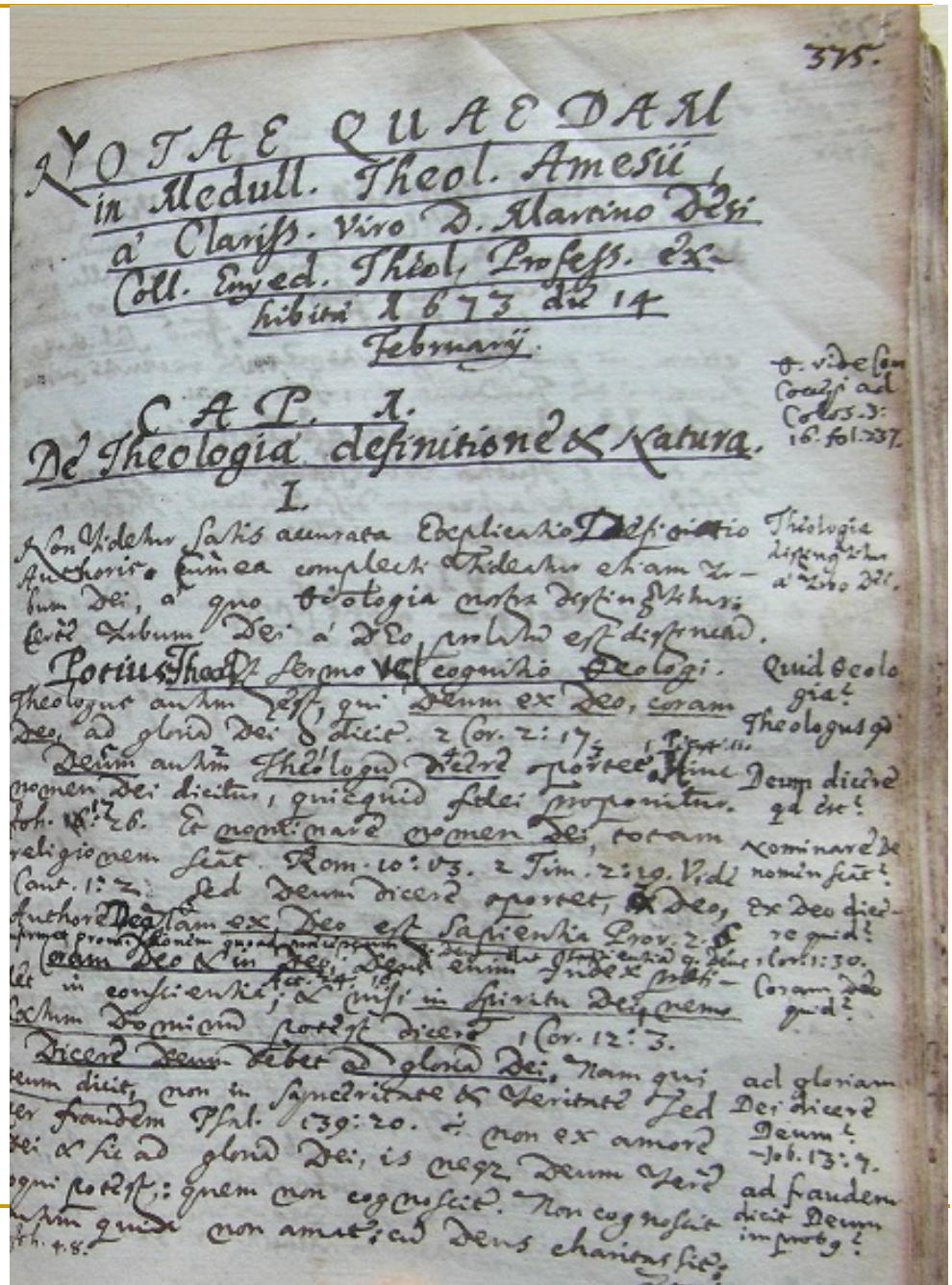
I. 3 Hungarian Puritanism and its general assessment: problematic aspects

- **Historical explanation: macro vs. micro level**
 - Micro 1. Who are the puritans? Synod in Szatmár, June 10-11, 1646: *Nomen puritani nemo sibi amplius ausit usurpare, quia est scandalosum; secundo periculosum, quia innovationes sunt; qui enim hoc fecerit, privabitur.*
 - Micro 2. the domidoctus Puritans (István Matkó Kézdivásárhelyi)
 - Micro 3. lay persons as Puritans: Count Miklós Bethlen (1642--1716), Mihály Cserei (1667--1756)
-

