

# Exorcism and Sexuality: The “Thick Description” of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century Transylvanian Catholic Priest’s Transgression<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Using contemporary documents, the study presents the story of a scandalous exorcism that took place in 1726-27. At the heart of the Csíkszentgyörgy (Ciucsângeorgiu) case is the local parson and a non-local “possessed” woman. The supreme church authority sought to figure out the details of the months-long case retroactively through testimonies and the correspondence of the priests involved. The demonically possessed woman upset the entire village community. In many respects, the priest became “obsessed” with the case and the woman. For his exorcism, he used methods found in alternative European manuals that were by then banned in the Church. The woman’s prophecies and reports of the afterlife were taken seriously not only by the priest, but also by the wider village community. The sexual fervor of the woman did not leave the young men guarding her at night – as well as the parson himself – unaffected. The Church authorities ultimately sought to clarify the circumstances of the woman’s pregnancy, and especially the priest’s role in it. Although there is no judgment to be found in church sources, all traces of the Padre later disappear.

In keeping with the trends of narrative history, beyond the “thick description” of the case, the author undertakes less contextualization than usual. The case is undoubtedly edifying in terms of the history of Roman Catholic exorcism in Hungary; it presents significant documentation of contemporary religious and folk demonology, contains the early traces of subsequent folk beliefs, and raises a number of cultural-historical issues (in regard to sexuality and love).

**Keywords:** demonology, exorcism, eroticism, transgression, lower clergy, narrative historiography

## INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the emic interpretation of a “stumbled upon” 18<sup>th</sup>-century source text, and one of the potential research interpretations of the story it contains. I have

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<sup>1</sup>This study is based on the author’s earlier Hungarian-language paper (BÁRTH 2008). In preparing the revised, updated English version, it was financed under grant agreement ERC 324214 of the European Research Council through the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Union (2007–2013).

been interested in the issues of early modern Church exorcism in terms of historical folkloristics, cultural history and Church history for years<sup>2</sup> when in the summer of 2004 I embarked on a general source exploration in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Gyulafehérvár. Wading through the documents of the former Bishop's Office chronologically, the two dossiers of the above-mentioned case from Csíkszentgyörgy emerged unexpectedly. There was, in fact, logic in including the documents of the case that is interpreted as a priestly transgression among the documents of the same subject. For contemporary Church leadership, the fact of an unlicensed exorcism was only secondary to the alleged sexual aspect. To me, however, it was exactly this chronicle of a Roman Catholic exorcism conducted in Ciuc during 1726-1727 that was an exciting research find. While processing the source, it became clear that the "erotic thread" of the story was also not merely an obscure case among dozens of priestly "transgressions". What seemed to be most expedient, then, was to temporarily combine the two – otherwise usually different – research threads and treat them as equal aspects of this case.<sup>3</sup>

The first, longer part of my study – almost exclusively based on the central source text – strives to reconstruct the scenario of the original story. This is achieved through a research process that uses as few external aspects in the description as possible, as few secondary frames of reference based on ex-post scientific paradigms as possible. In writing the "event history", this type of narrative history does not use the source data to illustrate its own ex-post concept, but follows the sources and their characters in the explication itself, striving to create a possible interpretation of the story *from within*. Another important circumstance is that the researcher does not go so far as to claim exclusivity: he does not claim that the events of the past, in this case nearly 300 years ago, are depicted exactly as they took place in reality. A multiplicity of readings must necessarily exist in all interpretations of sources that – due to the unilateral development of circumstances – understandably distort reality. This research process also results in a number of acknowledged and accepted question marks in such event histories, which the historian deliberately avoids answering with the help of his imagination or the "analogies" at hand.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>The incredibly extensive and versatile scientific literature of the devil in Christian culture, as well as the associated yet independent phenomenon of exorcism as the ecclesiastical cure of demonic possession, leaves no doubt that it is a truly interdisciplinary research area. If we only focus on the historical issues of the subject and do not take into account its current and recurring aspects, we can still document an interest in said subject in a wide range of disciplines (theology, religious sciences, history of church and liturgy, art history, history of culture, historical psychology, etc.). For example: ALMOND 2004; ERNST 1972; LEVACK (ed.) 1992; LEVACK 2013; ZUTT (Hrsg.) 1972. Of course, ethnographic/folkloristic research of the devil and exorcism occupies a prime position in both Hungarian and international literature. For example: DAXELMÜLLER 1984; KATONA 1902; PETZOLDT 1990; PÓCS 2001; SZACSVAY 2002. Recently, these have cropped up in conjunction with some of the more refreshing historiographical trends (historical anthropology, history of mentalities, micro-history), utilizing their methodologies and results on the basis of historical folkloristic aspects (to mention but a few specifically: CLARK 1997; DINZELBACHER 1996; FERBER 2004; LEVI 2001) (cf. Bárh 2016). As one of the stages of my research carried out in this spirit, this paper presents the early modern practice of eliminating demonic possession in Hungary in light of a specific story of exorcism.

<sup>3</sup>This idea is by no means unique in European literature. Cf. ROMEO 2003; RUGGIERO 2007.

<sup>4</sup>On the renaissance of a new form of event history and the historic-philosophical background of the "linguistic turn" in historiography, see: BURKE 2001.

I linked the controvertible epilogue of the story with the presentation of the indirect analytical frameworks and possible interpretations. The “conciseness” and complexity of the case under consideration allows for a variety of contextualizations, some of which I have tried to present, if only tangentially.

The following essay is, above all, an experiment as to what a historian can do with a document reflecting a perceptibly unique event if he merely examines the surviving texts on their own and – for lack of substantial control sources – must forego background information on the biographical data and motivations of the actors, as well as the specific social and cultural relations of the scene in which the story took place. In such a case, is it even worth drawing a necessarily blurry picture at all? Can such a case description lead to the mandatory generalizations?

### THE DOCUMENTS OF A SCANDALOUS EXORCISM

In the examined 18<sup>th</sup>-century story from Transylvania, it was presumably not the fact of the exorcism itself, but the unusual, suspicious circumstances – from the point of view of Church leadership – that led to the scandal. Based on the surviving documents that have been created in conjunction with the case,<sup>5</sup> it is not exactly clear when and based on whose observations did the dignitaries of the diocese of Gyulaféhevár take notice of the activities of the parson in Csíkszentgyörgy. On the other hand, we know that the latter – namely, György Ferenczi – started the exorcism of a woman named Kata during the Advent of 1726.<sup>6</sup> From a later testimony, it is clear that the exorcism ritual was already ongoing on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December of that year.<sup>7</sup> As one of the phases of the months-long procedure, the allegedly possessed woman was transferred to Csíksomlyó on March 23, 1727.<sup>8</sup> It is possible that this incident was related to the church investigation launched in the spring, during which two appointed priests first came on the scene to verify the fact of the woman’s possession. After Márton Szépvízi, the parson of Kisasszony, and Tamás Bertalan, at the time the parson of Kászón, not only found the demonic possession to be false, but their report<sup>9</sup> also unveiled the sexual transgressions committed in connection with the exorcism, the case reached the highest forum, the bishop of Gyulaféhevár. Bishop János Antalfi first interrogated the local priests involved in the case to a greater or lesser extent based on a questionnaire (*deutum*) assembled in April,<sup>10</sup> then, on June 28, through three appointed priests, the interrogation of commoner witnesses in

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<sup>5</sup>The presentation of the events is based on the data of two concurrently filed archival records located in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Gyulaféhevár (heretofore GYÉL): GYÉL I. (Episcopal Archives) I. (Records of the Episcopal Office) 8/1727, 9/1727.

