



BOOK REVIEWS

Ringen um den einen Gott. Eine politische Geschichte des Antitrinitarismus in Siebenbürgen im 16. Jahrhundert. By Edit Szegedi. Refo500 Academic Studies 95. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023. 276 pp.

From the perspective of religion, early modern Transylvania was a diverse corner of Europe. Many of the most radical thinkers of the Reformation took refuge here for a time, and their ideas could be characterized as harbingers of some of the principles of the Enlightenment. It is therefore a bit surprising that no work has yet been written, in Hungarian or in any other language, that offers a comprehensive overview of the religious situation in early modern Transylvania. Comparatively detailed works have been written on the religious thought and debate in Transylvania in the 1560s and 1570s, however, at the moment there is nothing available that covers the whole period. The book under review here also does not promise anything this ambitious. Edit Szegedi (senior lecturer at the faculty of European Studies at Babeş-Bolyai University) is very clear about her intention. She has written a political history of early modern Transylvanian Antitrinitarianism, though admittedly what she means by this precisely remains a bit unclear throughout her discussion. The book is a compilation of essays that were written separately, but it is structured in thematically coherent chapters. The primary focus is the mutual relationship between the Antitrinitarians and the secular authorities and the church politics of the last four decades of the sixteenth century. Szegedi explores this relationship from a variety of perspectives, the most obvious of which is the relevant legal measures that were taken, but she also considers her subject from the viewpoints of urban history, and she includes biographical sections, discussion of theological issues, the history of certain trials, and issues involving church organization. She seems primarily interested in the impact of ideas and theological experimentation on social life, but she also touches on the paradoxes of the religious situation in Transylvania. She points out, for instance, that while the theological ideas espoused by the Transylvanian trinitarians completely upended the earlier traditions on which religious life rested and were more radical than the ideas put forward by Reformation thinkers in any other region of Europe, in everyday life, everything continued largely as usual, in the cities and in the villages. The religious changes brought about little in the way of visible change in people's lifestyles, and they did not subvert the social or

political order. The center of the Transylvanian Reformation, which was initially Brassó (or Kronstadt by its German name; today Braşov, Romania) and later became Kolozsvár (or Klausenburg by its German name; today Cluj-Napoca, Romania), was far from being a second Münster or even from being seen by later generations as a second Geneva. As one example of the adherence to old customs, one could mention the fact that witch trials continued uninterrupted even during the period when “rational theology” was in a position of power, a situation which seems paradoxical to Szegedi.

In the preface, Szegedi invites us to explore the world which has captured her interest, introducing us to the topic and unraveling her investigations.

The first chapter is a history of the Reformation from an urban history perspective. Szegedi guides her reader through the city of Brassó, explaining the power structures and the emergence and spread of Antitrinitarian ideas. She identifies the considerations and motives behind the arguably eclectic array of religious ideas that the Reformation brought to the city of Brassó and, more broadly, Transylvania. According to Szegedi, behind the delay in the emergence of distinct denominations lay an anxious desire to restore the unity of Christianity as a whole (and not just Western Christianity). The boundaries remained essentially undefined until the parties to the religious debate (of which the Antitrinitarians were the last) realized that denial of the Trinity was a red line that Trinitarian Christians would not cross in the interests of unity.

In the second chapter, Szegedi approaches the history of the Transylvanian Reformation through the life of a central figure, Ferenc Dávid. Dávid, who was the first bishop of the Antitrinitarians, was a believer in the notion of the continuous reform of the Church (or “*ecclesia semper reformanda*”). The theological changes and “innovations” that he introduced offer a kind of arc of the history of the Transylvanian Reformation. The perspective shifts over the course of the chapter, with the focus often changing from Dávid to Kolozsvár, which emerged as the new center of the Transylvanian Reformation, and the relationship among the Transylvanian nations (the Hungarian nobility, the Székelys, and the Saxons) in matters of church politics and power.

In the third chapter, Szegedi presents a more complex picture than those offered in the first two. She gives a sketch of the events that took place over the course of the two decades after Dávid’s death up to the turn of the century. The question she is addressing is the development or stagnation of Antitrinitarianism. Szegedi presents the relationship of the Antitrinitarian leaders to tradition, their view of history, and strategies they used in order to assert their legitimacy. She

also examines changes in the balance of power among the denominations and in the church policy of the court, and she considers the reasons for these changes until the return of the Jesuits to the stage of religious life in the region.