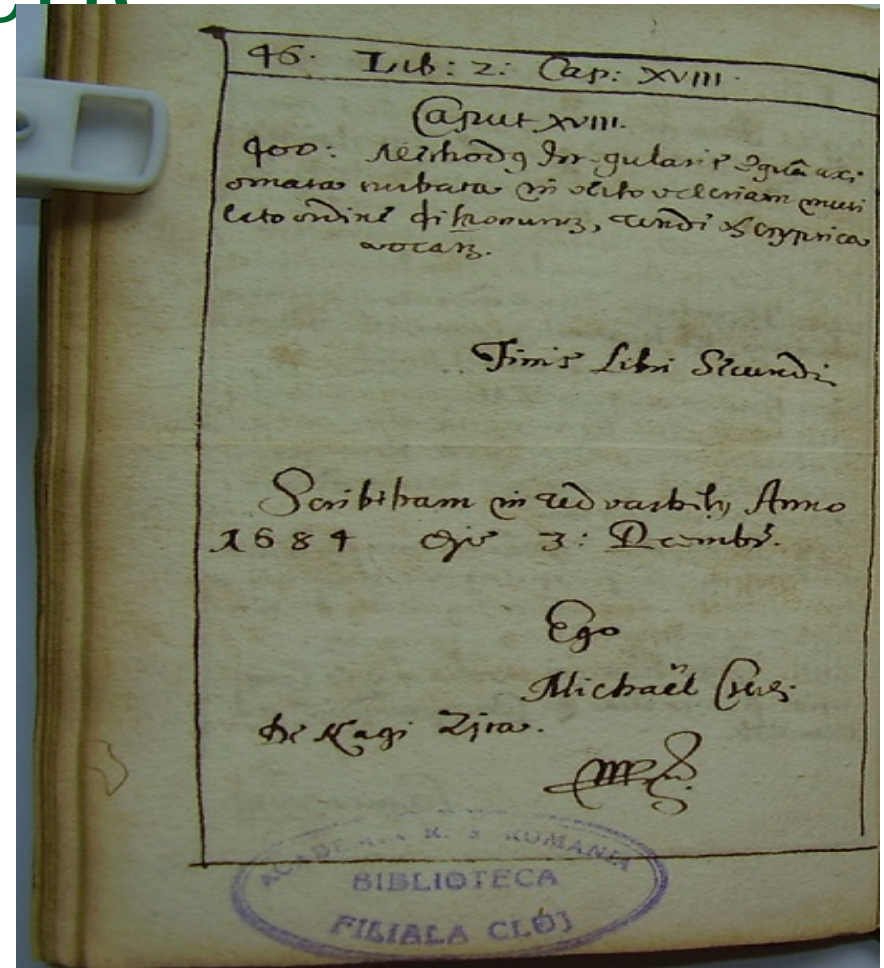
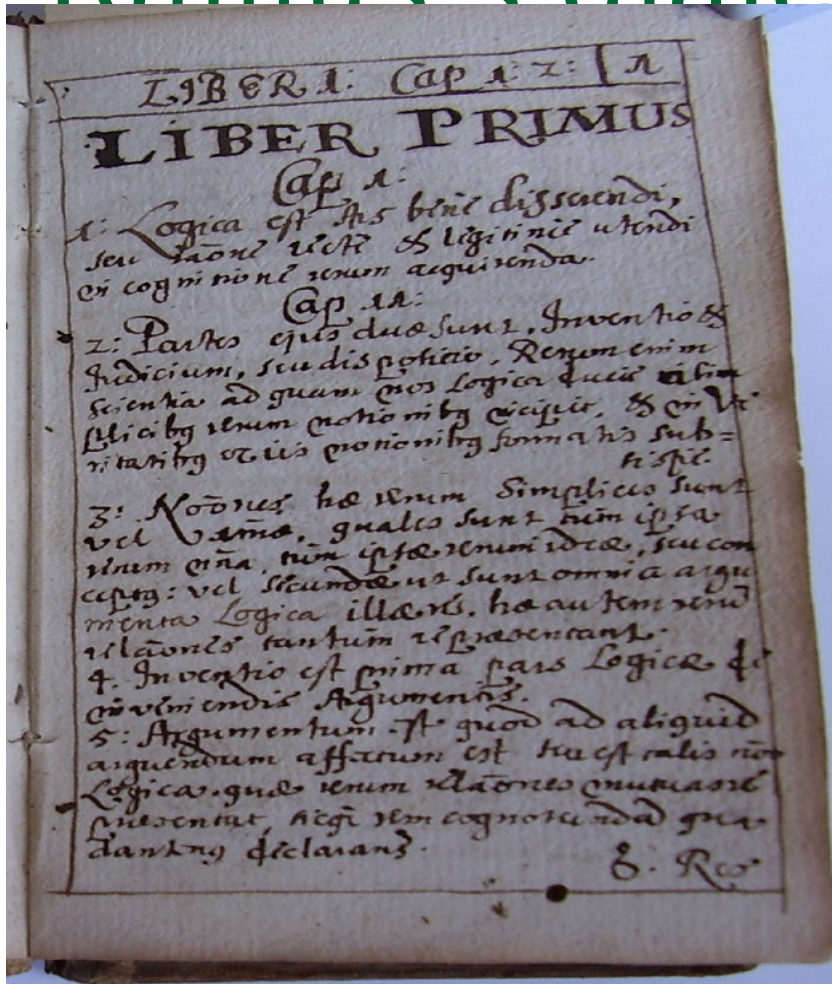
- Transfer as the explanatory model of the reception: similarities and cultural otherness
- Narrativization: the time and timing of the process/processes of transfer(s): 1630s--1660s vs. 17th--18th centuries
- The transfer as *the trope* of the master narrative
- Transfer vs. dissemination of ideas
- Sources: print corpus vs. manuscript corpus
- Unexplored research themes: lay people's religiosity
- Puritanism, religious persecution, and Calvinist martyrology

