

THE WORK ENTITLED *SENECA CHRISTIANUS* AMONG THE EDITIONS OF THE CONGREGATION OF VISITATION OF OUR LADY AT TRNAVA*

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The first part of my article will be about the Mary congregation of the University of Trnava, known as the Visitation of Our Lady Congregation.¹ I will look at one of their gift books from 1700, the *Seneca Christianus*, from the standpoint of their guiding principles and spirituality.² In the second part, I will turn to a document from the National Archives of Hungary. I will shed light on the property list of the Mary congregations at the time of their abolition under Joseph II.

The Trnava Visitation Congregation³ was established by Péter Pázmány in 1617, expressly for students. By 1636 only philosophy and theology students remained in the congregation, as younger learners formed a splinter congregation called the Immaculate Conception Congregation. While the congregation existed, it produced nineteen books.⁴ Among them may be found the *Seneca Christianus* from 1700. We know that among the books published by Hungarian congregations there were only sporadic editions of ancient texts. Only two editions may be mentioned. The first is the subject of this presentation, the *Seneca Christianus*. The second also stems from Trnava, and can be traced back to the Candlemas Congregation. It is their edition of Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae*.⁵ The relative lack of ancient texts showcases the importance of this publication of the *Seneca Christianus* as a gift volume.

The *Seneca Christianus* is a Jesuit compilation. The Jesuit father Johann Baptist Schellenberg (1586 – 1645) put it together and published it for the first time in Augsburg.⁶ The volume had many European editions and soon vernacular translations appeared. In Hungary, there were early editions of this writing. In 1660 the Brewer Printing House produced a Latin version in Levoča.⁷ Johann Andreas Hörmann had one published at the Trnava University Press in 1696.⁸ Sámuel Kéri of the Franciscan order translated the work into Hungarian, and its publication took place in 1654 in Vienna.⁹ The 1700 Trnava edition, which is a little octavo

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¹ About the Hungarian congregations see: TÜSKÉS, Gábor and Éva KNAPP. *Népi vallásosság Magyarországon a 17 – 18. században*. Budapest: Osiris, 2001.

² *Seneca Christianus, id est flores Christiani ex Annaei Senecae Epistolis Collecti, pro Xenio distributi ac dicati...*, Ab alma Sodalitate B. V. M. Elisabeth Visitantis Tyrnaviae M.D.CC. Tyrnaviae: Typis Academicis per Joannem Andream Hörmann, 8°, [24] fol. – RMK II 2022; Č 2476; Ave Tyrnavia 1700/26.

³ VISKOLCZ, Noémi. *17. századi ismeretlen hazai kinyomtatványok a Magyar Országos Levéltárból*. Magyar Könyvszemle, 123. évf., 2007, p. 185-199.

⁴ KNAPP, Éva. *Pietás és irodalom*. Budapest: Universitas, 2001, p. 209-211.

⁵ KNAPP, ref. 5, No. 18, p. 215.

⁶ *Seneca Christianus, id est flores Christiani...* Augustae Vindelicorum: Aperger, 1637, 88 p., 8°.

⁷ *Seneca Christianus, id est flores Christiani...* Permissu superiorum editi Lucernae: 1645, apud Davidem Hautti, nunc denuo recusi Leutschoviae typis Breverianis, 1660, 12°, 120 p. – RMK II 953; Č 1085.

⁸ *Seneca Christianus, id est flores Christiani ex Annaei Senecae epistolis collecti...* Anno M.DC.XCVI. [=1696], Die Mensis Augusti, Tyrnaviae: typis Acad. per Joan. Andream Hörmann, 8°, fol. [24] – RMK II 1857; Č 2359; Ave Tyrnavia 1696/23.

⁹ *Keresztyen Seneca az az Lvcivs Annaeivs Seneca leveleiből ki-szedetett és XXXVIII részre osztott keresztyeni viragok...*kinyomtatattak Béchben: Cosmerovius Máté, M.DC.LIV. [=1654], 12°, [28], 188, [10] p. – RMK I 882.

comprised of twenty-four folios in Latin produced by the Visitation Congregation, appeared also through the Trnava University Press by Johann Andreas Hörmann. Comparing the 1696 and 1700 editions, we notice that aside from the title page and dedication, or in other words with the exception of the first two folios, they are identical. For the 1700 edition, only the title page and dedication were reprinted using a different typeset. In relation to the main text, the print is larger. Placing the National Széchenyi Library's two copies¹⁰ side-by-side, it becomes obvious that sheet A's first two pages were removed and the newly printed title page and dedication were glued in.

