

Biblical criticism and congregational singing two Unitarian translations of the Book of Psalms in 16–17th-century Transylvania

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ABSTRACT

Within half a century, there were two Unitarian authors who created rhymed Hungarian translations of the Book of Psalms – Miklós Fazakas Bogáti at the end of the 16th century and János Thordai in 1627. There are still unanswered questions regarding these translations: why did Bogáti's translation not spread among Unitarian congregations? Was Thordai acquainted with Bogáti's translation?

This paper explores the circle of possible answers to these questions from various perspectives. It also examines Bogáti's biography and the subsequent legacy of his Psalterium, taking into account the context of Church history and the history of publishing Unitarian songbooks. In addition, the poetics of the two translations are analysed. Based on these it transpires that there were several circumstances that made the spreading of the Psalterium difficult.

However, Thordai's work should not be viewed solely as depending on Bogáti's translation, since it is not certain that Thordai was trying to fill a gap with his translation. The Transylvanian Unitarians did not necessarily intend to publish a complete Unitarian translation of the Book of Psalms in their songbooks.

KEYWORDS

Miklós Bogáti Fazakas, János Thordai, Book of Psalms, Antitrinitarianism, Church history, history of Transylvanian literature

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INTRODUCTION

Psalm translations had a remarkable influence on the development of national literatures in Europe due to their central role in spreading the Reformation. In Hungary, too, psalm singing had a canonical place in the liturgical song tradition of the Reformed churches. In about fifty years, three Hungarian translations of the Psalms were completed: *Psalterium* by Miklós Bogáti Fazakas was composed in Transylvania in the last decades of the sixteenth century, Albert Szenci Molnár published his own work in Hernborn in 1607, while János Thordai from Kolozsvár (present-day Cluj-Napoca) completed his own translation in 1627. The three psalm translations were created along literary and theological programs with striking differences. Two of the authors (Bogáti and Thordai) were members of the Unitarian Church, a movement that was considered heretic in most European countries at this time, and its followers were persecuted. There were only two exceptions to this: Poland and the Principality of Transylvania. Theological differences are not only apparent in the text of the psalm translations, but have fundamentally determined the later transmission of the psalms, as well.

In this respect, it is particularly interesting that the earliest of the three translations, Miklós Bogáti Fazakas' *Psalterium Davidis*, has to this day not been published in print, even though its poetic features, its use of and attitude to sources and its Bible interpretation make this collection unique. There have been two popular editions of the psalms so far: one that is complete but exists online only (Bogáti, 2009) and a printed one containing a mere 70 psalms (Bogáti, 1979). The work reveals a humanist background and a truly singular theological concept remarkable even by European standards, and it provides a glimpse not only into a peculiar and in many ways forward-looking trend of early Protestantism, but is also an important milestone in sixteenth-century Hungarian poetry. The critical edition of Bogáti's works is currently underway. The first volume, already published, contains Bogáti's other biblical paraphrases and historical songs about ancient subjects (Bogáti, 2018), but the publication of the psalms is also expected to begin shortly. Therefore, it is especially important to take stock of what we know about the composition, transmission and canonisation of the *Psalterium*.

This paper examines the translation of the Psalms of the two Unitarian authors, Bogáti and Thordai, in the context of Transylvanian Church history and Unitarian congregational singing. It seeks answers to the following questions: what prevented the circulation of the *Psalterium* in Unitarian and non-Unitarian circles; was this due purely to theological reasons or were there other considerations, too; and how did the two translations influence each other? The authors of the study firmly question approaches to Thordai's work which interpret them exclusively in relation to previous psalm translations. In our analyses, we introduce new perspectives on the interpretation of the origin of psalm translations: we identify several potential reasons for the creation of the texts, while highlighting the difference between the theological, literary, and philosophical ideas motivating the two Unitarian psalm translations.

HUNGARIAN CONTEXT

By the end of the sixteenth century, numerous Latin and vernacular verse translations of the psalms had been published in Europe. The psalm translations were created on behalf of various humanist and Protestant literary programs. To varying degrees, translators were inspired by the



humanist traditions of metric ode poetry and the theological and liturgical demands of the Reformation, but the majority of authors were simultaneously influenced by the two programs mutually reinforcing each other. Already in sixteenth-century Hungary the influence of Theodore Beza can be clearly identified, who translated the psalms into both French and Latin, and dedicated a printed selection of the latter to the Hungarian bishop and diplomat Andreas Dudith (Csomasz Tóth, 1967, 51). Bálint Balassi, one of the most influential renaissance poets in Hungary, has several psalm paraphrases, and Beza can also be found among his sources, together with Jan Kochanowski, the “Polish Horatius,” and the Scottish humanist George Buchanan, whose metric Latin psalms were immensely popular in sixteenth-century Europe (on the significance of Balassi, see Ács–Louthan, 2015, 404–405).