Márton Dézsi
(1639--1691)

a Calvinist professor
of theology explaining
the Medulla Theologica
on February 14, 1673



M. Cserei's outline of Ramus's dialectic



I. 4. Hungarian Puritanism: the particular features of an emerging native tradition

- The study of religious literacy :

Combination of the history of the book, manuscript studies with a particular focus on lay persons' religious experiences

- Count Miklós Bethlen (1642–1716) as *Homo electus*
- Calvinist education: (Ames+Ramus), peregrinatio academica
- Godly reading and ego-documents revealing a puritan practice of piety

- Life-writing and Amesian theology:

„Election, Adoption, Justification, Sanctification, Glorification”

“...you [God], before the creation of the world, had unconditionally elected me in our Lord Jesus Christ, first for holly, unblemished life and then for eternal life. ... You cleansed me from all my sins with the blood of your beloved Son in baptism, then adopted me and made me one belonging to your house” (Bethlen 1708)

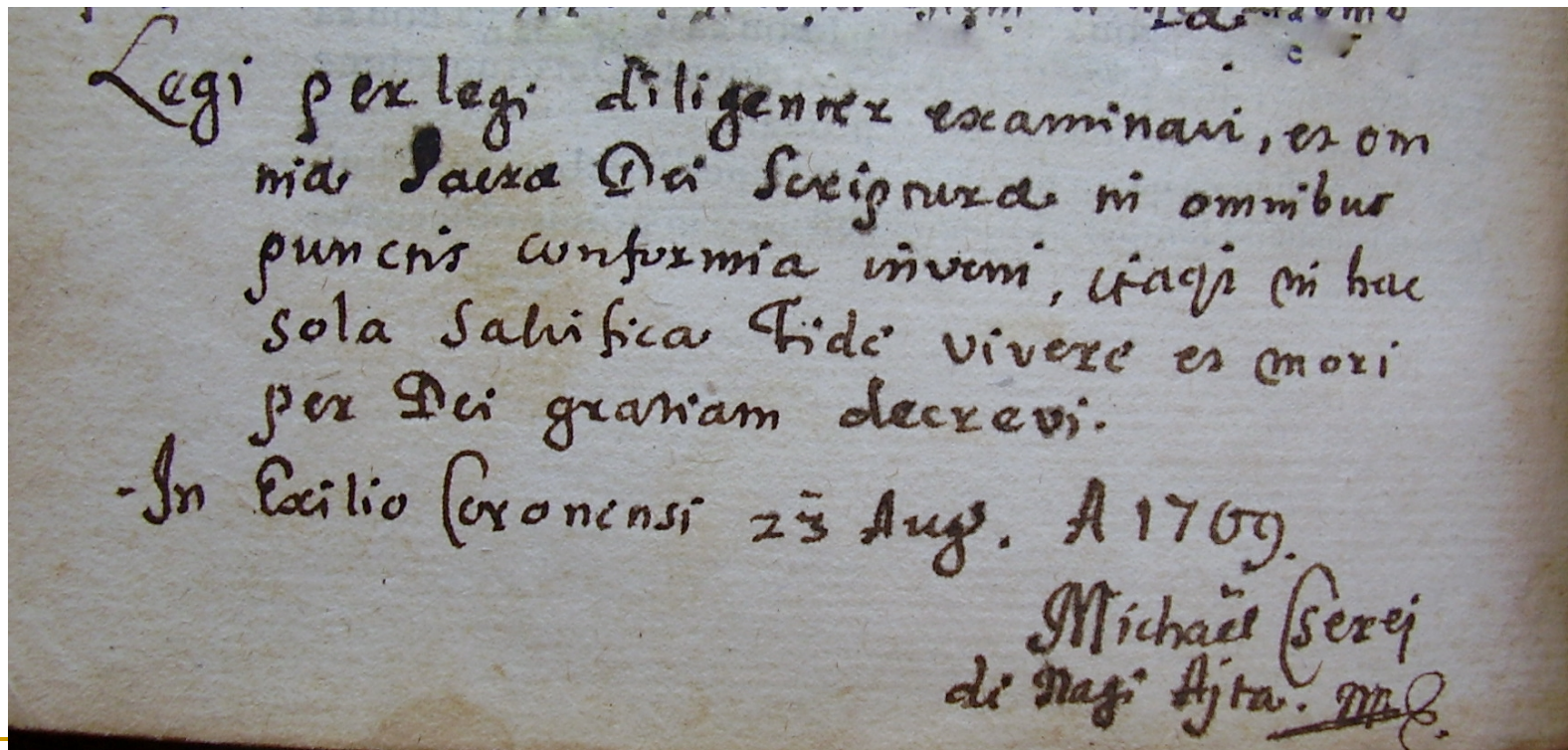
- Calvinist and Puritan martyrology

- Miklós Bethlen’s prayer book as a spiritual autobiography

- Mihály Cserei (1667--1742)
- “Because of the ravaging plague, which broke out in October 1718, we had to flee from Ajta, first to Kal ...we could not avoid the punishing hand of God, for my beloved, pious, and excellent wife possessing all virtues, Ilona Kun on the 6th of September 1719, being pregnant, had contracted the disease, and though he delivered a dead baby, a little girl, on the same day’s afternoon, *after fine preparation* passed away to my eternal sorrow. ”
(Cserei 1733, 10v).
- Medgyesi’s translation of Bayly’s Practice of Piety (1712)

-
- “A: 1715. 25. Xbris. My dear first wife, who used to be a stubborn Unitarian woman, in this day of Christmas, after having been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, was convinced in her conscience by Truth; consequently she converted to the solely true Reformed religion and had her first communion in our Church, in Kal.” (CSEEREI 1733, 10v).
 - Underlined passages from the chapters dealing with the theological concept of Trinity/ Trinitas
-

- Cserei as *Homo reprobus* /religious despair
- Reading Calvin's Institutes in August, 1709
- Institutio Christianae Religionis, Genevae, MDLXIX



Legi per legi diligenter examinari, et omnia *Sacra Dei Scriptura* in omnibus punctis conformia vivere, utique in hac sola *Salutifica Fide* vivere et mori per *Dei* gratiam decrevi.

- In *Exilio Cronensi* 23 Aug. A 1709.