What was the reason for the volume? What led the Visitation Congregation to put out a Seneca compilation? The volume published in 1700 has two dedications to Count József Esterházy, the subsequent supreme judge and the Vice Rector of the congregation and Count Ferenc Esterházy, the congregation's Secretary, both of whom according to the introduction added to the importance of the gift volume by lending it their names and prestige. If we examine the congregation's documents, we find that the dedication most often reflected the person or people who aided the appearance of the work. It was customary for nobles to be members of the congregation or even hold positions within it and to support it financially. Among the higher level aristocrats we find that the Esterházy family's patronage was especially prevalent.¹¹ The introduction also informs us that the congregation's members received the volume, and despite its concise nature, it was helpful for young members of the congregation.

The usefulness of the volume aside, the fact that the Jesuits operating in Trnava particularly liked Seneca may have been the reason as to why the Visitation Congregation picked this particular volume as its gift book. A small number of the Jesuits who worked in and around Trnava University (for example János Rajcsányi, György Rajcsányi, Gábor Kapi, Gergely Berzeviczi, Gergely Hidi) produced rather stoical works around the first third of the 18th century.¹² The philosophy of the new stoicism had a demonstrable effect on them, and they laboured to harmonize it with the spirituality of the Jesuit order.

If we take into account the books produced by Trnava University which are still in existence, then it is crystal clear that they published several volumes connected to Seneca and to other stoic writers from the end of the 1600s onward.¹³ The main emphasis was not on the pagan stoic philosopher, but on what could be taken from the work and applied to the principles of Christian spirituality. The first of these publications began with the *Seneca Christianus* of 1696, and the second edition was the Visitation Congregation's gift volume from 1700.

As academic articles have not as of yet concentrated on a thorough examination of its contents, let me briefly summarize exactly what *Seneca Christianus* is about and what sources were used to compile the work. The writing consists of thirty-eight short chapters, geared towards the

¹⁰ RMK II 1857, ref. 9 and RMK II 2022, ref. 3.

¹¹ VISKOLCZ, ref. 4.

¹² TURÓCZI-TROSTLER, József. *Keresztény Seneca. Fejezetek a kései humanizmus európai és magyarországi történetéből*. Budapest: 1937, p. 15-18.

¹³ BÍRÓ, Csilla. Elements of the Late Stoic Philosophy in György Rajcsányi's Spiritual Work Entitled *Laurus tuta*. In: *Kniha 2015: Zborník o problémoch a dejinách knižnej kultúry*. Martin: Slovenská národná knižnica, 2015, p. 140-141.

quotidian life and problems of a Christian, aiming to provide material for reflection regarding his most common questions. The work was pieced together from portions of Seneca's works, without attention to citation. Expert's articles have taken the work's title as a starting point, namely *Seneca Christianus, id est flores christiani ex Annaei Senecae epistolis collecti*, which means that the assumption repeatedly crops up that Schellenberg only used excerpts from Seneca's letters. In contrast to this idea, I have come to the conclusion, based on philological comparative examination of the texts, that aside from the letters, large extracts of the writing derive from Seneca's dialogues as well, especially from his works *De tranquillitate animi*, *De vita beata*, *De brevitae vitae* and *De providentia*.

The chapters of *Seneca Christianus* normally begin with a short, pithy observation from Seneca, which are then followed by excerpts from his other works dealing with similar themes which are edited into a whole. It was not a common practise to reword Seneca's original sentences into Christian thoughts. However, it is noteworthy that the compiler picked those parts of his writing which corresponded most closely to Christian spirituality, sometimes using four or five different Seneca passages for one short chapter. For example, chapter eleven, which deals with the importance of finding good company and avoiding evil people, is composed of six Seneca works in the following order – two sections derive from letter 109, one from letter 90, one part is from letter 3, the next from chapter 7 of *De tranquillitate animi*, and finally one part each is taken from letters 128 and 123.

Pondering the question about how this compilation from Seneca's works fitted in with the day-to-day functioning of the Visitation Congregation, we notice that parts of the Mary congregations' basic principles were readily compatible with the teachings of stoic philosophy. Although the Mary congregations' main aim was the strengthening of the Catholic faith, and honouring the cult of Mary, the Trnava Visitation Congregation's guiding principles, which were recorded in a pocket book that appeared more or less concurrently with the *Seneca Christianus*, were truly well complemented with the compilation deriving from the stoic writer.

The pocketbook of the congregation, the *Manuale Sodalitatis beatae Virginis visitantis*, has been published numerous times. It was reviewed by Éva Knapp in her articles about *Officium Rákóczianum*,¹⁴ so here I delineate only two short chapters of the editions 1696 and 1700.