In the fourth chapter, Szegedi addresses the legal statuses of different denominations. She analyses the texts of the various resolutions of the Transylvanian Diet touching on religious matters between 1566 and 1595, and she considers not only the distinctive features of the wording but also the omissions and the failure to mention certain names. Building on this, she maps the place and legal weight of the unnamed and missing religious churches among the established churches in Transylvania. On the basis of her discussion of the sources, Szegedi concludes that the Antitrinitarians were not named or given the status of a “*recepta religio*” in the laws when they were at their strongest and had the most influence on the power in the principality, but rather precisely when they were suffering the most restrictive pressures (1594–95). She also explains that the familiar and often mentioned legislation of 1568–71 was not a celebration of diversity or was a proclamation of equality among the denominations. Rather, it was an attempt to create the necessary conditions for peaceful coexistence. This chapter is the second in the book which touches on the trial of Ferenc Dávid, not from a historical perspective, but rather with a detailed presentation of each side’s position. Szegedi notes that the outcome of the trial was not a favorable or desired outcome, neither for the prince nor for the Antitrinitarians who opposed Dávid. It was, rather, the result of the demands of the Calvinists in the region known as Partium, which lies roughly to the west of Transylvania. The prince, however, took advantage of the situation. In exchange for this gesture in support of the Calvinists and Dávid’s Antitrinitarian opponents, he invited the Jesuits to come to Transylvania.

The last chapter is also the epilogue of the book. In this chapter, Szegedi leaps roughly a decade forward and discusses church politics in Transylvania in the 1610s, focusing on the conflicts between Prince Gábor Báthory and the Antitrinitarian council of Kolozsvár. As in the first half of the book, she approaches the events from the perspective of urban history, and her research shows the connection between Báthory’s church politics and the ecclesiastical policies of the princes who followed him. Although Báthory failed in his efforts to limit the rights of the Antitrinitarians in Kolozsvár, he nonetheless offered a kind of a model for the princes who came in his wake. He showed how to dismantle religious order in Transylvania and how to use the accusation of Judaization as a means of suppressing the Antitrinitarians.

Regrettably, the book does not offer, as a conclusion, any summary of Szegedi's findings, much as it also does not offer any reflections concerning the research she has done or the questions answered or left open. Similarly, the book lacks structural and methodological coherence and consistency. It is not entirely clear, exactly how the chapters are intended to relate to one another, and in the individual chapters Szegedi alternates between descriptive and analytical approaches without much reflection on her methods. The Hungarian secondary literature on the history of ideas often interweaves historical narrative with biographical passages, textual analyses, urban history, and reflections on legal and theological issues. In the case of Szegedi's undertaking, this sometimes clouds her narrative and makes it difficult to follow the main question and line of argument.

One also cannot help but notice the lack of editing. I am thinking not of grammatical mistakes or stylistic issues, but rather of issues as mundane but significant as correcting typos and punctuation. More thorough editorial work should also have been done to address the inconsistencies in the uses of personal and place names. From a terminological point of view, Szegedi is cautious and reflective, but several important ambiguities remain unaddressed. What precisely does she mean, for instance, by the term "Protestant," and who belongs to this category? And why does she not consider the Sabbatarians to have been Antitrinitarians?

Szegedi has a thorough knowledge of the secondary literature, but she tends to rely on the works of older, more widely known authors and seems to be less familiar with or at least draws considerably less on the findings of more recent research (for example, she makes no mention of the works of Borbála Lovas or Dávid Molnár, and even Lech Szczucki, who represents the older generation on the international scene and wrote seminal works on the subject, is also missing from the bibliography).

These shortcomings, however, are outweighed by the book's many merits. Szegedi's academic interests (relations among national minorities and questions of identity construction) and her own cultural background as someone who arguably belongs to several minorities and has an intimate knowledge of several languages make her the perfect person to address this topic with adequate sensitivity and minimal bias. Her strengths as someone with the necessary linguistic and cultural knowledge is clear both in the superb use of language in the book and also, for instance, in her knowledge of the Romanian secondary literature and her decisions with regards to the language used in the case of

place names. Her insistence on subtle, penetrating reflection is also clear in her discussion of ecclesiastical issues, as she refuses merely to follow or echo the narrative of the Transylvanian Reformation as a history of salvation, which traces an allegedly “praiseworthy” path of ideological development and modernity from Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Antitrinitarianism to the Enlightenment. Her comments offer evidence of her impartiality. She notes, in the main text, that she supports neither the positions of the established churches, which condemned the “godless” heretics, nor the views of the opposing side, since both sides showed contempt and scorn for each other.

The book’s greatest merit is that it offers a highly readable presentation to an international readership of a topic on which there is relatively little secondary literature available in English or German. It clears up some of the confusion surrounding stereotypes that have lingered long in the public mind, such as notions of religious tolerance in Transylvania or ideas concerning the trial of Ferenc Dávid and draws attention to the findings in the secondary literature. Many sources are quoted at length and translated (except for those in Latin, which also should have been translated to ensure that the book remains accessible to the widest possible readership), thus helping historians and scholars who do not read Hungarian pursue further research.

Although Szegedi does not rely on her own primary research from a theological and intellectual-historical point of view, she is very much able to offer a long-term perspective and summarize the findings of the secondary literature. She is able to synthesize complex phenomena and connections without getting lost in the details. Moreover, with this book, she has shown that she is able to incorporate the results of her own primary research in the fields of church policy and law into the study of the religious situation in Transylvania and the history of Antitrinitarianism.

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