Michael Cserei
de *Nagy Ajta*. *ms.*

alteri subiecti. Præscientiam quæ tribuimus Deo, significamus omnia semper fuisse ac perpetuò manere sub eius oculis: vt eius notitiæ nihil futurum aut præteritum, sed omnia sint præsentia. & sic quidem præsentia, vt non ex ideis tantum imaginetur (qualiter nobis obuersantur ea quorum memoriam mens nostra retinet) sed tanquam ante se posita verè intueatur ac cernat. Atque hæc præscientia ad vniuersum mundi ambitum & ad omnes creaturas extenditur. Prædestinationem vocamus æternum Dei decretum, quo apud se constitutum habuit quid de vnoquoque homine fieri vellet. Non enim pari conditione creantur omnes: sed alius vita æterna, aliis damnatio æterna præordinatur. Itaque prout in alterum finem quisque conditus est, ita vel ad vitam vel ad mortem prædestinatum dicimus. Hanc verò Deus non modò in singulis personis testatus est, sed specimen eius in tota Abrahamæ sobole edidit, vnde palàm fieret, in eius arbitrio esse qualis cuiusque gentis futura sit conditio. Quum diuideret Altissimus gentes, & separaret filios Adam, pars eius fuit populus Israel, funiculus hereditatis eius. Ante omnium oculos est segregatio: in Abrahamæ persona, quasi in arido trunco, populus vnus aliis reiectis peculiariter eligitur: causa verò non apparet, nisi quòd Moses, vt posteris ansam gloriandi præcidat, gratuito tantum Dei amore excellere eos docet. Liberationis enim hanc assignat causam, quòd Deus Patres dilexerit. & elegerit semen eorum post eos. Expressius alio capite,

Præscientia

*Quid Prædesti
natio.*

*Deut. 32
b. 8*

*Deut. 4.
c. 17*

vel miserandi incertitate Deum ipsonare conuenit, & sic autem

lege ipsam permittere vt iudicio se prorsus abdicet? Quare pul-
cherimè quadrant ista Augustini sententia, Quum in primo ho-
mine vniuersa generis massa in condemnationem defluerit, quæ
sunt ex ea vasa in honorem, non propria iustitiæ, sed Dei miseri-
cordiæ vasa esse. Quòd verò alia fiunt in contumeliam, non ini-
quitati, sed iudicio deputandum, &c. Quòd Deus iis quos repro-
bat, debitam pœnam rependit: iis quos vocat, immeritam gratiam
largitur: ab omni accusatione liberari, similitudine creditoris, cu-
ius in potestate est, alteri remittere, ab altero exigere. Potest igitur
Dominus etiam dare gratiam quibus vult, quia misericors
est non omnibus dare, quia iustus iudex. Dando quibusdam quod
non merentur, gratuitam suam ostendere gratiam: non omnibus
dando, quid mereantur omnes declarare. Nam quum Deum scri-
bit Paulus clausisse omnia sub peccato vt omnium misereatur, si-
mil addèdum est nemini esse debitorem: quia nemo illi prior de-
bit, vt mutuuum exigat.

Hoc quoque ad euertendam prædestinationem exagitant,
quòd ipsa stante concidat omnis sollicitudo, & bene agendi stu-
dium. Quis enim audiat, inquiunt, æterno & immutabili Dei de-
creto sibi fixam esse aut vitam aut mortem, quin protinus in men-
tem veniat, nihil interesse quomodo se gerat: quando suo opere
libel aut impediri aut promoueri queat Dei prædestinatio? Ita

