Scholars’ libraries in Hungary in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: reconstructions based on owner’s mark research

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Hungarian historians started to publish archival sources regarding library history and the history of reading in 1876 in *Magyar Könyvzséme*, one of Europe’s oldest journals of book history. The published archival sources were in particular book lists included in probate inventories from different periods, inventories of confiscated books and other property, records of confiscations, and bills regarding book purchases. In the period between the two World Wars, Béla Iványi devoted most of his scholarly activity to these types of sources, and his collected papers were published in a separate volume.1 Considering the fact that the historians of the *Annales* School started to publish similar sources on a regular basis at exactly the same time, and that it was in 1941 that Lucien Febvre announced that he intended to analyse probate inventories as a particular type of source,2 one can be proud of the achievements of the Hungarian historians. In the nineteen-fifties, Zsigmond Jakó emphasised the importance of a unified historical approach to material culture,3 that is, an examination of all objects listed as assets in probate inventories, and not separately the books, paintings, jewels, clothes, and other personal effects. In the same article, Jakó underscored the fact that an adequate picture of the book culture of a given period cannot be achieved by studying the archival sources alone, since owners’ marks and handwritten annotations in extant books (such as *ex-libris*, *supralibros*, shelf marks, other numbers, etc.) can reveal important information. In fact, such evidence can help us reconstruct book collections, estimate the number of lost books, and reveal reading habits as well as particular circumstances under which reading has taken place. In the nineteen-sixties, Jakó supervised provenance studies carried out by his students in Kolozsvár (today: Cluj-Napoca) and in other ancient Transylvanian collections. The evidence gathered through these
investigations became available in the form of ephemeral publications, until they were collected in a small volume which came out in the beginning of the seventies, and during the eighties the authors of several books made use of these data. Gustav Gündisch, a contemporary of Jakó, worked with similar dedication on the surviving books of the Transylvanian Saxons, and published his findings in a separate study. In the nineteen-eighties, studies in book history received substantial funding from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In the nineties, a project of a unified electronic catalogue of all ancient books in the Carpathian basin was launched, in addition to the publication of individual catalogues for each library. Meanwhile, the methodical study of all the archival sources has been completed and partly published.

SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

When one examines the names of owners of books in the extant inventories from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in connection with the names of owners attested in extant book collections, several interesting facts emerge. First of all, the two lists of names are complementary, that is, we know of very few cases, where both the inventories and the books have survived. Another important feature of both lists is that there is hardly any person attested on these lists whose written work we know of. Furthermore, there is hardly any name on these lists which appears among the names of persons known to have been enrolled in a secondary school or university, although the latter must all have been able to read and must have owned and used books. This means that we can reconstruct the reading culture of the intelligentsia in the Hungarian kingdom in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries only from other sources, that is, through quotations and the mentality of their writings. This statement is true only on a general level because, in fact, some of the books of some of the scholars both in Hungary and in Transylvania in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have indeed been identified, so that conclusions can be drawn concerning the intelligentsia of this period by studying these books.

The handwritten notes in the surviving books reveal another general phenomenon. In the Central European region and in Hungary it was very common that the same book came to be included in the libraries of several families or institutions, due to the difficulties in acquiring books and hence to a general shortage of books. As a result, such books contain the names of several of its successive owners. The owner's mark "N.N. et
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amicorum⁷ is also common,⁸ reminding us of the fact that books circulated beyond the walls of the library of their owner.

**Scholars' Libraries**

The history of the scholarly libraries in Hungary of the sixteenth century can be summarised briefly. Three important collections are mentioned although two of them were held only partly in Hungary.⁹

*Hans Dernschwam* (1494–1568), a German who was born in Moravia, lived in Hungary from the age of 20 as a supervisor of the mines of the Fuggers in Hungary and Transylvania. As an envoy of the emperor he went on a diplomatic mission to Turkey. He is known as a humanist due to the Roman inscriptions he collected during his lifetime. He himself catalogued the 1,162 volumes he had in his library in 1552, so there is an authentic contemporary booklist of his collection. Most of the books still exist since his son sold them to the Imperial Library in 1575 after the death of his father, and Hugo Blotius included the books in the Viennese collection.¹⁰

The books of the historian János Zsámboky (1531–84) have also survived in Vienna. Zsámboky was based in Vienna, and his library was kept there, but he spent a great part of his life travelling. Because of financial difficulties he himself sold some of his books: 550 manuscripts were sold to the Imperial Library in 1578. He kept selling until his death, when there were 3,327 volumes left to be listed. His collection was catalogued by Hugo Blotius in 1587¹¹ when it was acquired from Zsámboky's widow.¹²