<sup>6</sup>The parson in his 1726 letter to the bishop. He mentions St. Andrew’s Day (Nov. 30) as the day when he achieved his first success in exorcism.

<sup>7</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of József Ferenczi.

<sup>8</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Andrásné Dobondi.

<sup>9</sup>The report did not survive, but we can learn of the mission of the two priests from their subsequent testimony: GYÉL I. 1.9/1727.

<sup>10</sup>The bishop received five independent letters of testimonies from priests in the spring of 1727 (April to May). – GYÉL I. 1.8/1727.

Csikszentgyörgy commenced.<sup>11</sup> A Latin-language fair copy of the protocols summarizing these testimonies was presented to the bishop on October 13.<sup>12</sup>

For us, the most important source materials for the year-long procedure, in addition to the clerical letters and certifications, are understandably the documents of witness interrogations. It is a fortunate circumstance that the above-mentioned fair copy preserved the preliminary questions, all of which already incorporate a pre-existing accusation concept.<sup>13</sup> The interrogation of the two protagonists of the case, parson György Ferenczi and the possessed woman – if it even came to their interrogation at all – did not survive, only one of the priest's letters was preserved in the archival dossier.<sup>14</sup> So far, I failed to track down the judgment reporting on the – otherwise predictable – outcome of the story. For lack of this, we can only indirectly deduce the subsequent fate of the protagonists.

Of the 19 testimonies recorded in the case, eight can be associated with local priests (from Csík and Háromszék).<sup>15</sup> All of them visited Csikszentgyörgy at different times in the winter of 1726-27 and have become witnesses, and in some cases even participants, of the exorcism ritual taking place there. Another large group of testimonies came from eleven residents of Csikszentgyörgy, only one of them being a woman.<sup>16</sup> Most of the four *primipilus* (centurion), six *colonus* (tenant) and one *libertinus* (freedman) witnesses<sup>17</sup> were young men in their twenties and thirties who took part in guarding the possessed woman day and night. Thus, they saw the events close up. In answering obviously tendentious questions and at times perceptibly coordinating their answers, the witnesses' testimonies were almost without exception incriminating for the priest.

## THE MAIN PROTAGONISTS

Who was this 18<sup>th</sup>-century Transylvanian parson who became the protagonist of the story we are examining? The little information we know of his life is revealed in the files

<sup>11</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Hungarian-language proceedings of witness interrogation recorded in Csikszentmárton on 28 June 1727, signed by Mihály Cseh, parson of Torja, István András, subdeacon of Csík, and Márton Szépvízi, parson of Kisasszony.

<sup>12</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727. Latin-language proceedings in two copies (draft and final version), dated 13 October 1727 in Csíkkozmás, signed by Mihály Cseh, archdeacon of Háromszék, and János Bíró, notary of the Holy Office of Háromszék.

<sup>13</sup>The preliminary questions, divided into three main groups, inquired about the circumstances of the "possessed" woman's coming to Csikszentgyörgy, the beginning and particular procedure of the exorcism, the woman's visions, the administration of the Eucharist and its possible desecration. – GYÉL I. 1.9/1727.

<sup>14</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727.

<sup>15</sup>List of testimonies by priests: Ferenc Bodó (Csikszentmiklós), Ferenc Csató (Csikszentimre), Zsigmond Antal (Kászonújfalú), József Ferenczi (Csikszentlélek), Mihály Bartó (Csikszentsimon), Márton Szépvízi (Kisasszony), János Zachariás (Csíkkozmás), Tamás Bertalan (Kászon, later Kézdiszentlélek). – GYÉL I. 1.9/1727.

<sup>16</sup>Andrásné Dobondi, Judit (45, colona). – GYÉL I. 1.9/1727.

<sup>17</sup>List of male witnesses: József Keresztes (34, primipilus), György Ferencz (37, primipilus), András Kovács (24, colonus), György István (50, primipilus), Ferenc Oláhfalvi (29, colonus), Pál János (25, primipilus), János Dobondi (27, colonus), István Dobondi (30, colonus), Mihály Kádár (30, colonus). – GYÉL I. 1.9/1727. For the current-day interpretation of the above-mentioned Székely social categories, see IMREH – PATAKI 1992:41–91.

of the visitation by vicar Márton Demeter in 1721.<sup>18</sup> Ferenczi was already a parson in Csíkszentgyörgy, and according to the visitor's notes, he was in the 31<sup>st</sup> year of his life and the third year of his priesthood. Like the majority of his fellow priests pioneering the revival of the Transylvanian Catholic Church, he, too, studied theology in Nagyszombat (Trnava). Aside from this taciturn entry, we have almost no other information on the parson: his birthplace, education, history, and the dates of his work in Szentgyörgy remain obscure.<sup>19</sup> From his letter and his utterances cited by witnesses, a confident, proud priest emerges who had less than usual respect for Church hierarchy. These characteristics might have eventually caused him to collide with the higher authorities, even if fate had not brought him in contact with the "possessed" woman. Of the "devilish" Kata, the other protagonist of the story, we know even less than of Ferenczi. Despite questions about where the allegedly possessed woman came from and the circumstances of her ending up in Szentgyörgy at the top of the questionnaire,<sup>20</sup> no witnesses could (or wanted to) respond to these.<sup>21</sup> It is clear from the wording that the woman was not a local resident. We also know that she was at a sexually fertile age. She was characterized by a certain degree of coquetry and an increased appetite for all kinds of bodily pleasures. At times she had convulsions that led to the accusation of demonic possession.

### EVIDENCE OF THE "POSSESSION"

The sources do not say how György Ferenczi ascertained the demonic possession of the woman, but later he tried all the more determinedly to prove this fact to his skeptical fellow priests and the villagers.<sup>22</sup> Several people have heard from Ferenczi's mouth that "he who does not believe that Kata is possessed by the devil will be condemned".<sup>23</sup> The extraordinary determination of the parson is clear not only from the testimonies,<sup>24</sup> but also from his own letter, in which he describes to his superiors that the allegedly possessed woman herself testified by "holding onto the Eucharist and swearing" that demons had possessed her.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, in the parson's opinion, it was not even she that spoke but the evil spirit inside her.

Ferenczi, in order to provide his fellow priests with conclusive evidence of the woman's possession, asked her Latin questions on various theological issues. Ferenc Bodó, the parson from Szentmiklós, described in detail how one such interrogation took

<sup>18</sup>GYÉL I. 6. Visitatio Canonica 1720–21. 4 March 1721.

<sup>19</sup>In this aspect, the entry in the clerical directory is not too informative either: FERENCZI 2009:242.

<sup>20</sup>"*An sciat, viderit, aut audiverit pro testimonio convocatus, quo modo, et qualiter quaedam energumena sit profecta, aut ducta in Csik Szent György ad exorcizandum? Quis primus eam incepit exorcizare? Cujus ex mandato? Qua obedientia?*" – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727.

<sup>21</sup>Reverend Ferenc Bodó is an exception, as he made a vague reference to the fact that the possessed woman wanted to come to Csíkszentgyörgy. – GYÉL I. 1.8/1727.

<sup>22</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimonies of András Kovács, György Ferencz, Ferenc Oláhfalvi and Mihály Kádár.

<sup>23</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Csató.

<sup>24</sup>In his Latin-language testimony, Ferenczi also stated: since the beginning of the world, such a miracle has not yet occurred, and even our Lord Christ himself has not done so. – GYÉL I. 1.9/1727.