Q. ii.

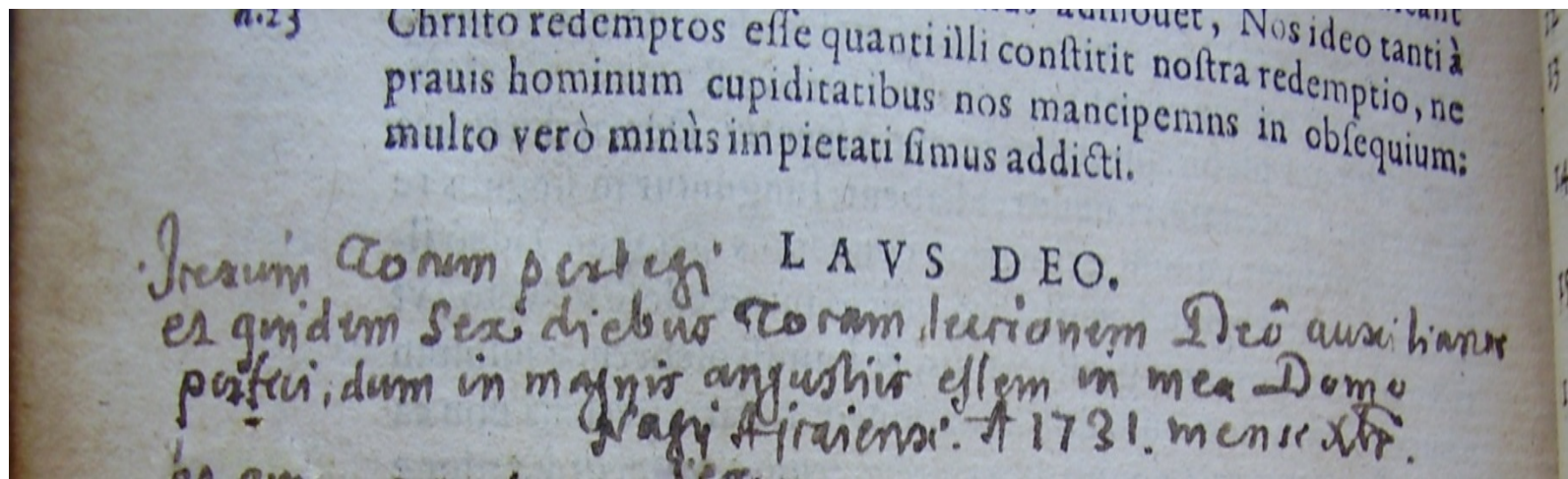
Epi. 106.
De præd.
De gratia
De bono
per seuer.
cap. 12

NB

NB: NB: NB

Rom. II
d. 32

- Reading again Calvin's Institutes in December 1731
- „Iterum totum perlegi et quidem sex diebus totam lectionem Deo auxiliante perfecì, dum in magnis angustiis essem in mea Domo NagyAjtaiensi A. 1731. mense Xbr.”