In vernacular translations, the humanist literary program was intertwined with devotional and liturgical functions, and psalm poetry had been an equally favourable and attractive field for both humanist poetry and congregational singing, which satisfied a more tightly bound liturgical demand (Imre, 2005, 253; Ács–Louthan, 2015, 405–406). Whether it was a translation for Church singing or for private devotion, producing theologically flawless and highly practical songs for contemporary believers was an important concern.

As a consequence of the slow pace of Hungarian confessionalisation, until the end of the sixteenth century there is no sharp distinction between the song material used by the Calvinist, Lutheran and Unitarian congregations. It is precisely the psalm translations that provide the core of the congregational canon used by all the three churches. Nevertheless, no Hungarian verse translation of the entire psalm book appeared in print during the sixteenth century. Although translations of specific psalms were published in congregational hymn books, they were by multiple authors – and Miklós Bogáti Fazakas was not among them.

Albert Szenci Molnár considered two of his works as pioneering endeavours, but they were not. One of these is the complete Hungarian verse translation of the Psalms (Szenci Molnár, 1971, 15). This already shows that Bogáti’s *Psalterium*, to our present knowledge the first complete Hungarian verse translation of the Psalms, could not be easily distributed, even though it was in high demand. The same impression is reinforced by the preface to Imre Újfalvi’s hymn book, published in 1602, “the whole *Psalterium* is not arranged according to Hungarian rhythms, not even by this many singers” (RMNy, 886, ()4r–()4v, available in diplomatic transcription: H. Hubert, 2004, 393–394). Why the entire *Psalterium* was not integrated into the Unitarian practice of Church singing is a question that has not been convincingly clarified to this day. This is closely related to the perplexing question whether anyone was aware that this work had been completed by Bogáti who was of a nonadorantist conviction. Did János Thordai, another member of the Unitarian Church, know about this when in 1627 he completed what was already the third complete Hungarian verse translation of the Psalms?

Critics frequently suggest that Bogáti’s *Psalterium* was “supplanted” by a new translation by the Unitarians because the *Psalterium* became too popular among the Sabbatarians, and its author was even accused of Judaizing. The Unitarian Church, striving for legitimacy, preferred to isolate itself from the dubious text, which meant that a new translation was needed (Klaniczay, 89; RMKT XVII/4, 580; Varga, 1968, 541; H. Hubert, 2004, 177). This conclusion relies on the following premisses: (1) the spread of the *Psalterium* among the Unitarians is hindered by nothing else but the accusation of Sabbatarianism; (2) beyond a certain point the *Psalterium* was only used by the Sabbatarians; (3) had the *Psalterium* not been appropriated by the Sabbatarians, Thordai’s work would have never been completed. Since the very premisses



appear unacceptable to us, in the following section we offer a revaluation of the range of potential claims about the two Unitarian translations of the Psalms based on available records.

It is beyond doubt that Bogáti's entire Psalm translation could not become the backbone of Unitarian Church singing, but Thordai's work could not fulfil this role, either. On the other hand, songs by both authors were quickly added to the printed denominational hymn books, and both authors' Psalm-collections are extant in numerous manuscript copies. Even in the case of Bogáti, transmission was not restricted to Sabbatarian circles, nor do we see a rupture in the congregational use of his hymns in the Church. In the following section we will examine the problem from different perspectives.

Nonadorantism

If we take into account the biography of its author, the difficulties surrounding the transmission of the *Psalterium* may be easily explained without resorting to the concept of the Sabbatarian appropriation of the collection. The records cited below were borrowed from the newly published critical edition of Bogáti's works. Further critical literature is presented in the bibliography of the edition (Bogáti, 2018, 464–470). Bogáti is a follower of the nonadorantist theology movement associated with the names of Ferenc Dávid, Jacobus Palaeologus, and Johannes Sommer, which promoted a radical Christology, and was a significant trend within the Hungarian Unitarian movement from the beginnings, lending a unique colour to it (about the European roots and Hungarian particularity of this theology, see Balázs, 1996). In other dogmatic issues, too, this group was much more radical than the Polish Unitarian Church movement emerging under the influence of Fausto Sozzini, and due to the slowness of confessionalisation it prospered in Transylvania well into the middle of the seventeenth century, when Socinianism became predominant (Balázs, 2016b, 231; Szczucki, 1982). Nonetheless, fearing for their fragile legitimacy, and sometimes due to political coercion, the Transylvanian Unitarian Church has repeatedly been forced to act against more extreme theological innovations. In 1579, Demeter Hunyadi became the Unitarian Bishop, and repressive measures against the more radical branch of the Unitarian Church were introduced, so like many of his fellows, Bogáti was also forced to leave Kolozsvár, while Ferenc Dávid was imprisoned and soon died. Between 1582 and 1583 Bogáti enjoyed the hospitality of the Unitarian Church in Pécs. According to long-standing critical opinion, this is where the translation of the Psalms was made (Dán, 1973, 157). This view stems from an article by Ferenc Kanyaró, even though his arguments would only prove that certain psalms could have been made in Pécs (Kanyaró, 1902). There are no serious arguments suggesting that the entire Book of Psalms was accomplished in Pécs, so nothing prevents us from assuming that Bogáti worked on it until the end of his life, a point which will be reinforced by specific arguments below (Bogáti, 2018, 452). After his sojourn in Pécs, he lived in Torda (present-day Turda), exactly when the nonadorantist Máté Toroczkai – a Unitarian bishop from 1601 – was copying the works of Jacobus Palaeologus (Balázs, 2016c, 208). From 1585 onwards he was court priest to Farkas Kornis at Homoródszentpál (present-day Sânpaul). According to Róbert Dán, he died in 1592, while Géza Szentmártoni Szabó puts the date of his death to the first years of the seventeenth century – at any rate there are no surviving records about him after 1592 (Dán, 1973, 193; Szabó, 1982, 230).