The 1696 edition contains the governing rules of the congregation, summarized in twelve points.¹⁵ The rules were read out loud once a year to congregation members, often at the beginning of studies. The congregation's main aims were virtue and benevolence, which were expressed through respect for Mary, in imitating the Virgin Mother's moral example, in praying to her, in participating in the sacraments and in study. The congregation's members' participation in confession and in saint veneration was compulsory on certain holy days, or rather every fourteen days. At mass participation and assistance was obligatory. The governing rules

¹⁴ KNAPP, Éva. *Officium Rákóczianum: az I. Rákóczi Ferencről elnevezett imádságoskönyv története és nyomtatott kiadásai*. Budapest: Borda Antikvárium, 2000.

¹⁵ *Pretiosa occupatio sodalis Mariani, seu manuale sodalitatis Beatae Virginis Visitantis in alma A[r]chi-Episcopali Universitate Tyrnaviensi erectae et confirmatae ... Primo excusum eidemque sodalitati in xenium oblatum*. Tyrnaviae: typis academicis, per Joannem Andream Hörmann, 1696, [12] 356 p., 12° – RMK II 1856; Č 2358; Ave Tyrnavia 1696/22. The rules of the congregation p. 334-340.

also detailed prayers which had to be recited – on Sundays members prayed lauding Mary, but mention was made of morning and evening prayers too. They were required to examine their consciences on a routine basis and to go to confession, and avoid sin and temptation. They were to seek opportunities to engage in virtuous behaviour, such as visitation of the sick. Special mention is made of prayer for the departed or dead fellows. Every month a different patron saint was held in special regard; public contrition had to be exhibited before the members, and mandatory participation was required during the congregation's holidays. The regulation's last two points refer to members who travel away – anyone who leaves remains a part of the congregation. The traveller should ask the Congregation Chair for a recommendation, so that he can join the congregation of his new city. Wherever members may reside, their comportment should reflect the spirit of the congregation. It was also expected that a member inform his superiors about his situation while he was away.

The 1700 edition¹⁶ of *Manuale Sodalitatis beatae Virginis visitantis* contains the so-called *Axiomata vitae* comprised of eleven points, which members were to follow and were encouraged to reflect on a daily basis. While the previous edition's regulations were rather a practical guide for members, the *Axiomata vitae* was made up of the fundamental truths of Christian life. Its sources were biblical passages, Latin sayings and the musings of Jesuit fathers. Axiom number one – people were created in order to recognize, worship and serve the Lord. (This teaching is in accordance with chapters II. and XIII. of *Seneca Christianus* which discuss love of solitude and quiet and contemplation of the divine). Axiom number two – virtues lead to salvation while sin brings damnation. (*Seneca Christianus'* chapter XX. is about this topic, namely that only virtues are the path to salvation.) The third axiom is that life is uncertain, death is a certainty and judgement occurs after one's passing. (There is a parallel to *Seneca Christianus'* IIIrd chapter about contemplating death.) The fourth axiom is that a dead person's deeds, whether they were good or bad, remain with him, and determine if he will be granted everlasting life. The fifth axiom is that Christians must endure all and must do all to earn God's favour. (To this we may link *Seneca Christianus'* chapter XII., which is about self denial.) The sixth axiom is that death destroys all vanity. The seventh is that God's presence is everywhere; he sees and hears all. The eighth is that we should endure everything rather than commit a deadly sin. The axiom number nine: one must avoid opportunities for sinning, temptation and the company of those who engage in these actions. (To this the chapter XI. is applicable). The tenth axiom: our transgressions must be followed by remorse. (Chapter XXXVIII. of *Seneca Christianus* is applicable about taking our sins in earnest.) And the eleventh is that the Virgin Mother must be held in special esteem.

The Mary congregations of schools had their own libraries.¹⁷ Regarding their nature and size, we currently do not have precise information. The congregations themselves did not keep lists of the volumes in their possession. However, at the time of Joseph II.'s decree forcing the abolition of the religious orders, detailed lists of the assets and valuables of the congregations slated for abolition had to be made, down to the minutest items. Regrettably, these lists did not document

¹⁶ *Manuale sodalitatis B. Virginis Visitantis, in Collegio Societat. Iesu Tyrnaviae ...* Repressum ibidem typis academicis, per Joannem Andream Hörmann, Anno Iubilaeo M.D.C.C. [=1700], [56], 449, [10] p., 12° – RMK II 2019; Č 2471; Ave Tyrnavia 1700/24. *Axiomata vitae bene instituendae, quotidie animo volvenda*: p. 391-393.

¹⁷ JUHÁSZ, Miklós. *Magyarországi konfraternitások a barokk korban*. *Katholikus Szemle*, 58. évf., 6. szám, 1944, p. 161-169.

the books' particulars so exactly that they could be identified. A few such inventories are public knowledge. However, the list in the National Archives of Hungary has not yet been the subject of scholarly attention.¹⁸ The document dated from 1785 is an eighty page folio whose precise title is *Tabella cum inventariis congregationum Marianarum in regno Hungariae existentium*. It is a record of the property of sixty-one Mary congregations in all divided according to administrative zones, which were then subsequently divided according to urban schools and congregations. The Trnava Visitation Congregation occupied place number fifty on that list.¹⁹ The list includes for example their valuables, flags, statues, the congregation's album, the ceremonial garments, candle holders, the congregation's stamp, the little copper plate used to reproduce copies of the religious picture of Mary's visitation with Elizabeth, the furniture (namely cabinets and chairs) and the congregation's altar. The end of the list notes the book inventory: "(t)he catalogue of the books is not hereby attached, as the books have been sent away from here to Bratislava."²⁰ Unfortunately, we can learn nothing more from this list, so it remains a mystery as to what the fate of the books and that of the congregation's album was.

It can be said about the inventory that an effort was made to give more details about the congregation's books in other instances. For example, in relation to the Esztergom congregation, there is separate mention of the titles of the volumes as well as the number of copies. To provide an example, the first book, *Ars semper gaudendi*, was Jesuit father Antonius Alphonsus Sarasa's popular spiritual writing based on stoic notions. A second instance is the Italian Jesuit Giovanni Pietro Pinamonti's *Via coeli complanata*, but we can also take as examples another Jesuit, Giovanni Pietro Maffei's *Vita sancti Ignatii* or János Nádas's *Theophilus Marianus*. The short titles or portions of titles make the works identifiable, their places and dates of publication less so.²¹

At those congregations where we can locate some type of book list, the order in which the books were enumerated is not straightforward. For example, the Prešov congregation's book record gives information about the books according to size²² – two quarto size spiritual volumes; forty-two duodecimo sized religious volumes. In such cases, more precise identification is impossible. If the congregation was smaller in size, the functionary who compiled the list was satisfied with simply giving the number of books. One example was in Požega: "various ecclesiastical volumes, approximately 175 in number".²³

¹⁸ *Departamentum ecclesiasticum cleri saecularis et regularis*. 1786, F 34, 154. doboz, 531, 321-es irat. Magyar **nemzeti levéltár**, Helytartótanácsi Levéltár. Henceforth: *Tabella*.

¹⁹ *Tabella*, ref. 19, fol. 62-63: No. 50. *Districtus Poson[iensis]; nomen academie vel gymnasii: Tyrnavien[is] Maioris*.

²⁰ *Tabella*, ref. 19, fol. 63: "Cathalogus librorum inventario huic non est insertus, cum libri hi translati sunt Posonium."

²¹ *Tabella*, ref. 19, fol. 10-11, No. 8. *Districtus Budensis, nomen academie vel gymnasii: Strigonien[is]*.

Specificatio libellorum:

Ars semper gaudendi; Via celi complanata; Imago filiationis Marianae; Epistola S. Fran. Xaverii; Vita S. Ignatii etc.

²² *Tabella*, ref. 19, fol. 15: *Districtus Cassoviensis, nomen academie vel gymnasii: Eperiessen[is]*: Libri ascetici in quarto; [...] Libri ascetici in duodecimo; Libri ascetici in decimo sexto; Profani scholastici in quarto, in octavo, in duodecimo etc.

²³ *Tabella*, ref. 19, fol. 36: *Districtus Zagrabien[is], nomen academie vel gymnasii Poseganae [...]*: Varii libri spiritualis utpote tomuli 175.

In those instances where they aimed at creating a relatively precise list, we see that the majority of the works listed were contemporary spiritual volumes, however Schellenberg's *Seneca Christianus* is not found among them. In Uzhhorod, among the ancient authors we occasionally find a volume from Horace or Cicero.²⁴ They probably belonged to one of the members, because elsewhere writers from antiquity are not even met with once in a while. So we can conclude, based on the 1785 inventory that nothing leads us to believe that the *Seneca Christianus* played a role in the quotidian lives of the Hungarian Jesuit Mary congregations, with the single exception of the Trnava Visitation Congregation.

Résumé

²⁴ *Tabella*, ref. 19, fol. 30-31, No. 26. *Districtus Unghvariens[is]; nomen academie vel gymnasii Unghvariens[is]; [...] Inventarium librorum: [...] Ciceronis de officiis; Eiusdem ad familiares epistolae; [...] Horatius Flaccus.*