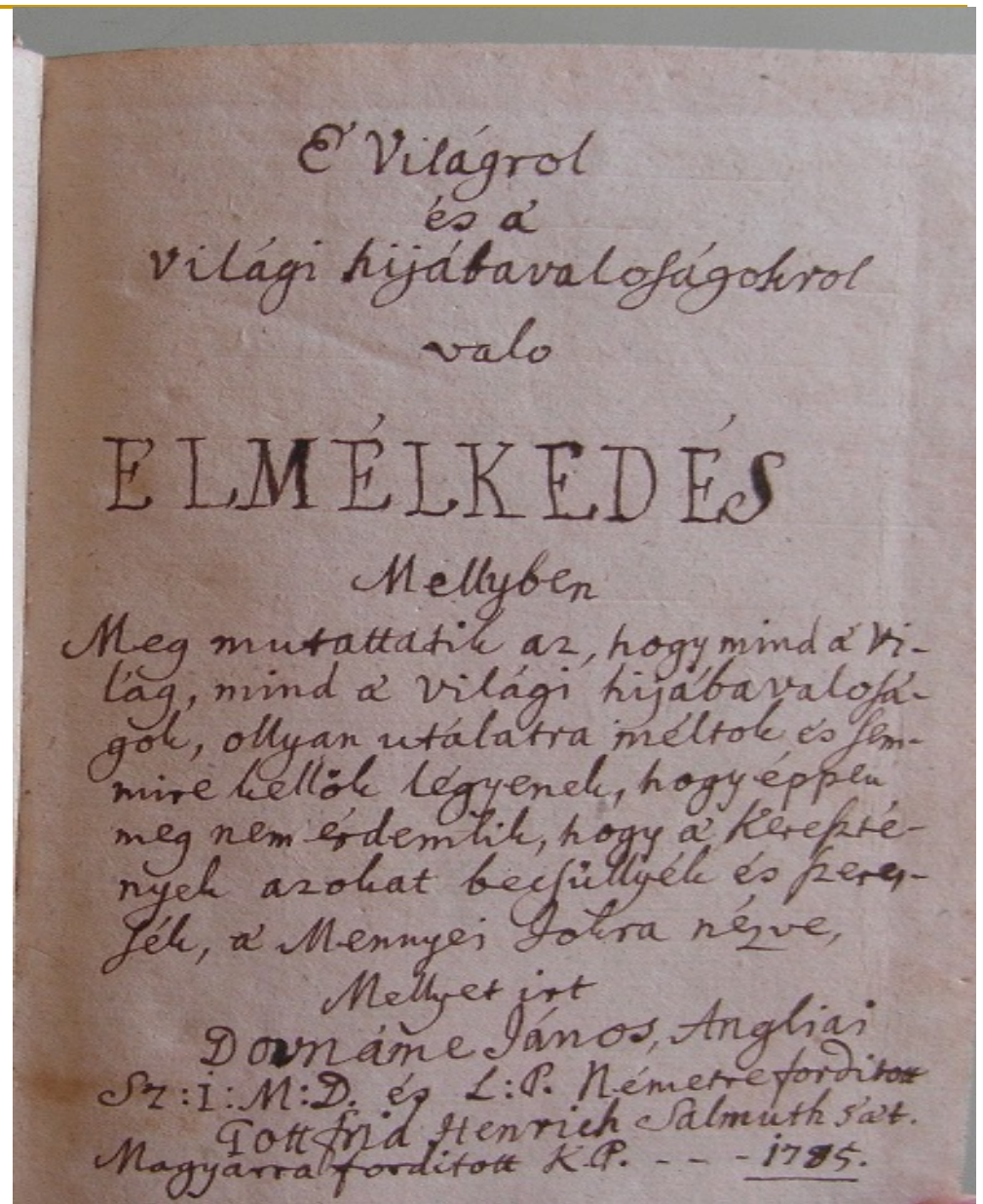


II. Toward a comparative approach

- Further perspectives: English, Dutch, and German pietistic religiosity
- Dutch contexts and texts (W. Teelinck and Nadere Reformatie)
- German piety and book market:

The German translation of an English Puritan text translated to Hungarian: John Downname
→ Salmuth, Gottfried Heinrich → K. P.
(Hungarian Translator)

John Downame:
*The contempt
of the world*
translated from
German to
Hungarian (1785)



III. Applications

- The historiography of the Hungarian reformation displays all these aforementioned problems
 - Problematic transfer(s): native/indigenous tradition vs. assimilated tradition
 - Lay persons' religiosity/religious literacy/microhistories/historical anthropologies of the religious self
 - TIME, timing, chronologies, and the different pace of transfers as processes
 - The benefits of the application of the concept of Long Reformation
-

IV. Conclusion

- Reception, transfer(s) and historical explanation
 - Lewis Bayly, *The Practice of Piety* 1613 → Pál Medgyesi *Praxis Pietatis* (1636) → Mihály Cserei's adding entries to the *Praxis Pietatis* (1715–1719)
 - Long Reformation as methodological novelty
-

The Epitomized
Sacred History
of the Witness
Church from
Creation to the
Times of Our
Century (1731)
István Beregsz

A
TANUBIZONÁS GÖTE.
VÖ
KÖZÖNSEGES