It is clear from these elements of the biography that the theologian and poet, like many of his fellows, was marginalized, and even if he did not die in 1592, he certainly did not hold any important ecclesiastical positions after this date. The future fate of his works sheds ample light



on how his activities of theological relevance were prevented from appearing in public. While he successfully published his historical songs dealing with classical subjects, his two biblical histories, the *Song of Songs* and *The Paraphrase of the Book of Job*, which conformed to all the formal conventions of the genre, could not be published. All his tracts and treatises have also been lost, except for his *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, which was preserved in manuscript. It is undoubtedly more spectacular to accuse Bogáti of “heretic” Sabbatarian inclinations, however, his radical, uncompromising nonadorantism is sufficient reason in itself for his forced silence. Bogáti’s views alone could explain why his psalms were not canonised by the Church, but based on his biography, we cannot even be sure that news of the *Psalterium* ever passed beyond the narrow circle of his fellows.

TEXTUAL TRADITION

Twelve psalms by Bogáti were published in the Unitarian hymn book printed around 1616 (RMNy 983 — for the sake of clarity, a table offering an overview of the presence of the psalms by Bogáti and Thordai in the Unitarian hymn tradition is appended to the study). However, there are known appearances of Bogáti’s psalms in Unitarian sources before this date. In the manuscript *gradual* compiled for Máté Toroczkai in 1601 (*Gradual of Máté Toroczkai*, Stoll, 2005, no. 1005), four psalms were included, and since they are at the end of the extant manuscript, “they might have been followed by further Bogáti psalms” (RMKT XVII/4, 531). In 1602, Psalm 8 appeared in the Calvinist Church hymn book edited by Imre Újfalvi (RMNy 886, C4r–C4v). Balázs Pap demonstrated that one of the sources of this volume could have been the lost sixteenth-century printed Unitarian hymn book (RMNy 746; Pap, 2017). The same holds true for the *Codex Bölöni* (Stoll, 2005, no. 30). The comparison of its texts with the Unitarian publications and the 1602 hymn book also confirm that Bogáti’s psalms currently known from printed versions were already published in the sixteenth century, and were handed down from these early sources (Etlinger, 2017, 286; Etlinger, 2018, 43–47). If we also add that György Enyedi, who was a Unitarian bishop between 1592 and 1597 with important connections to the followers of nonadorantist theology, is one of the potential compilers of the lost hymn book, we can practically identify a point of incursion into the printed tradition, without the necessity of assuming a wider distribution of the *Psalterium* itself. On the other hand, Balázs Pap also raises the possibility that in one of his sermons, Enyedi would engage in a debate with Psalm 2 of Bogáti, but he also admits that there is no textual evidence for this (Pap, 2016, 218). Borbála Lovas discovers important similarities between Bogáti’s and Enyedi’s interpretation in her paper (Lovas, 2021, 123–124), (Table 1).

Although manuscripts of the *Psalterium* reveal the existence of a unified authorial concept and its roughly complete realisation, since the complete translation was not printed in the author’s life, it is possible that no final edition was ever prepared. There are several signs of this. In the case of certain psalms, more than one authorial version survived and they spread independently of each other. Psalm 55 is a later recast, while Psalm 137 has been preserved in two distinctly different paraphrases, but minor authorial revisions can be detected in other psalms, as well. “If the Book of Psalms was created in a process of continuous editing, it is possible that it was not only transmitted in a unified form, but individual psalms might have been independently printed” (Etlinger, 2017, 285). The impression that the psalms admitted into



Table 1. Psalms translated by Bogáti (B) and Thordai (T) in printed and manuscript Unitarian hymn books. Printed sources are referred by [RMNy](#) or [RMK](#) numbers (see the References), manuscripts are referred to by their numbers in Stoll's bibliography ([Stoll, 2005](#))