<sup>25</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727.

place publicly in the church. The priest asked the woman in Latin whether the Virgin Mary was conceived without original sin. The woman replied in Hungarian, “absolutely, for she is as virgin as Christ”. The next question asked whether the *unio hypostatica* was realized in Christ.<sup>26</sup> The answer to this was also positive: “absolutely”. Finally, the priest inquired as to who was teaching the latter. “The Jesuits”, came the correct answer. Ferenczi argued to those standing around him that even some of his fellow priests are not in possession of such information. A similarly serious theological knowledge was required by the question relating to the various forms of worship of God, the Virgin Mary, and the saints (*cultus latriae, hyperduliae, duliae*).<sup>27</sup> The parson of Csíkszentimre, Ferenc Csató, heard with his own ears when his colleague asked Kata, among other things, about angels, purgatory, the devil’s past, and his archnemesis.<sup>28</sup> It was a cunning response to a question about predestination – which he nonetheless did not quote – that finally convinced Csató of the woman’s devilishness. He figured only the devil is capable of such a thing.<sup>29</sup>

### THE “BENEFITS” OF POSSESSION: PROPHECY AND SEEING

In addition to her responses to the theological questions, it was the woman’s prophecies, visions, divinations, and utterances about dead people that convinced her surroundings of her possession. “Kata also said that she was talking to God, and what she said had great credibility.”<sup>30</sup> “I have heard enough of her prophecies, the Padre and many others have even written down what she said”, testified a Szeklér from Szentgyörgy.<sup>31</sup> Ferenc Bodó, the parson from Szentmiklós, said that the woman spoke of both the living and the dead. Of the late Mihály Mikes and his wife,<sup>32</sup> for example, she claimed that they were in purgatory and will only be “liberated” after 12 years and “100 masses”, and they will be released through great signs because they will appear in white, but no one should be

<sup>26</sup>That is, a personal union of divine and human nature.

<sup>27</sup>The questions were beginning to be leading. It is curious that the interrogator and respondent associated the “*duliae*” cult otherwise reserved for the saints with the Virgin Mother, and the “*hyperduliae*” cult otherwise reserved for the latter with the saints. The mistake was recorded in the minutes without comment. – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727.

<sup>28</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Csató.

<sup>29</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727. Later, as per his own confession, Csató became suspicious of the frequent secret encounters between the priest and the possessed woman, and had a foreboding that it was fraudulent. (At least that is how he interpreted what had occurred, in retrospect and in his defense.) After he took leave of the parson of Csíkszentgyörgy, the latter first sent him pleading letters, later showered him with choice curses. Allegedly, even the possessed woman herself cursed him, “*Damnatus es in aeternum. Quia me deseruisti, cum ordinatus fueris a Deo penes me*”. (Be cursed forever! Why did you leave me when God ordered you to be by my side?) – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727.

<sup>30</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Csató. They tried to convince the doubting Csató with the example of his own ancestors. The possessed woman claimed that his grandmother has been freed of purgatory, but his grandfather was still there. – GYÉL I. 1.9/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Csató.

<sup>31</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of József Keresztes.

<sup>32</sup>We know from an earlier visitation that Count Mihály Mikes was buried in Kisasszony County on 11 February 1721. – GYÉL I 6. Visitatio Canonica 1720–21.

frightened.<sup>33</sup> In retrospect, the “possessed” woman, presumably in a trance state, seemed to have acted as a quasi-seer. Ferenczi often inquired after other *dead people*, and followed the woman’s instructions in celebrating masses for them.<sup>34</sup> In relation to the living, the woman primarily revealed their sins.<sup>35</sup> At other times, she dealt with financial matters.<sup>36</sup>

Responses to religious questions, as well as prophecies and psychic visions, were only accepted as evidence for a short time, and even then, not everyone was convinced of the woman’s possession. Indeed, over time, it was exactly these manifestations that made Ferenczi’s fellow priests become suspicious of Kata along with Ferenczi.<sup>37</sup> They could not interpret their whispers, their secret conversations in any other way than the priest having had taught her the responses and texts.<sup>38</sup> The latter hypothesis was already included in the *deutum*’s accusation concept.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, by having had forced and repeatedly justified the credibility of the prophecies, the priest of Csíkszentgyörgy committed a fundamental impropriety. The exorcism rituals based on the Roman Ritual explicitly forbid priests to pay any attention to the deceptive and diverse chatter of the devil, even if they are about the future or secret things.<sup>40</sup>

## WEEKS OF AGONY

The possession of Kata was already assumed by many based on her physical seizures.<sup>41</sup> In such cases, she has manifested unusual physical strength. According to the letter of the parson, “the demons are always torturing her, day and night, as if they were trying to tear the poor Kató apart.”<sup>42</sup> At the same time, he writes that because of this agony, “at all times, there must be four men by her side.”<sup>43</sup> We also learn that besides the guards, Ferenczi, as well as another priest, had to remain continuously by the woman’s side. The latter instruction came straight from the evil spirit. The bishop was issued a similarly threatening message as the parson: “If he does not appoint a priest to be by your side, he

<sup>33</sup>The woman added that their appearance in white is expected at their grave (“*loco ubi sepulti sunt erunt magna signa*”). – GYÉL I. 1.9/1727.

<sup>34</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimonies of Ferenc Bodó and Ferenc Csató. It is to be noted that celebrating a mass for someone did, of course, bring Ferenczi a very tangible, financial gain.

<sup>35</sup>Some she called out as adulterers, others as drunkards, etc. (“*alios fornicarios, alios ebriosos etc., vocitando*”). – GYÉL I. 1.9/1727.

<sup>36</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of György István.

<sup>37</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727. Testimonies of Ferenc Csató, Mihály Barto and János Zachariás.

<sup>38</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Zsigmond Antal.

<sup>39</sup>“*Quales quaestiones et interrogationes tum de vivis, tum vero de mortuis ab exorcistis eidem propositae etc. etc. (...) Quam et qualem conversationem cum illa, die ac nocte habuerunt? (...) Occulte instruxerunt ne obsessam, quae et qualiter ad interrogata respondeat?*” – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727.

<sup>40</sup>STR 1625:265.

<sup>41</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of József Keresztes.

<sup>42</sup>The plastic description of *demonic possession (possessio)* is strongly reminiscent of the way in which the phenomenon appears in 20<sup>th</sup>-century belief narratives. Cf. Pócs 2001, 2003:230.

<sup>43</sup>The relevant provision in the official ritual of Esztergom states that, when exorcising women, there should always be some honorable persons, preferably relatives of the possessed, assisting the priest. The same provision also warns priests to be vigilant, so that they would not say or do anything that might give rise to inappropriate thoughts.– STR 1625:266.

will be eternally damned if this obsessa is lost because of him.”<sup>44</sup> The demon speaking from within the woman – strangely enough issuing instructions for his own expulsion – even named the priest to be called upon for assistance.<sup>45</sup> The parson of Szentsimon, Mihály Barto, like half a dozen other priests, actually gave in to the request and for some time participated in the protracted exorcism ritual. It is unknown to what degree the rest of the local clergy followed Ferenczi’s instructions in other areas. Even through absentees, the parson of Csíkszentgyörgy wanted to increase the efficacy and power of the exorcism he was conducting. To this end, he asked his colleagues to celebrate masses for the purposes of exorcism.<sup>46</sup>

Part of the unusual circumstances of the exorcism in Csíkszentgyörgy was that the liturgical procedure lasted for a very long time. One of the witnesses interrogated claimed to have guarded the possessed woman for a total of seven weeks.<sup>47</sup> Ferenczi justified the extended duration with the number of demons possessing the woman and the incomprehension of the higher Church authorities. He allegedly managed to reduce the number of evil spirits from an originally approximately 17 million (!) to sixty,<sup>48</sup> but the complete success of the exorcist was impeded by the bishop summoning the congregation of priests. At least this is what the possessing spirit itself claimed in response to a question about the protracted exorcism.<sup>49</sup>

### THE EXORCIST’S ARSENAL

The procedure that was protracted for weeks and months provided an opportunity for the utter exploitation of the centuries-old toolkit of exorcism. When the repeated recitation of texts found in the ritual books<sup>50</sup> did not result in liberation, the exorcist parson turned to various types of sacramentals, objects, and practices. Only a fragment of these was included in the formal exorcism rituals.<sup>51</sup> The overwhelming majority of the special

<sup>44</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727.