We do not have a contemporary list of the contents of the third huge humanist library, that of András Dudith (1533–89). The known 572 titles (342 volumes) have been found in 32 different libraries. His life and his spiritual path from being a bishop representing his church at the Council of Trent, to becoming an independent spirit close to the teachings of anti-trinitarianism, is in itself fascinating. His French biographer Pierre Costil has summed up in a separate chapter of his book on Dudith what is known about the readings of this scholar of European fame. Costil also listed Dudith's books, in particular his manuscripts, on the basis of the owner's marks he was aware of.¹³ However, a recent reconstruction of the Dudith library¹⁴ based on owner marks has made the picture more complicated, since it shows that only parts of the entire library have yet been revealed. To the best of our knowledge the library of András Dudith must have been much larger than Costil thought. Dudith's library was in Silesia, in
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Breslau (today Wrocław), during the last years of his life. His widow sold it to the Dietrichstein family. This library was taken to Sweden in 1645, during the Thirty-Year's War, but did not remain there as one entire collection.

One can mention more cases where the collection of a philologist or historian cannot be reconstructed from a contemporary book list but only through owners' marks and additional notes, such as the library of Adrian Wolphard in Kolozsvár, the collection of János Baranyai Désci in Marosvásárhely (today: Târgu Mureș), that of István Szamosközy in Gyulafehérvár (today: Alba Iulia), etc. However, the best Hungarian example to illustrate the usefulness of owners' marks is that of the historian Miklós Istvánffy.

MIKLÓS ISTVÁNFFY

His father, Pál Istvánffy (1533) visited Padova and studied humanities and law in Bologna. His humanist network is also known. Under his patronage Martin Brenner published the first part of Antonio Bonfini's *Hungarian Chronicle.* The career of Miklós Istvánffy (1538–1615) is that of an aristocrat politician. In 1560 he became a royal councillor, and in 1582 he and his brother became barons. The same year Miklós Istvánffy was appointed Vice-palatine. From 1587 to 1608 he served as chamberlain (*magister curiae regiae*) and from 1608 until his death his title was *magisterIaniorum regalium.* He travelled to Poland on behalf of Rudolf II and served as royal commissioner in Transylvania, where Zsigmond Báthory on several occasions resigned in favour of the Habsburgs.

The young Istvánffy owed his erudition to several excellent humanists. He started out his career with Archbishop Pál Várday, then became the secretary of the historian archbishop Miklós Oláh until the latter's death. Archbishop Oláh supported Istvánffy's studies in Padova from 1552 to 1556. It was in Padova that he became acquainted with János Zsámboky. After returning home, he kept up these connections and remained a member of the humanist circle of Nicasius Ellebodius who himself lived in Pozsony (today: Bratislava). Miklós Oláh, János Zsámboky, István Radéczy, Miklós Istvánffy and Georg Purkircher were members of this circle which later also included Boldizsár Batthyány and Carolus Clusius, the Dutch botanist who resided at Batthyány's court at that time.

We do not know where Miklós Istvánffy kept his books during his active political career, perhaps in Vinica or Paukovec in Croatia where he wrote his *chef d'œuvre*, the *Hungarian history.* The real problem, however, is
that we have evidence regarding only a tiny fragment of his library, merely 36 volumes. We can, however, estimate that the entire collection consisted of more than 2,000 volumes. How? Jenő Berlász wrote the historiography of Istvánffy's library in 1959. He presented all the books (8 volumes) of which historians had become aware at that time, together with hypotheses concerning the books Istvánffy may have had and the location of the library itself. Berlász pointed out that a shelf mark can be seen in Istvánffy's extant manuscripts (historical sources, and copies of rare prints), which indicates that the folio-sized manuscripts in his collection held between 180 and 190 items (See Figs. 1 and 2). Berlász emphasised that through these shelf marks one could detect a well-ordered library of several hundreds of volumes. And he was right. Recently discovered volumes have proven his point. These shelf marks can also be found on prints, as has later been discovered. Several shelf marks in the range of 1,500 to 2,000 have been found. The highest number is 2,320!

Mrs Györgyné Pajkossy started to publish this kind of additional evidence in 1970, mentioning Istvánffy's copy of a book by Hieronymus Cardanus. When Jenő Berlász in 1972 amended his earlier publication, he could only present the manuscripts held in the Archives of the Academy of Sciences in Zagreb, and the new evidence concerning the history of Istvánffy's library which could be derived from them. He also suggested, very logically, that the Hilarious codex from the Corvina library, now in the Croatian National Library, must have passed to the Draskovich family (and from there to its present location) from the Istvánffy family.

Jenő Berlász found other paths through which the Istvánffy library got dispersed, and his hypotheses have all proved to be correct. The De architectora of Vitruvius Pollio which used to belong to Istvánffy is now held at the County Library of Arad. It must have got there at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the Arad County Educational Association purchased it along with the Csáky Library. Another book, Nicolaus Reusner's collection of tracts on Turkish history, was found in Zagreb in the Zrínyi library. Jenő Berlász in his first article listed Istvánffy's humanist network and emphasised that he must have received or bought the books that were written by its members. Berlász cites the correspondence between Carolus Clusius and Istvánffy where the latter is asking his friend for books.