Stoll 2005, no. 1005. (1601.)	B33. B85. B90. B95.
RMNy 983. (c. 1616.)	"...Psalms follow": B8. B29. B33. B44. B46. B72. B74. B85. B90. B92. B95. B139.
Stoll 2005, no. 30.	"G.K." from 1616: B8. B29. "J.B.Z." from 1620: B16.
Stoll, 2005 , no. 143. (after 1616.)	"Sequuntur Psalmi secundum alphabetum": B33. B29. B85. B8. B104. B92.
RMNy 1290. (Kolozsvár, 1623.)	B29.
RMNy 1541. (Kolozsvár, 1632.)	"...Psalms and hymns for different occasions follow, according to the order of the alphabet": B33. B29. B85. B90. B139. B46. B104. B8. B92. B74. B44. B72.
	"Sequuntur cantiones breviores [...] suntque ordine Alphabetico congestae": T128. T125. Insertion (disregarding the alphabetical order): T133. T18. T69. T68. T146.
RMK I 1503. (Kolozsvár, 1697.)	"...Psalms and hymns for different occasions follow, according to the order of the alphabet": B33. B29. B85. B90. B104. B8. B92. B44. T33. T101. T103. T69. "Supplement. T. I.": T139. T143.
	"Sequuntur cantiones breviores [...] suntque ordine Alphabetico digestae": T128. T112. T24. T146. T148. T150. T122. T68. T75. T127. T134. T26. T53. T100. T110. T123. T121. T93. T15. T111. T125. T43. T149. Out of alphabetical order: T133.
RMK I 1558. (Kolozsvár, 1700.)	"Beautiful Divine Praises and Thanksgivings" (Alphabetical order): B29. Alphabetical order restarting: B4. B151. B15. B1. B104. B62. B23. T133. B146. T125. T47.

the congregational tradition are not the result of a conscious choice is supported by the strong editorial intervention in the case of several individual items, changes which made the songs conform to the customs of the Unitarian song tradition. Had the editor worked with the full *Psalterium* in mind, he could have selected pieces which require no further editing. We will come back to this problem later.

The unfinished nature of the manuscript of the *Psalterium* provides another explanation to the difficult transmission of the psalms. It is possible that the reception of the *Psalterium* was not only hindered by questions of belief, but the audience might not have known the work in its entirety, maybe because it had not yet been completed. It is certain, though, that the translation of the psalms was already present at Szentersébet (present-day Eliseni) in December 1607 in



some form, and there it was copied by an unknown copyist along with the other biblical paraphrases.

It should also be mentioned that at that time Szentersébet was already owned by Simon Péchi, later Chancellor of Transylvania. According to Zsigmond Thúry, Simon Péchi brought Bogáti's manuscripts from Homoródszentpál, while Róbert Dán had already allowed him to it in Kolozsvár (Thúry, 1912, 6–7; Dán, 1987, 138). Furthermore, the extent to which Simon Péchi might have been described as a Sabbatarian at that time is also disputed (Balázs, 2016c, 228).

Sabbatarians

We currently have eight manuscripts that contain or might have contained the entire *Psalterium*: the *Bogáthi Codex of Szentersébet, 1607–1608* (Stoll, 2005, no. 22); *Simon Péchi's Hymn Book*, c. 1610 (Stoll, 2005, no. 33); *Codex Jancsó*, c. 1615 (Stoll, 2005, no. 31); the *Codex of János Mátéfi, 1634* (Stoll, 2005, no. 39); the *Psalms Book of Abásfalva, 1671* (Stoll, 2005, no. 53); *Codex János Kövendi, 1679* (Stoll, 2005, no. 105); the *Codex of Péter Magyari, 1704* (Stoll, 2005, no. 167); and two fragments, presumably from the same codex: *Fragment of the Bogáthi Psalterium* (Stoll, 2005, no. 69) and *Fragments of the Bogáthi Psalms* (Stoll, 2005, no. 1030). Remarkably, all of them can be connected to a narrow geographical space, the centre of which is Kissolymos (present-day Şoimuşu Mic) — or Szentersébet, only six kilometres away. They can also be closely related to each other based on their textual variants (Szatmári, 2018, 55). The only exception to this geographical concentration is the *Codex János Kövendi*, which was copied in 1679 by György Felvinczi in Kolozsvár, commissioned by Unitarian citizen János Kövendi, but the source of this is either *Simon Péchi's Hymn Book*, or both stem from the same source (Szatmári, 2015, 66–69). The ornamented codex contains Thordai's Psalm Book as well, but in 1676 György Felvinczi also copies Szenci Molnár's *Psalterium* for János Kövendi (*Codex Felvinczi*, Stoll, 2005, no. 101). The remaining seven manuscripts are conventionally regarded as a proof of the text's transmission among the Sabbatarians.

Nevertheless, several copies feature a text containing hardly any Sabbatarian amendments, providing highly accurate copies instead, which, even where they differ, reveal no Sabbatarian leanings. This is most prominent in *Simon Péchi's Hymn Book* and the copy at Szentersébet, which was conceived as an anthology of Bogáti's works. The two sources share further similarities in that their texts approach Bogáti in a cultic fashion, and their paratexts present the translator of the Psalms as an authority (Etlinger and Szatmári, 2016, 107–108). On the other hand, the *Psalms Book of Abásfalva* bears strong marks of Unitarian use, and in the case of those psalms which also appeared in print, almost always contains the variants of the printed tradition. In some cases, this may be simply caused by the influence of everyday Church use on the memory of the copyist, but in other cases the congregational tradition had presumably already adapted a different authorial version, and this is what appears in the *Psalms Book of Abásfalva*, a scenario supported by examples in the above-cited study (Etlinger, 2017, 284–286).