ANYASZENT
EGYHAZNAK
SOMMASZENT
HISTORIAJA.

Világ teremésétől fogva a mi mostani száz-
zunkban, a melly 1731 dik esztendő: fojo-
idönkig, a Szakajbóknak rendi és lajstro-
ma öczing le hozatott és ki iratott álla-
gotjáról.

A melljese
Elsőben az Ultrajeklinomi Eklelesianate
és Akademiának Sz. I. M. Közönséges Doktora
Lampé Adolfus Friderik, Deák nyelven bocsi-
tot ki világ eleiben.

Mostan pedig a Fordétótól a Magyarok
Reformátusokának és kémlény üllözteréseknek
Historiajával, a XII Révnek 38 pontomjában kee-
ségeben való öregbítésére.

BEREGSZASZI István. A. V. R. E. M. L. P. által.
Az 1731 ben Sz. György havának 19 dte napján
vajasson.



A Man for All Seasons: Exile, Suffering and Martyrdom in the Autobiography of Miklós Bethlen, *Hungarian Studies*, 2012, 26:(2), 273-283.

How to Comfort a Dying Family Member? The Practice of an Early Modern Hungarian Calvinist. A Case Study = Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead, eds. Tarald Rasmussen and Jon Øygarden Flæten, *Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen*, 2015, 265--280.

The Importance of Being (In)Tolerant, the Strange Case of Transylvanian Puritanism = Reformed Majorities in Early Modern Europe, eds. Herman Selderhuis, J. Marius J. Lange van Ravenswaay, *Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen*, 2015 (*Academic Studies* 23), 89--108.