Istvánffy's humanist network in Pozsony/Bratislava, and the fact that Boldizsár Batthyány belonged to this circle, have already been mentioned. Istvánffy could easily visit Németújvár (today: Güssing) on his way home
to Vinica, unless he took the road from Graz along the Mura river. The book which this aristocrat offered to István Beythe, Batthyány's minister in 1570, has remained unknown to the scholars concerned with Istvánffy. This is a book by Reginaldus Gonsalvius Montanus written against the cruelty committed by the Spanish inquisition. It later became the main source of Gáspár Heltai's book entitled *Hídd* (Net). The book has survived in a composite volume made for Beythe, in which the other parts are not from Istvánffy. On the cover page of the book by Gonsalvinus, István Beythe wrote the following: *Magnificus dominus Nicolaus Istvanffy in signum amicitiae dono dedit 1570. Sapien. Cap. 5. Tunc statuit justus in magna constantia, aduersus eos qui se angustiauerunt etc.* Furthermore, the University Library of Budapest owns a volume which was offered to Istvánffy by Boldizsár Batthyányi himself. The historian Istvánffy received Philippe de Mornay's (*Mornaeus*) pamphlet entitled *De veritate christianae religionis liber* from Batthyányi in 1586, and he wrote the following on the recto of
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The flyleaf: Magnificus Dominus Baltasar de Batthian Magister Dapiferorum Nicolao Istuanfi dono dedit Januarii 1586. This finding was presented by Klára Boross in her fundamental study regarding the use of books of the Pozsony humanist circle. She has documented in detail the exchange of books, presents and bequests. Boross accepts Mrs Pajkossy's view that the books of Nicasius Ellebodius which came to the Budapest collection from the Jesuits of Sopron must have originally come from the Istvánffy library because they bear the characteristic shelf mark in Istvánffy's handwriting. However, the study of the Istvánffy library is not yet brought to an end, since Gábor Farkas has found more Istvánffy copies in the rare-book collection of the University Library of Budapest. Mrs Pajkossy has also in 1983 mentioned a few authors in whose books she has seen inscriptions by Istvánffy or his known supralibros.

One should furthermore take into account that Miklós Istvánffy had some of his books bound in a uniform style, that is, he is to be considered
as a bibliophile collector. On the binding of his copies one finds the coat of arms of his family, with an inscription referring to his highest title: Nicolaus Istvanfi de Kiszassonzalwa Sacrae Caesareae Regiaeque Maiestatis Consiliarius ac Regni Hungariae propalatinus, which means that the bindings on which it can be found were made after 1582. The fact that he had earlier, in 1575, an *ex-libris* made for himself, confirms his conscious behaviour as a book collector. The wording of this *ex-libris* is the following (See Figs 3–4): NICOLAVS ISTHVANFFII S. CAES. M | SECRETARIVS | AETATIS SVAE XXXVI | ANNO DOMINI M.D.IXXV. Another bibliophile characteristic is that he found it important to mention the donator and the date of donation in the book received as a gift from Boldizsár Batthyány. However, part of the almost 500 books identified as originating from the former Istvánffy library are in publishers’ bindings and bear no indication of the owner apart from the shelf mark.

Let us now turn to Istvánffy’s reading habits. His surviving books show that he read a lot and put marks and short notes and amendments or corrections of the text in the margins and between the lines. The best example of this habit of his is the manual entitled *Appendix Bibliothecae*.

![Figure 3](image1.png)  
*Figure 3*  *Ex-libris* of Miklós Istvánffy, 1575

![Figure 4](image2.png)  
*Figure 4*  *Ex-libris* of Miklós Istvánffy, 1575
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Conrad Gesner... *per Conradi Lycothenem.* In this instance he amended the author in several places. Reading about the fourteenth-century travel book writer, Jean de Mandeville, in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century best-seller version, he added the following: *estat liber Ioannis de Mandeville militiae peregrinationum impressus Moguntiae, anno 1471 sed in (...) sunt falsa fere omnia. Inter alia scribit apud Turcas esse homines qui ab oque patre et matre nascentur cum quibus iesu fuerit locutus et conversatus.* This note reveals two important facts: Istvánffy paid close attention to any descriptions concerning the Turks, even if they described fairy-tale-like wondrous births. Secondly, he held in his hands and read this particular edition of Mandeville's Itinerarius, most probably at home (or made notes about it somewhere else and then added his note to the Gesner volume at home — although it is less probable). He also noticed a serious misprint in the name of Thurae de Castello, crossed Tharae out and corrected it in the margin: *Bonaventura de Castello* (which makes sense). For the name of the Dalmatian Tranquillus Parthemius Andronicus, he added the following biographical note: *Tranquillus iste Andronicus nunquam docuit literas Lipsiae, sed fuit Secretarius Ludovici Gritii tam Constantinopoli quam ubique usque ad obitum eius. Mortuus est Sebenici in Dalmatia anno 1572.*