Recent research suggests that in the first third of the seventeenth century different anti-trinitarian trends and the corresponding congregations had not yet separated sharply: “there was clearly no solid and clear boundary (especially in the first period) between nonadorantists and Sabbatarians” (Keserű, 2007, 431–432). On the other hand, the lands of Sabbatarian noblemen like Simon Péchi were able to provide some form of protection for Unitarian persons who happened to face difficulties (Balázs, 2016c, 228; Molnár, 2015, 24). Dávid Molnár presumes that



some scribes of the copyist workshop in Kissolymos were “import copyists”: “Sabbatarian secular scribes not living from the craft of writing, [...] who fulfilled a certain, not necessarily prestigious (craftsman- or priest-like) position within the Unitarian Church” (Molnár, 2017, 52).

We would not like to represent the well-defined area where copies of the *Psalterium* were known as a closed Sabbatarian community that appropriated the Psalms of Bogáti. The above points suggest a different picture. This environment was suitable for the adaptation of the *Psalterium* and played a pivotal role in preserving this corpus. However, it also provided a passage to the Unitarian centre, which is confirmed by the direction of the texts’ transmission. Should the *Psalterium* not have found its way into this context, its text might not have survived persecution, or might not even have found a receptive audience (Molnár, 2015, 22, 54). This is also warranted by the fact that the Accord of Dés’s list of confiscated books begins with the *Bogáti Codex of Szentterzsébet*, followed by several radical nonadorantist works (Dán, 1987, 304). The *Psalterium* was certainly known in Kolozsvár at the end of the seventeenth century. This is not only testified by the preparation of the *Codex János Kövendi*, but also by the fact that the Unitarian prayer and hymn book printed in 1700 (*A Portable Booklet of Prayers and Songs*, RMK I 1558) includes seven psalms which had never been printed before. And their source is certainly not the *Codex János Kövendi*, since one of the new pieces is Psalm 151, which had not been copied into the *Codex János Kövendi*.

HISTORY

So far we have argued in favor of the idea that the *Psalterium* was not necessarily known in the Unitarian centre, and we discussed the difficulties surrounding the transmission of the Psalm manuscript(s). In the following section we seek arguments suggesting that the unique poetic features of the text represented another obstacle to its congregational reception. Even if *Psalterium* had been known and accepted, it would not have been able to become a part of congregational singing, as evidenced by the revisions to the psalms published in print.

Psalterium is translated according to “the meaning of histories over time”, as it becomes clear from the cover of Simon Péchi’s *Hymn Book* (the cover page is published: Etlinger and Szatmári, 2016, 108). Bogáti’s biblical approach relied primarily on Sebastian Castellio and Jacobus Palaeologus (Dán, 1977; Balázs, 2016a, 289–290). With regard to the psalms, this means that they are historical as opposed to prophetic texts, which can only be interpreted through a strenuous exploration of their literal meaning (*sensus literalis*) and their historical context (*sensus historicus*). The application of the text – even to Jesus as a messiah – can only be external, it is not encoded in the historical corpus (Ács, 2019; Pap, 2016, 217–218). Bogáti operates a “translation-poetical concept, the essence of which is the reproduction of biblical texts true to their sources and historical context, without immanently delivering the interpretations and commentaries attached to them” (Etlinger and Szatmári, 2016, 106). Translation and interpretation, or otherwise: a sharp distinction between text and commentary is clearly reflected in the *Song of Songs* and the *Paraphrase of the Book of Job*.

The historical translation of the Psalms gave rise to its own peculiar rhetorical structures, which may have been unusual compared to the common practice of congregational songs (Szilasi, 2008, 149–161). Most of Bogáti’s psalm renderings feature an epic framework, and the pronounced and constant mention of the Jewish people, as well as the various Old Testament rites pose a challenge to the actualisation and the application of the text. This anomaly can be



clearly identified in the group of Bogáti psalms which appeared in print. Bogáti's literal approach caused several issues for congregational singing, where the consistency of didactics and the applicability of songs was a more important principle than textual fidelity.

In the following, the supposedly original versions are quoted from the *Simon Péchi's Hymn Book*, while the printed editions are quoted from RMNy 983. The texts will be quoted in modernised English translation here, but in footnotes we include a transcription of the Hungarian original that is modernised but reflects the pronunciation, and the capitalisation of the sources. The printed hymn books omit four verses from Psalm 72 due to excessive emphasis on the elect state of the Jewish people. We quote verses 7-9 as featured in the unabridged psalm:

The land of plenty shall be the Jewish Land,
whose border extends further and forth,
it reaches two seas, so far does it go,
south, north will be under his Lordship.
His enemies will also surrender to him,
kiss the dusty ground in front of him,
many pagan peoples bow their heads to him,
with a lot of gifts and taxes they come.
He will be fortunate, his fame will reach far away,
Lords of many countries, princes of many islands,
Greek and Arab people will visit him,
and out of fear all will revere him with gifts.

Five verses are omitted from Psalm 33. The 14th and 15th verses are removed due to a problem similar to the one in Psalm 72. We quote the 14th verse:

Thus are Jewish people dear and prosperous,
since their God is such a heavenly majesty,
their guardian father is such a merciful Deity,
whose favor is like the dearest inheritance.

Psalm 72 is not only truncated, but the remaining text has also undergone thorough revisions. The first two lines read as follows in *Simon Péchi's Hymn Book*:

Thou hast given a new Lord to the holy people,
give thy holy spirit to this new prince...

Opposed to this, Unitarian hymn books include a version that can be easily actualised, even on multiple occasions:

Lord God, thou hast given a new Lord to this land,
Give a Holy Spirit to the new Prince...

There are some changes in Psalm 46, as well. The fourth line of the seventh verse originally read: "this guards the offspring of Jacob", but in print this was changed to "this guards our wretched land". The third line of the 11th stanza reads "I protect the Jewish people", in print: "I protect the Christian people".

Stakes are high with these changes, because the application of the passages easily gives way to the perception that the Jews can receive redemption in a unique way that is different from those



available to other people. This is in line with the short summary of salvation history (a paraphrase of Palaeologus) that Bogáti offers in the preface to the *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. “Because until this year I have worked on the history of Jesus Christ, which is called a book of the new covenant, in which the Jews and the many believing Gentiles proved for the benefit of the remnant of faithful Jews that Jesus is a messiah, in opposition to the Jews who despised, murdered and denied Jesus. So, the Jew should not expect anything other than what it was meant for, and the pagan should also stay put with the sacrament found with faith” (Bogáti, 1589, 6r–6v. Diplomatic transcript: Dán, 1973, 230. — cf. Balázs, 2016a, 286).

Because of the lengthy description of the instrumental music played in praise of God, the careful editor cannot hand down the third and fourth verses of Psalm 33 and the second verse of Psalm 92 to the singing congregation. Like the Calvinists, Unitarians also removed the playing of musical instruments from worship as a papist invention. The *Brief Explication* by Ferenc Dávid repeats the usual phrases related to this question (Dávid, 1910, 7–8), but György Enyedi’s sermon on the *Letter to the Colossians* 3,16 contains more exciting details: “Their third delusion in singing [is] blowing whistles and organs in the temple. For although it is often read in the Psalms that God must be praised with whistles, drums, violins, and trumpets, but it was different, because in addition to such instruments of music there were praises which everyone understood and everyone could sing together. First, this was set in the Old Law, and in the New Testament we have no such commandment as the one about the singing with the mouth. [...] Let us therefore be satisfied with the mouth, and with the praises spoken in words, and so we shall glorify our God” (Enyedi, 2017, 177).

This (no less typical) argument also touches upon the validity of the Old and the New Testament, in which Bogáti’s position must have deviated from the opinions of the more moderate Enyedi (Dán, 1973, 190). In any case, it would be strange if, after the cited sermon of Enyedi, the congregation would merrily sing a version of Bogáti’s Psalm 33 featuring the third and fourth verses as well:

Together with me, let us the grant respect,
for this great Lord let all your Music chant,
where are your lutes, where are your Zithers,
your horns, Organs, wheel fiddle, drums and whistles?
With these, praise the Lord,
strike unusual songs, new tunes,
strum the name of the Lord with something beautiful,
now all must rejoice, so you all should chant!

The second stanza of Psalm 92 seems to launch a direct attack against the text of Enyedi:

Not only with the tongue, not only with numbers,
I quote your name from the heart with my song,
but with all the noise of comfort,
with a ten-string violin,
with a lute, a whistle, an organ,
a horn, a jaw-harp, a trumpet.

A comparison of these lines with the parallel places in Thordai’s psalms is quite revealing. This is the second verse of his version of Psalm 33, based on the critical edition:

Every heart, mouth, lip with one soul,
Praise God with fear,



Because what he pledged with an oath,
He delivered his promise and faithfully provided it.

Musical instruments are not mentioned at all in Thordai's version of Psalm 99. As a control text, let us quote the relevant parts from the Vizsoly Bible, the first Bible to be printed in the Hungarian language (RMNy 652). Psalm 33,2:

Praise the Lord with the violin,
sing to him with the lute and the ten-string wheel fiddle.

Psalm 92,2-3:

To proclaim thy mercy every day,
and your truth every night.
With a ten-string violin,
with a lute, a song, a violin.

Needless to say, Thordai makes no mention of instruments in the psalms of praise closing the Psalterium, while Bogáti and the Vizsoly Bible list 3 specific instrument names each in Psalm 149 and 7 each in Psalm 150. The editors clearly sacrifice textual accuracy on the altar of consistency. This is simply how the genre of congregational singing works, and Thordai respects these conventions. One wonders whether György Felvinczi's eludological poem at the beginning of *Codex János Kövendi* (RMKT XVII/13, no. 8) might refer to this feature of Bogáti highlighted in the above passages — with some mockery:

One Miklós Bogáti,
who they sing now
With throat and a loud voice...

As an additional consequence of the omission of full verses, some of the argumentative acrostics, a unique feature of Bogáti's poems, lose their meaning. As seen, even the congregational usage of the psalms of Bogáti is only possible after heavy editorial intervention which neutralises their most prominent poetic and theological features (Etlinger and Szatmári, 2016, 107).

Bogáti's *Psalterium* is an attempt to create a new language for congregational use and psalm singing that differs from the common rhetoric and the historical and biblical concepts of Protestant denominations. The experiment could have initiated a tradition delivering texts which even the most radical of antitrinitarian congregations could have used and experienced as genuine. Bogáti's historical *Psalterium* laid the foundations for the creation of the Sabbatarians' increasingly independent new literature. However, the tradition of Unitarian Church singing was not sufficiently open to receive such a new initiative. Even where it was known, the *Psalterium* proved almost completely useless in Church singing for a number of reasons and only a handful of these were theological in nature. Only one fact is certain: in the 1620s, no canonized verse translation of the Psalms was circulating in the Unitarian Church, and János Thordai also had to face this fact. This situation alone can explain the preparation of yet another psalm book in verse.

János Thordai's translation

According to the suggestion quoted at the beginning of this study, János Thordai had to be familiar with Bogáti's *Psalterium*. This is mainly supported by the argument that in several cases



Thordai uses Bogáti's psalms to signal the tune. In Andrea Hevesi's reckoning, twelve Thordai psalms rely on Bogáti for their tune (Hevesi, 2018, 107–108). However, this refers to a total of no more than six Bogáti tunes, using them multiple times. The psalms in question are the following: 8, 30, 85, 92, 104, 125. It is striking, however, that five of these also appear in printed congregational hymn books. Bogáti's Psalm 104 is known from 1632, while the manuscript of Thordai's Psalm 81, which refers to it, was preserved later, so its tune may come from the copyist (on the textual background of the Thordai Psalms, see the annotations of the critical edition: *RMKT XVII/4*, 572–599). Thus, based on Thordai's tune references all we can claim with utter certainty is that he knew those psalms by Bogáti which were published in print. One exception is Psalm 125 which, to our present knowledge, has not been printed, but Thordai's familiarity with it may be explained by the independent transmission of certain pieces of the *Psalterium*. In Thordai's case we cannot infer familiarity with the entire Bogáti Psalm book based on a single tune reference, neither can we exclude it, since Thordai might also have belonged to the non-adorantist movement (Molnár, 2015, 34).

The Thordai Psalms reveal scarcely any overlaps with Bogáti on a textual level, or in any case, the quantity of such – often unintended – overlaps is not more than what is warranted by two authors translating the same work. Although we find convincing similarities in Psalm 8 as translated by Thordai and Bogáti, this is the most widespread translation by Bogáti in print, and this further strengthens the suggestion that Thordai was mostly familiar with those Bogáti psalms which were adopted by the Church singing tradition. Previous research could not indicate more significant matches, and a familiarity with *Psalterium* is mostly suggested by external evidence (Varga, 1968, 542 — more recent comparisons tend to reinforce this: Farcádi, 2007). It seems, therefore, that the Thordai corpus is difficult to trace from the direction of Bogáti. Comparing them, however, it is striking that unlike Bogáti, Thordai's translations are tendentially aligned with the Church singing tradition, and they are in dialogue with that tradition in terms of both text and tune. However, this tendency could have existed without the knowledge of Bogáti's entire Psalm book, simply driven by a congregational demand.

THORDAI AS EDITOR

Earlier research unanimously accepts that Thordai edited the congregational hymn book of 1632 (RMNy 1541). This idea comes from Ferenc Kanyaró's study in which, based on the section appended to the hymn book containing mostly psalms by Thordai, he suggests that Thordai might have been the editor of the book (Kanyaró, 1908, 271). However, we should not overlook the fact that no more than two of Thordai's psalms ever became an organic part of the collection, and they only appear at the end of the section devoted to miscellaneous songs. The remaining five psalms are only found in the above mentioned attachment, printed on coarser paper, and three of them are not featured in the index of songs, either (*RMKT XVII/4*, 536–537).

If Thordai was indeed the editor of the hymn book, why do we see editorial inconsistency or ignorance precisely in connection with his own texts? In our view, even if Thordai was involved in the editorial process, he could only have contributed to the composition of this supplement, which is remarkably at odds with the overall concept of the hymn book. It might be more plausible to assume that the congregational hymn book of 1632 was curated by an editor who was familiar with Thordai's Psalm translations. Since Thordai completed the translation in



Kolozsvár in 1627, it is quite possible that he sought to publish it, and that the editors had the opportunity to become acquainted with his psalms.

Andrea Hevesi's argument in favor of Thordai's editorial role is that his psalms appear as tune references in seventeen cases within the volume. According to her, these references suggest that the congregation in Kolozsvár knew and used the psalms (Hevesi, 2018, 105–106). In support of this claim, we should be able to identify the background of these tune references, to see that the congregation already knew and sang the psalms of Thordai, but fourteen of them had not been published either in the hymn book or in any other printed collection before. Or we could rephrase the question: is it a requirement for tune references that they be widely known? Functionally, of course, it is an important condition, but in the use of tune references in seventeenth-century Unitarian hymn books a peculiar trend or concept seems to emerge which operates a different system of references.

The Unitarian hymn book published around 1616 contains only a handful of tune references. Out of the 118 songs, 92 bear no tune references at all, even though the majority of them appear in previous Protestant hymn books with a tune. It is also remarkable that 15 out of the 26 tune notations refer to songs that can be regarded as part of the Unitarian textual tradition. By 1632, these proportions changed significantly within the same corpus of songs, resulting in an almost complete U-turn: 92 songs now have a tune reference, and the notation of the tune is missing in a mere 19 cases. Seven songs disappear which never had a tune before, or if they had, they referred to Polish tunes. And from the Unitarian textual tradition, 56 songs are now marked with tunes.

Unitarian editing practices thus seem to reveal a trend in that they do not align with the Protestant hymn tradition in their tune references, similarly to the way in which they create their very own textual variants from a part of the sixteenth-century congregational song material, due to dogmatic anomalies. The 1616 hymn book reveals a state where texts are stripped of their tunes, while the 1632 version supports the received material with more consistent tune references (for more details on the consistent editorial principles of the Unitarian hymn books, see: Etlinger, 2017, 280–284). As a counterargument we might think that in 1616 the tune references were no longer needed because the congregation was already familiar with the usual tunes, but the consistent tune references of the 1632 hymn book do not support this. Furthermore, there are several songs that contain a tune reference in the 1616 hymn book but are then changed by the editor of the 1632 version, effectively replacing the tune accompanying the text.

Even if we ignore the peculiarities of the Unitarian use of tunes, we still find a number of examples where the reference points to a tune that was not generally known or was not necessary meaningful to the users. Therefore, we cannot assume an ideal congregation where it is generally understood what the tune reference “Nota: Pol.” or “Melod. Saxonica” stands for. It is more realistic to claim that the congregation learnt the tunes of songs during the liturgy, as their tunes could change from edition to edition. The Unitarian approach to references in hymn books could also provide an explanation for the appearance of the Thordai tunes: as they strive to avoid references to the texts of other denominations, they choose tune references from the Unitarian tradition.

Because of these considerations it is rather uncertain whether Thordai's psalms, appearing as tune references, would have been more widely known by 1632, but the editor of the hymn book was certainly familiar with them. Neither does the use of Thordai's contribution for tune references confirm the conjecture that Thordai might have been the editor of the *Divine Praises* of 1632. Kanyaró plays with the idea that the Unitarian Church aimed to print Thordai's Psalm Book, but eventually this did not prove possible, and thus some psalms were appended to the



1632 hymn book (Kanyaró, 1908, 272). In such a case there is also no need to assume Thordai's involvement, and the tune references may thus have been included with the intention of promoting Thordai's new translation.

CONCLUSION

Nothing suggests that, following the example of Calvinists, the Unitarians wanted a complete printed Psalm translation in front of their hymn book (H. Hubert, 2004, 60). In fact, the opposite is suggested by the fact that beginning with the 1632 hymn book, the psalm section was not separated, and that the songs were not featured in the original order of the Psalms, but in simple alphabetical order. It is also remarkable that while 31 psalms translated by Thordai were included in the 1697 hymn book (RMK I 1503), there are several other parallel translations of the same psalms, and so delivering a numerically complete collection of the psalms is clearly not a principle of selection. Instead, the primary purpose of the hymn books seems to be to provide songs that can be sung and used by the congregation and to advance their own song tradition.

Neither do the editorial steps taken in the 1697 hymn book imply that the popularity of Bogáti's psalms known by the congregations were waning in importance (Hevesi, 2018, 182; Szatmári, 2018, 61). Showing a marked difference, the prayer and hymn book published in 1700 can and does adopt new psalms, as the general familiarity and singability of the items is less important, and more unique solutions are also welcome. Characteristically, in the case of four psalm translations by Bogáti and two by Thordai appearing here, the editor gives no indication that these are from the Psalms.

Even if it is difficult to make firm claims about the relationship between Bogáti's and Thordai's respective translations of the Psalms, this study has hopefully been able to show new perspectives illuminating the transmission of the two Psalm books, and to highlight their position within the song use of Unitarians in the 16th and 17th centuries.

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