<sup>45</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727.

<sup>46</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727.

<sup>47</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of József Keresztes.

<sup>48</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727.

<sup>49</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727.

<sup>50</sup>The case files and the data of the visitations do not provide sufficient points of reference in terms of the exact rituals that were used in the parish. The visitation of 1731 only mentions that there were four of them in use in Csíkszentgyörgy (“*Ritualia 4*”) (KOVÁCS – KOVÁCS 2002:141). Based on comparative data, they might have been various 17<sup>th</sup>-century, respectively 1715 editions of the *Ritual of Esztergom (Rituale Strigoniense)*. For their bibliography, see BÁRTH 1999. The rite of exorcism in the *Rituale Strigoniense* first published by Péter Pázmány (STR 1625:263–292) follows verbatim the text of the Roman ritual (*Rituale Romanum, 1614*) renewed in the spirit of the Council of Trent.

<sup>51</sup>The Roman and consequently domestic rituals of exorcism do not mention any other objects and procedures besides the use of holy water, the crucifix, and the stole. According to these manuals, the most important weapon of exorcism is the spoken word. It is no coincidence that most of the prayers quote the words of the Scripture. Cf. STR 1625:263–292.



procedures represent solutions that were not officially accepted, considered to be an alternative heritage of most likely medieval origins, or – presumably – the parson's "own" methods.<sup>52</sup>

It is almost natural that during the exorcism the priest frequently used holy water and holy oil.<sup>53</sup> In his testimony, Ferenc Csató ironically noted that Ferenczi had so thoroughly aspersed the parsonage that they were lucky if they remained dry.<sup>54</sup> He rubbed the olive oil he consecrated on the patient's temples, eyes, breasts, navel, feet, and, according to some testimonies, even her "*pudendum*", so as to expel the devil manifesting in the form of protrusions, limb by limb.<sup>55</sup> The parson of Csíkszentgyörgy used an exorcism procedure generally known but not officially recommended when he added to the incense burner not only frankincense, but also sulfur<sup>56</sup> and various strongly scented plants.<sup>57</sup> In regards to smoking, however, it was a rather unique exorcism tool<sup>58</sup> when Ferenczi had the woman draw the image of the demons and placed it on the embers, so that as the smoke slowly

<sup>52</sup>In the absence of contemporary parochial catalogues, it is difficult to determine what other "alternative" manual, in addition to the official diocesan ritual, Ferenczi may have used in his exorcism. Based on some of the methods and procedures mentioned below, we can conclude that the priest of Szentgyörgy might have known Hieronymus Mengus' two-volume Exorcist Manual or its extracted version (MENGUS 1697a, 1697b). The Franciscan Mengus' handbook was considered to be the most important exorcism manual of the entire early modern era. Cf. FRANZ 1909:II. 585. Note 3. On the origin and impact of the work, see: PETROCCHI 1957; PROBST 2008.

<sup>53</sup>In addition to the generally known and officially sanctioned use of holy water, fewer parallels can be found for the use of chrism (holy oil). The *Flagellum daemonum* offers a variety of chrismations for the purposes of exorcism. – MENGUS 1697a:180–182, 188–189. The *Fustis daemonum* prescribed the same for removing hexes from married couples, firstly by anointing the body, and secondly by ingesting the oil: MENGUS 1697b:215–216. On the background of the blessing of the oil in general, see: FRANZ 1909:I. 335–361.

<sup>54</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Csató.

<sup>55</sup>"With the holy oil, the Padre anointed the parts of her naked body that she indicated the devil possessed, even her pudendum" (the latter was later redacted and refined to say in Latin: "*etiam in locis secretis*") – GYÉL I. 1.8/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Oláhfalvi. The official ritual proposes to sprinkle the protrusions caused by the devil moving within the body with holy water and to mark them by drawing the symbol of the cross. – STR 1625:265. According to the ordinance of the *Flagellum daemonum*, the patient *should be anointed with the holy oil* on the eyes, the forehead, the ears, the chest around the heart, the pulse point on the forearm, the hands, and the pulse points on the foot, while reciting the following words: "*Ego ungo te N. hoc oleo benedicto, et per istam unctionem absolvo † te ab omnibus maleficiis, incantationibus, ligaturis, signaturis et facturis tibi arte diabolica factis. In nomine Pa†tris, et Fi†lii, et Spiritus†Sancti.Amen.*" – MENGUS 1697a:188.

<sup>56</sup>One parallel, among others, can be found in the I. exorcism of *Fustis daemonum*: "*Si autem exire noluerit, suppone ignem cum sulphure ardentem, prius benedictis ante patientem; et fac illum profumigari...*" – MENGUS 1697b:64. In the same place in the III. exorcism: "*...si noluerint dicere veritatem, fac suffumigationem ex rebus foetentibus, puta sulphure, camphora, asa foetida, et similibus.*" – MENGUS 1697b:116.

<sup>57</sup>For the use of frankincense (most often along with gold and myrrh), as well as certain herbs and plants (ruta, lavender, rose, etc.) in exorcism, see MENGUS 1697a:189–191, 211, 232–236. On the modern-day aspects of all these benedictions: BÁRTH 2010.

<sup>58</sup>Parallels of the procedure can be found in the VI. exorcism of *Flagellum daemonum*: "*Hic exorcista habeat imaginem pictam illius daemonis, qui opprimit obsessum, cum ejus nomine scripto super caput ipsius imaginis praeparatam, et conjurando ignem similiter praeparatum, dicat sequentem conjurationem.*" – MENGUS 1697a:134.

consumed the drawing, the devil's power would be consumed as well.<sup>59</sup> As a tool based on an elementary idea of the removal of evil, the priest also consecrated some twigs for "casting the devil out of the house, sweeping him out."<sup>60</sup> On Ferenczi's instructions, the house, the window, the stove, and all the rooms were swept with the consecrated twigs.<sup>61</sup> In addition, the priest also blessed several curved rods with which they hit the woman's back and head.<sup>62</sup> It is remarkable that this method was also suggested by the possessed herself.<sup>63</sup> The success of the exorcism was ensured with not merely such external means: the exorcist parson also blessed the woman's food and drink.<sup>64</sup> Most commoner witnesses noticed that Kata did not eat just anything.<sup>65</sup> "She was very picky with her food, so Kata was in charge in that, too."<sup>66</sup> "Kata was very fond of meat, she did not even eat anything, mostly honey scones, mead, or honey water."<sup>67</sup> In addition to gastronomic indulgences, her body was also pampered. After blessing various herbs and grasses, they were used to make a bath,<sup>68</sup> which, according to the manuals, could have demonstrable exorcistic effects.<sup>69</sup> Several witnesses from Szentgyörgy asserted that "Kata was bathed in wine."<sup>70</sup>

### THE END JUSTIFIES THE MEANS?

In higher ecclesiastical circles, it was mostly the incorrect use of church objects, and especially of the Eucharist, that provoked outrage. At the time of the exorcism in Szentgyörgy, many pieces of clerical clothing ended up on the "possessed" woman. Although the use of the *stole* – during exorcism – is allowed by the ritual book,<sup>71</sup> it seemed excessive that several (2-3) stoles were ruined during the protracted procedure, and even a liturgical alb and *superpelliceum* (surplice) were damaged.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, none of the official ceremonials included instructions to dress the possessed in an alb and have them

<sup>59</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Zsigmond Antal. In his Latin testimony, as an explanation of the smoking of the image, Antal adds: "...donec quasi spiritus in ipso deficeret". – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727

<sup>60</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Csató.

<sup>61</sup>Testimony of Ferenc Csató. Here, the exorcist used the *eliminatory* (removing) rite of "sweep-out", which in Heiler's religio-phenomenological categorization is a common form of sacred actions known in many religions. – HEILER 1961.

<sup>62</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727.

<sup>63</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Csató.

<sup>64</sup>Among the *benedictions of the Flagellum daemonum*, the blessing of bread and wine and all sorts of (not specifically clarified) drinks are indeed included. – MENGUS 1697a:182–188, 191–194, 207–211.

<sup>65</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of András Szekeres.

<sup>66</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Andrásné Dobondi.

<sup>67</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of György Ferencz.

<sup>68</sup>Reverend Ferenc Csató noticed that even the ingredients of the bath were according to the woman's instructions. GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727.

<sup>69</sup>See, for example, the blessing of the bath in one of the popular collections of benedictions: MB 1685:417–419.

<sup>70</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of György Ferenczi.

<sup>71</sup>In the instructions of the Esztergom ritual, there is no mention of binding with respect to the stole. The prescription is for the priest to wrap one end of the stole around the neck of the possessed (probably as carefully as it is done during the binding of the hands of the parties in a wedding ceremony), put his other hand on their head and thus say the prayer. – STR 1625:270.

<sup>72</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of József Keresztes.

sleep or bathe in it.<sup>73</sup> The use of the Eucharist in the exorcism was a particularly serious circumstance.<sup>74</sup> The priest committed a transgression in keeping the sacrament in his house and not in the church.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, Ferenczi let the woman hold the monstrance, using it to “force” the woman and her demons to tell the truth.<sup>76</sup> Although this procedure does have medieval parallels, the regulations stipulate that the Host is to be placed on the head of the possessed.<sup>77</sup> In Szentgyörgy, they went even further when, according to the concordant testimonies of the witnesses, a piece of the Host was “sewn into a piece of cloth and kept around Kata’s neck at all times.”<sup>78</sup> The priest also used the *pyx* (small monstrance) for the exorcism,<sup>79</sup> as well as the *ciborium* (communion vessel) and the monstrance. At times he even placed the crucifix on the woman’s chest and abdomen.<sup>80</sup> With regard to the latter – because they were in physical contact with the woman and indirectly or directly with her sexual organ<sup>81</sup> – an accusation of desecration has obviously also arisen.

### FROM WHISPERS TO A SEXUAL ACT: THE STEPS OF EROTICISM

Our story thus reached the most important motive of the scandal: the erotic aspect of the exorcism of Csíkszentgyörgy. In this regard, the overwhelming majority of the witnesses

<sup>73</sup>This element was also included in the preliminary questionnaires of the interrogation: “*Alba pro sanctissimo missae sacrificio celebrando adhiberi solita die aut nocte illam induerunt ne?*” – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727. Most of the witnesses unanimously admitted to their use. – GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Bodó. He also testified that Ferenczi covered the head of the woman with *velum* – a shroud or cover used in church for a variety of purposes. According to medieval examples in Western Europe, the possessed were during the exorcism sometimes seated in a tub filled with holy water, stripped naked, their neck, groin, and thighs wrapped with a stole. – FRANZ 1909:II. 571–572.

<sup>74</sup>The third group of preliminary questions concerned only this topic: “*Quomodo et qualiter venerabile sacramentum tractarunt, dederunt ne ad manus obsessae in templo, domo, aut in balneo? etc. Ita, ut hoc cessisset in prostitutionem venerabilis sacramenti? Illud venerabile sacramentum servarunt ne in domo? Si ita, ubi? Qualiter et cur? Quis modus orandi obsessae ante venerabile sacramentum praescriptus? Ut post absolutam orationem, et post quaesita, et interrogata a venerabili sacramento, prophetaret obsessa, quis voluit aut mandavit?*” – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727. The relevant passage of the Esztergom ritual admonishes extreme caution, in general, when using holy things (*res sacrae*) in exorcism, while it completely rejects the use of the Eucharist: “*Sanctissima vero Eucharistia super caput obsessi, aut aliter ejus corpori non admoveatur ob irreverentiae periculum.*” – STR 1625:265.

<sup>75</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Csató.

<sup>76</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Bodó. József Ferenczi saw the *paten* in the hands of the priest of Szentgyörgy wrapped with the *purificatorium*.

<sup>77</sup>The Eucharist was occasionally replaced with relics. – FRANZ 1909:II.570.

<sup>78</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of József Keresztes.

<sup>79</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Csató.

<sup>80</sup>„...*saepius etiam pectori, ventri applicabat crucifixum et pyxidem venerabile sacramentum continentem...*” – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727. According to the Esztergom ritual, the crucifix could be placed within arm’s reach or in sight of the possessed: “*Habeat prae manibus, vel in conspectu crucifixum.*” – STR 1625:265.

<sup>81</sup>„*Non semel, sed pluries intra pedes obsessae exiguo infra genitalia pressit ciborium sacratissimum continens sacramentum, et quidem publice; supra tamen vestes muliebres.*” – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Csató. The same case was confirmed by Reverend Zsigmond Antal as well. According to his report, the woman was not naked when the priest “lowered the Eucharist between her legs.” – GYÉL I. 1.8/1727.

interrogated provided a testimony, sometimes detailed, incriminating the parson and others that could be suspected of such acts. These minute remarks, mostly directed at gestures and attitudes, are exciting to us not because they testify to the desires and weaknesses of a Roman Catholic priest of nearly three centuries ago, but because to the community, they probably signaled the various signs and stages of a love/sexual relationship.

The basis of the suspicion that the priest was facing was the undeniable fact of sleeping in close proximity of the allegedly possessed woman.<sup>82</sup> Many have overheard them “whispering”.<sup>83</sup> “I saw the Padre under a blanket with the *obsessa*”, said parson Ferenc Bodó, for example.<sup>84</sup> He also described a specific case in which he overheard a nighttime event. When he was in Csíkszentgyörgy, Ferenczi wanted him to sleep next to the woman. Having refused, he laid down on the ground on some straw, further away but still in the same room. He heard as the woman whispered the following into the ears of one of the guards lying next to her: “Touch my breasts, look how the demons are rubbing inside!” When the man touched her, the earwitness priest began to snore to feign sleep. The woman then further pleaded with the man next to her to touch her navel, where the evil spirits are flowing out of. Then she begged him to touch her even lower. The witness – in his own admission – fell asleep at this point. But he stated with certainty that all the while the priest was lying on the other side of the woman.<sup>85</sup>

For eyewitnesses, it clearly seemed like fondling, an “indecenty”, when the Padre rubbed oil into the protrusions on Kata’s body that suggested the devil’s presence.<sup>86</sup> It was utterly unmistakable when they found the woman seated in the priest’s lap, laughing.<sup>87</sup> József Ferenczi, a parson from Szentlélek, was stunned to see at the Szentgyörgy parsonage that the priest was sitting at the table when the woman came over, slung herself over the table, and touched her naked foot directly to the priest’s.

<sup>82</sup>It is no coincidence that among the preliminary questions of the interrogation, the woman’s nighttime conditions were also included: “*Qualiter et ubi jacere illam jusserunt?*” – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727.

<sup>83</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of András Kovács. The “whispering” was clearly interpreted as a subtle clue of intimacy. – GYÉL I. 1.8/1727. Testimony of György István.

<sup>84</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. The same was confirmed by János Zachariás’ testimony

<sup>85</sup>“*Ardente adhuc lucerna audio semel mulierem insurrare auribus cujusdam viri jacentis ex una parte ad latus mulieris ... haec formalia: Tange inquit pectus meum, qualiter contriverint daemones; ubi vir tetigisset, ego incepti ronos trahere fingens interim me dormire, mulier ulterius obsecrat, ut etiam umbilicum tangeret, ubi evagantur maligni spiritus; imo cogit precibus etiam inferius tangere. Haec ubi inaudivi verecundia perfusus operante Deo optimo mox obdormivi. Quid ex post factum est, ignoro. Verum tamen certum est, reverendum patrem Ferenczi alia ex parte ad latus mulieris jacuisse, sub eodemque centone illa nocte cum obsessa dormivisse.*” – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727.

<sup>86</sup>According to the testimonies of Ferenc Bodó and Zsigmond Antal, the priest kept groping the woman’s chest, abdomen, legs and “above her knees”, naked, even “near her pubic region” (“*in proximis partibus nude...*”). – GYÉL I. 1.8/1727. In his Latin testimony, Ferenc Csató, quoting the dialogues, painted the scene quite realistically: “*Ad partes foemorum etiam pudendis proximiores sub vestibis mulieris manum attollebat pater frequentius currentes sub cute (ut ajebat obsessa) capere nitens, et palam hisce ex illa quaerebat, est ne hic, est ne hic daemon?* Illa respondente: *ibi, ibi, tunc extraxit manum, et denuo sciscitabatur his formalibus: Extraxi ne? cui mulier, omnino extraxit...*” – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727. Some testimonies claimed that this procedure took place in the chamber, away from others’ eyes. – GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Pál János.

<sup>87</sup>“*...she often sat in the Padre’s lap.*” – GYÉL. I. 1.8/1727. Testimony of András Kovács. “I saw the woman sitting on the knees of the Padre, kissing the Padre ...” – GYÉL I. 1.8/1727. Testimony of István Dobondi.

All the while the priest remained motionless.<sup>88</sup> The public embraces<sup>89</sup> and kisses were difficult for Ferenczi to explain as necessary consolation.<sup>90</sup> Witnesses interpreted it as a sign of a high degree of intimacy that the woman put her head on the priest's lap and "rummaged through his head and beard".<sup>91</sup> The baths also had an erotic overtone. The wet liturgical vestment clinging to the woman's body was not a sight for priestly eyes.<sup>92</sup> Someone also noticed that after the woman was finished, "Padre Ferenczi washed up in her bath water."<sup>93</sup> Reverend Csató saw repeatedly with his own eyes that the priest followed Kata into the chamber, where she went "to relieve herself".<sup>94</sup> If possible, the protagonists of our story went even further when they kissed while they were eating, and they broke a piece of bread with their teeth so that one half was held by the woman in her mouth, the other by the priest.<sup>95</sup> Aside from the manifestations of sexual foreplay, several people also referred to the concrete act of intercourse. It would be difficult to interpret the flutters under the blanket in any other way.<sup>96</sup> Someone heard directly from Kata that it was not only the parson, but also a Franciscan monk (who was also seen on several occasions sleeping with her<sup>97</sup> that she had established a sexual relationship with.<sup>98</sup> Due to the large number of potential candidates (let us not forget about the young men guarding

<sup>88</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727., 9/1727. Testimony of József Ferenczi.

<sup>89</sup>"She often indicated that the devils were torturing her inside, went to the Padre to be hugged, and the Padre held her tightly." – GYÉL I. 1.8/1727. Testimony of Andrásné Dobondi.

<sup>90</sup>"*Amplexabantur etiam subinde se invicem, et oscula dabat pater mulieri saepius.*" – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Bodó. "...she sat on the knees of the Padre, they kissed each other." – GYÉL I. 1.8/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Oláhfalvi

<sup>91</sup>"*Ipse pater caput suum in sinum Catharinae reclinavit, et sic (fors pediculos) uti et in barba quaeri curavit publice quidem frequenter.*" – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Csató. Delousing as a striking expression of a love affair has been seen in other contemporary sources as well.

<sup>92</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Reverend Zsigmond Antal.

<sup>93</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Zsigmond Antal. In the Latin version, he added: "*quod turpe est*". – GYÉL I. 1.9/1727.

<sup>94</sup>She said she could not go in there "to empty her stomach" without a priest: "*In cameram cum Catharina patrem ingredi saepius vidi ad exonerationem (salva venia) stomachi, dixit enim mulier, se solam sine sacerdote ingredi minime posse.*" – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Csató. The strange circumstance that they had retreated to the chamber had been seen by others, but their testimonies left the purpose of the thing obscure. – GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Mihály Kádár. The exorcising Padre might have been able to excuse himself with the explanation that he was seeking tangible evidence of demonic possession in the stool of the woman, which the Esztergom ritual encourages (but not at all costs): "*Iubeatque daemonem dicere, an detineatur in illo corpore ob aliquam operam magicam, aut malefica signa, vel instrumenta: quae si obsessus ore sumserit, evomat...*" – STR 1625.266. Cf. the experiences of a 20<sup>th</sup>-century exorcist with the examination of the stool of the possessed: Amorth 2005.140.

<sup>95</sup>„*Semel etiam vidi ad mensam unius offae panem in duas partes ab iisdem dividi, ita ut unum extremum Reverendus Pater dentibus, aliud vero mulier tenuerit, sic dentibus divisum panem manducaverunt.*" – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727. Testimony of Ferenc Bodó.

<sup>96</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Mihály Kádár. In the Latin version: "*sed vidi tamen infra tapetum patrem cum Catharina, satis se movisse*" – GYÉL. I. 1.9/1727.

<sup>97</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727.

<sup>98</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of János Dobondi.

Kata!<sup>99</sup>), she herself did not know for sure when and from whom she got pregnant. Most of all, it was the trip to Csíksomlyó, mentioned above, that was suspicious in this respect. The only witness who denied the alleged events took place on the way to Somlyó was Andrásné Dobondi, an assistant at the parsonage of Csíkszentgyörgy. She did not think Kata could have gotten pregnant on the road, because “she had the monthly flow, I washed the foulness out of her shirt.”<sup>100</sup> The woman’s pregnancy was also explicitly referred to and asked about in the questionnaire of the bishop’s investigation.<sup>101</sup> The father’s identity probably remained uncertain.

## EPILOGUE AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

I have already mentioned that I have not found reliable data on the outcome of the case and the subsequent fate of György Ferenczi.<sup>102</sup> Ferenczi’s name is not included among the priests mentioned in the available visitations. We know that in 1729, he was certainly no longer the parson in Csíkszentgyörgy.<sup>103</sup> From the point of view of Church leadership, it is quite telling how the contents of the dossier of the case are summed up on the cover: “Reports on György Ferenczi, parson of Szentgyörgy, who in a despicable and ungodly manner mistreated a woman who feigned demonic possession.”<sup>104</sup> The serious accusations were confirmed rather than contradicted by the testimonies. Calling the woman’s possession into question clearly reinforced the fact of underlying sexual motivation. The latter was not necessarily the primary one, it could have been a mere “ancillary element” in the momentum of the events. There is no doubt that the parson – at least for a while – really believed in the woman’s devilishness. In a typical instance, he attributed even his own eye disease to the devil’s curse.<sup>105</sup> Kata did, indeed, exhibit “symptoms” that were evidence of her “possession” to not only the priest, but also the other priests and villagers. Presumably, Ferenczi had gotten involved in the sexual relationship only as a result of certain instances of the protracted exorcism and the erotic fervor of the woman. In his defense, he constantly claimed that the events have been *misconstrued*. The potential for at least two interpretations of the events does indeed exist to a certain degree. It is even possible that the woman was looking for demons

<sup>99</sup>“I often saw that the guards were kissing Kata”, said József Keresztes, a guard of the woman for seven weeks. GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. András Kovács specifically named a man named Ferenc Falu, “who was guarding Kata, kissing Kata. As we took Kata from Szentgyörgy to Somlyó, I saw in Somlyó one night their fornication with Kata”. – GYÉL I. 1.8/1727.

<sup>100</sup>GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Andrásné Dobondi.

<sup>101</sup>“*Fuit ne obsessa impregnata, aut est ne? Si est, a quo, etc. etc.*” – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727.

<sup>102</sup>For the insufficiency, cf. FERENCZI 2009:242.

<sup>103</sup>That year, in another case in Csíkszentgyörgy, the name of Gergely Kiss appears as a local pastor: GYÉL I. 1.1/1729. At the same time, in the visitation of 1731, a 34-year-old priest called János Kiss was listed in this function: KOVÁCS – KOVÁCS 2002:140.

<sup>104</sup>“*Relatoriae contra Georgium Ferenczi, parochum Szyörgyiensem, muliere ficta obsessa, foede ac sacrilege abutentem.*” – GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727.

<sup>105</sup>To expel the devil, he asked for help from his fellow priest. – GYÉL I. 1.8/1727. Testimony of Zsigmond Antal. In the Latin version of the testimony of the parson of Kászonyfalu (Caşinu Nou), he concluded that the procedure had been conducted with consecrated fingers (probably dipped into holy water) (“*consecratos applicabam digitos*”). – GYÉL I. 1.9/1727.

hiding in the priest's hair, and the latter was compelled to follow her into the "chamber" with the intention of discovering the objects of the curse. But his gentle feelings for the woman could hardly be denied by Ferenczi, since they are obvious from the sentences of his letter and from his countless gestures.

We do not know what the woman's punishment was, whom in one instance the documents called a "liar and bad cheater".<sup>106</sup> Her proven lechery presumably earned her the usual judgment of the era.<sup>107</sup> At the same time, the acceptance of the fact of her fraud exempted her from an even more serious accusation: communication with the devil, and the associated possible suspicion of *witchcraft*. Although this harsher version did not seriously occur to the authorities, it can be inferred from sporadic, insinuated data that such an explanation has also taken root in the local society. To illustrate this kind of attitude of the people of Szentgyörgy, we quote one of the witnesses: "The people that guarded Kata were quite often kissed by Kata; they said, get out of here, witch."<sup>108</sup> The testimony of a young bondsman serving at the parsonage of Szentgyörgy, András Kovács, preserved a particular and instructive narrative in this respect: "Once the sister of the Padre, Elizabeth, came to the house of the Padre and said to Kata: Ay, Kata, on the woodpile by the fence, I saw the incubus in the image of a large red rooster, its light completely suffusing the woodpile! The Padre then got angry with her and cursed his sister out of the house (...)"<sup>109</sup> The early modern terminology of the word "*incubus*" has various shades of meaning.<sup>110</sup> In this text, it refers to an *incubus* demon (an aggressive love partner), which happens to be in the form of a rooster.<sup>111</sup> The unusual furor of the priest may be understood in light of the contemporary notion of the incubus as the helper spirit of a witch.<sup>112</sup>

Like the interconnection between demonic possession and witchcraft, the relationship between possession and *visions* was just as "well-known" in contemporary ecclesiastical

<sup>106</sup> "(...) *mendacissima et iniquissima deceptorix*" – GYÉL I. 1. 9/1727. Testimony of Márton Szépvízi.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Kiss 1998.

<sup>108</sup> GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of Andrásné Dobondi. The interconnectedness of demonic possession and notions of witchcraft in the era can be documented in a great and varied way. Cf.: CLARK 1997; Pócs 2001:166–174; Tóth G. 2008.

<sup>109</sup> GYÉL I. 1. 8/1727. Testimony of András Kovács. In the Latin version of the testimony, the scene is the woodpile near the cemetery ("*penes caemeterium*"), and the terminology used for the incubus is "*spiritum incubum*". – GYÉL I. 1.9/1727.

<sup>110</sup> The various functions of this mythological figure are highlighted by the fact that two years after the exorcism, also in Csíkszentgyörgy, it was not the erotic function of the "incubus" that was emphasized but its role of continually "generating" money for his owner as a helper spirit. – GYÉL I. 1.1/1729.

<sup>111</sup> The "helper spirit" in the form of a rooster (hen, snake, frog, etc.) as a demonic creature possessing its master and committing erotic aggression is well-known in Central European folk belief. – Pócs 2001:154–155, 173. The figure of an incubus lover appears in 1737 in connection with the servant of the priest of Csíkszentsimon, a village neighboring Szentgyörgy. – GYÉL I. 1.7/1737. From the brief, two-page report of the case, it can be inferred that Reverend Mihály Barto, who was a witness to the exorcism in Szentgyörgy and whom the possessed woman specially recommended to Ferenczi from among the priests nearby, was himself suspected of fornication a few years later. For his biography, cf. FERENCZI 2009:178.

<sup>112</sup> For a concise, to the point summary of the early modern manifestations of the incubus, see: Pócs 2007. For the 20<sup>th</sup>-century proliferation of the figure of the Transylvanian "lüdérc" as an *incubus* demon, see: KESZEG 2003.

culture and local society.<sup>113</sup> Regardless of the question – too difficult to determine in retrospect – whether the visions of the devilish woman were suggested by the priest of Csíkszentgyörgy, or indeed the devil himself, it is nonetheless obvious that no one doubted the *possibility that the woman thrashing in a trance state could have visited the otherworld*. The remark, “many others have written down what she said” is particularly telling of the social and cultural embeddedness of the event. When Kata spoke of the deceased souls well-known to the community suffering in purgatory, with a slight exaggeration, she foreshadowed the figure of the mediator seer of the modern peasantry.<sup>114</sup>

It is known from the testimonies that at the time of the investigation, that is, in the spring and summer of 1727, Kata enjoyed the hospitality of Franciscan monks in Csíksomlyó. It is an attestation of the parson’s attachment that even during this time he sent food to the woman.<sup>115</sup> Obviously, it is not a coincidence that the woman presumed to be possessed was transported to the famous Somlyó shrine. In this respect, it is enough to refer to the widespread phenomenon of the exorcism activities of the priests of late medieval and early modern shrines (Pócs 2001:188–190). An even more important factor, however, is that after the priest failed, they requested the assistance of the monks in a matter that required a specialist. For the time being, we do not know how the *Franciscans* related to the alleged possession of the woman, but it is a telling instance that Kata remained in the monastery of Somlyó for months. Properly versed in the field of exorcism, the competence of the Franciscans, who had a penchant for meeting “popular” demands, was not (yet) questioned by the religious leadership. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially as a result of the so-called *Catholic enlightenment*, efforts to reduce Franciscan pastoral practice increased in Hungary, too, a spectacular “battle” between a charismatic Franciscan exorcist in Sombor and the archbishop of Kalocsa setting the precedent in the late 1760s (BÁRTH 2016). The latter event can accurately be embedded in the process of European ecclesiastical (and secular) shift in attitude towards demonic possession and exorcism, often accompanied by scandals (Cf. MIDELFORT 2005).

It seems that at the time of our story, in 1727, it was not the exorcism conducted by the parson of Csík that the Transylvanian Diocese’s leadership was concerned about, although such things did require the authorization of the bishop. This “transgression” in itself would not have resulted in the liquidation of the priest at the time. It is clear from the European literature on the history of ecclesiastical exorcism that the use of exorcism for various (mostly curative) purposes was prevalent in the 16-17<sup>th</sup> centuries (FRANZ 1909: II.514–585; MIDELFORT 1992:136; PÓCS 2001:140–143, 187; THOMAS 1971:477–493). The great waves of exorcism, which were often associated with the activity of a charismatic priest or monk, largely subsided by the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In Germany, there

<sup>113</sup>The interpretation of fortune-telling as a possession (divine or demonic) has been abundantly documented in European cultural history since the Middle Ages. Cf. Pócs 2001:143, 166–167. In her comprehensive study of the phenomena of trance and visions, Éva Pócs also points to the issue of possession: Pócs 1998. For the background of the topic, see the other studies in the volume also edited by Pócs: Pócs (ed.) 1998.

<sup>114</sup>The data is also particularly valuable as the research does not abound in early modern data regarding rural seers (cf. CZÖVEK 1987). In her latest survey, Éva Pócs concluded that in the era there were only three witch trials in which specific persons inquiring about or from the dead were involved: Pócs 2005. On the European connections of Hungarian seers in general, see: Pócs 2002.

<sup>115</sup>“*Even now the Padre sends foodstuff to Somlyó.*” – *GYÉL I. 1.8/1727*. Testimony of Ferenc Oláhfalvi.



are still examples of large-scale exorcisms in the 1770s, but the popular ecclesiastical personality they centered around already had to face attacks, doubts and disputes inspired by the secular and clerical enlightenment.<sup>116</sup> Due to the extraordinary scarcity of medieval and early modern data, an overview of the historical issues of exorcism in Hungary has yet to be compiled. To create a sufficiently nuanced picture, we can mostly contribute case studies, which, because of the nature of the subject, may usually be organized around a “scandalous” event that was worth documenting.<sup>117</sup> The documents of such scandals are extremely important sources as snapshots that provide an insight into the deep structure of the examined cultural phenomena, and, paradoxically – despite their inherent uniqueness, or in fact through it – they are capable of formulating some general lessons. Among the latter, issues of “norm and transgression” are not a negligible factor.

It is only the emergence of further relevant sources and the analysis of newer “cases” that can properly illuminate the cultural-historical shift that took place in terms of exorcism at the time, which for the time being has only emerged in outlines. Such an examination – whether in the context of the local (Transylvanian) framework, or in the context of the vertical levels of ecclesiastical society, from the bishop to the lower clergy and monks – would certainly be edifying. Of course, such research cannot concentrate on just the assessment of demonic possession and its ecclesiastical remedy, but must take into account its wider context, such as the extensive phenomenon of church blessing/curse (benediction and exorcism), the issue of miracles and healings taking place at shrines, or the complicated topic of the shifts in demon beliefs.

The question may arise as to what happened after the above-mentioned shift in mentality in elite culture. Relevant ethnographic research – even out of Transylvania, among others – provide a multifaceted answer to this. As this exorcist “service” of the Roman Catholic clergy ceased, people sought new solutions to possession cases. On the one hand, the role of rural healers increased, who through their incantations – strongly influenced by ecclesiastical exorcism texts – preserved a significant part of exorcism processes. More recent ethnographic collections (not limited to rural specialists) document the vernacular use of liturgical supplies, special equipment and sacramentals (incense, stinkstone, consecrated catkins, holy water) whose purpose was to expel demons, and which were part of the special toolkit of late medieval (before the Council of Trent) and subsequent alternative, early modern ecclesiastical exorcism rituals (Pócs 2001:192). On the other hand, in addition to amateur attempts, ecclesiastical exorcism considered to be more powerful than all others necessarily still survived, just not among Catholic (or Protestant) priests. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these kinds of exorcism services by *Romanian priests* and monks, and the flourishing practice of Hungarian parishioners who used them, were documented as a self-evident phenomenon by scholars of folk belief conducting research on the borders of Western Christianity and Romanian Orthodoxy.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>116</sup>There is an excellent monograph on the life and exorcism activity of Johann Joseph Gassner in this light: MIDELFORT 2005.

<sup>117</sup>A long line of case studies on exorcism can be cited from international literature, examples of which are: ALMOND 2004; ERNST 1972; LEVI 2001; MIDELFORT 1992, 2005. Our recent study: BÁRTH 2016.

<sup>118</sup>Beside those mentioned above (e.g., PÓCS 2001), see another case study by KOMÁROMI: 2007.

Finally, I have to revisit the general considerations posited at the beginning of my essay. Now that I have outlined the erstwhile story based on the documents available to me – not so rich in narrative turns, but in its “thick” form reflecting the reality – and lined up some possible interpretations in the form of “lessons”, we can circle back to the question: did this procedure yield a generalizable result or benefit?

There is no doubt that the examined source contains a number of historical ethnographic data. From folk belief (demon belief, visions, seers, incubus beliefs, sacramentals, etc.) to some areas of material culture (from nutrition to sleep culture), we could have selected a few ancillary, sporadic “tidbits” and compared them with similar data found in other sources in some thematic studies. It is equally obvious that the present case provides an extremely plastic picture of the toolkit and practices of exorcism from the period of the history of exorcism in Hungary that is otherwise poor in sources. It is undeniable that our source also contributes quite a lot of tiny details to the history of sexuality. Furthermore, the document described in detail above also contributes significantly to our knowledge of the worldview and everyday life of the early modern lower clergy, and thereby to a neglected area of ecclesiastical history.

According to the usual method (which I also utilize sometimes), I could have highlighted these (and other) themes that, examined independently, could have been the center of a different kind of analysis. Here, however, I was focused on not (or just minimally) organizing the source data along ex-post scientific concepts – and adopting its odium – so as to let the disciplinary results of the essay become much less tangible. The determination of whether or not I made the right choice in describing the story of the scandalous exorcism in Csíkszentgyörgy based on source materials is left up to the reader.

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- 1697b *Fustis daemonum, adjurationes formidabiles, potentissimas et efficaces in malignos spiritus fugandos de oppressis corporibus humanis. Ex sacrae apocalypsis fonte, variisque sanctorum patrum auctoritatibus haustus complectens... Venetiis.*

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