Miklós Istvánffy bequeathed part of his books along with his property in Paukovec to the Jesuits of Zagreb. The rest of his books were inherited by his daughters since his son did not live to adulthood. His daughters married into the aristocracy of Croatia: Eva married Banus Draskovich, and Orsolya married János Lipcey, while Katalin became the spouse of György Keglevich. One can only trace the books following the offspring of János Draskovich. The son, György Draskovich, later Bishop of Győr, gave some of them to the Jesuits of Sopron. After the decree of Maria Theresa suppressing the Jesuit order, the Jesuit libraries were dispersed. This also happened to the libraries of aristocrats which survived until the twentieth century (some of which must have included books from the Istvánffy library). Hopefully, a few more books will surface from the Istvánffy library through methodical cataloguing in electronic catalogues and databases.

NOTES

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edition, along with the seventeenth-century part which had been left in manuscript: A magyar könyvkultúra múltjából. Iványi Béla cikkei és anyaggyűjtés, ed. by. János Herner & István Monok, Adattár XVI–XVIII. századi szellemi mozgalman k történetéhez, 11, (Szeged: JATE, 1985).


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Tristano, Marta Cakkeri, Leonardo Magnionami (Spoleto, 2006), pp. 375-95;


17. Istvánffy's historical work was published after his death with the support of Péter Pázmány in Cologne: Historiarum de rebus Hungaricis libri XXIV (Coloniae Agrippinae: 1561).

18. Jenő Berlász, 'Istvánffy Miklós könyvtáráról' (On the library of Miklós Istvánffy), in: Az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár Évkönyvei 1959 (Budapest: 1961), pp. 202-40. Here we do not repeat his bibliographic data. Berlász found the following book to be the most important concerning the history of the library: Károly Bota, Istvánffy-Miklós (Budapest: 1938). The Ferenc Forgách manuscript described by Berlász (222-25), which was unavailable at that time, is in Kismarton (today: Eisenstadt): Schlossbibliothek, Zimmer V. Karton B. Regal 5/24.


22. De sancta Trinitate, Zagreb, National Library, shelf mark R 4071.


26. Sanctae inquisitoris Hispanicae ares aliquot detectae, ac palam traductae. Exempla aliquot, praeter ea quae suo quaque loco in ipso opere sparsa sunt, scorsum
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restored, in quibus easdem Inquisitionis artes veluti in tabulis guibusdam in ipso
porro exercito interi liceat ... Reginaldo Gonsalvo Montano author
(Heidelbergae: Michael Schirat, 1567). Güsing (Austria, Burgenland),
Bibliothek des Franziskanerklosters, shelf mark 4/7o.

27. Mihály Balázs, 'Heltai Hálójának forrásáról és eszméttörténeti hátteréről' (On
the sources and the background of history of ideas of Heltai's Network).

28. István Monok, Péter Övöös, 'Nem mindent mondunk el' (We have not said it
all – on a composite volume of István Beythe in which Mihály Balázs is also
Hungaricae, Tom. XX (Festschrift Mihály Balázs). Szeged, 2011, SZTE.

29. Györgyné Pajkossy, 'Ellebodius és baráti körének könyvei az Egyetemi
Könyvtárban' (The books of Ellebodius and his friends in the University

30. Klára Boross, 'A pozsonyi humanista kör könyvei az Egyetemi Könyvtár
antikva-gyűjteményében' (The books of the Pressburg humanist circle in the
old collection of the University Library), in: Az Egyetemi Könyvtár évkönyvei,
13, Istvánffy Miklós könyvei, 16 (2007), pp. 178-84.

31. Györgyné Pajkossy, 'Ellebodius és baráti körének könyvei az Egyetemi
Könyvtárban' (The books of Ellebodius and his friends in the University

32. Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (Hungarian National Library, shelf mark RNT
(Régi Nyomtatványok Tára = Old Book Collection), excl. 208b.

33. Tiguri: Christoph Froschover, 1555.

34. The ISTC database does not mention this edition.

35. See: Jenő Berlázs, 'Istvánffy Miklós könyvtáráról', in: Az Országos Széchényi
Könyvtár Évkönyve 1959 (Budapest: 1961), pp. 230. Berlázs was not aware of
the Croatian studies detailing the donation made to the Zagreb Jesuites in:

36. Jenő Berlázs, 'Újabb információk Istvánffy Miklós könyvtáráról' (New evi-
dence on the library of Miklós Istvánffy), in: Az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár