

ISTVÁN MONOK

ARISTOCRATS AND BOOK CULTURE AT THE BORDER
OF TWO EMPIRES
IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES



THE MUSLIM EXPANSION had been a political issue in Europe ever since the 7th century. Their first conquering momentum was stopped near Poitiers in 732. However, a considerable part of the Iberian Peninsula remained under Moorish rule until the end of the 15th century. The Turkish expansion towards Europe was for a long time checked in the Balkans but in 1543 the Turks occupied Constantinople. The Kingdom of Hungary which was at the height of its power in the 15th century (during King Matthias' reign) became a loser in the European power game by the beginning of the 16th century and thus suffered a fatal blow in 1526 at the battle of Mohács. The occupation of the Royal capital (Buda) in 1541 and at the same time the invasion of one-third of the country while another third (Transylvania) was turned into an independent state created and maintained for 150 years a situation where the main task for the leading politicians of the region was the reunification of the country. This idea became a determining factor for political thinking. This reunification came about by the end of the 17th century in a way that the medieval Hungarian Kingdom became a part of the Habsburg Empire while Transylvania gained the status of an archduchy. During the struggle, which lasted almost two centuries, the Carpathian Basin often became

a battlefield with particularly fierce fighting during the Fifteen Years' War (1592–1606).

Protestant ideas spreading from the beginning of the 16th century soon became known in Hungary¹. Almost the entire hierarchy of the Catholic Church died at the battle of Mohács. The German inhabitants who were in a majority in the free royal towns were sympathetic to Luther's teachings. The rivalry of the two kings, the Habsburg ruler Ferdinand I and János Szapolyai was coloured by religious debates although both died as Roman Catholics. Those opposing the Habsburg king rejected Catholicism as the religion of the "Austrians". By the end of the 16th century the majority of the population followed one or other of the Protestant creeds although a movement to reconvert the country to Catholicism also began, led by the Jesuit order and directed by Péter Pázmány, the archbishop of Esztergom. A considerable part of the aristocracy became Protestant too, mainly Lutheran although Calvinism enjoyed a considerable following among the Hungarian population. The aristocratic families residing near the borderline of the Turkish Empire and the Holy Roman Empire, along the line of Ozaly, Zagreb, Csáktornya, Alsóindva, Kanizsa, Sárvár, Monyorókerék, Németújvár, Léka, Esterháza, Fraknó, Kismarton, Pozsony, Vöröskő, Biccse, Trencsény, Szklabinya became mainly Luthe-

¹ Tibor Klaniczay: *Réforme et transformation culturelles en Hongrie*. In: *Les réformes: enracinement socio-culturel. XXVe colloque international des études humanistes* Tours, 1–13. juillet 1982. Etudes réunies par Bernard Chevalier, Robert Sauzet. Paris, 1982.; Mihály Balázs: *Einleitung*. In: *Bibliotheca Dissidentium. Répertoire des non-conformistes religieux des seizième et dix-septième siècles*. Éd. par André Séquenny. Tom. XII. Baden–Baden, 1990. /Bibliotheca Bibliographica Aureliana. CXXI./

ran for a few generations and Calvinist in a few cases. However, the contemporaries of Péter Pázmány almost all reconverted to Catholicism. Catholicism thus consolidating its power by the 1660s and assisted by the Habsburg state went as far as imposing conversion by force which was otherwise unknown in contemporary Hungary.

Large numbers of the population, mainly Serbs, Croats and Hungarians, fled to the North to escape the Turkish occupation². This is when the rich families of Szeged and Makó appeared in Nagyszombat, Kassa, Nagyvárad and other towns. At the same time, a great number of Croatian villagers moved to the former villages and towns of Zala, Vas, Sopron and Moson counties while a great many Protestants, coming from the Habsburg's hereditary dominions and, later on during the Thirty Years' War, from Silesia, Bohemia, Württemberg, Pfalz, Bavaria, and also from Vienna (Hernalis), settled down in the same area in the second half of the 16th century. The bourgeoisie moved mostly to Sopron, Ruszt and Kőszeg.³ The Czech exulants settled down mainly in the territories inhabited by Slovaks (Trencsény, Szokolca). This area consequently became quite complex in terms of ethnicity, language and religion.

Considering the history of the cultural institutions,⁴ all this means that the school system, the libraries and other ateliers connected to book culture established and running smoothly by the end of the 15th century were all destroyed. By the be-

ginning of the 17th century a well-organised school system was built up in the spirit of Protestantism mainly due to the responsible thinking of the nobility and the leadership of the towns. It was all destroyed once again during the Fifteen Years' War and by the wars waged against the Habsburg emperors by the archdukes of Transylvania, as well as by the raids of the Turks (by the big invasion of Transylvania by the Tartars in 1658) and by the Thököly and Rákóczi uprisings. Since the Catholic institutions that had been reviving in the 17th century were also destroyed during these wars the 18th century was indeed the century of reconstruction on all sides.

When describing the book culture of the aristocratic families⁵, it is important to emphasise the pattern-setting role of the court culture as well as the fact that the organisational part played formerly by the Hungarian royal courts was consciously taken over by the magnates, not only by the big families presented at this exhibition but also by their relatives: the Mikulich, Erdődy, Istvánffy, Perényi, and the Czobor families. Their main task, in fact, was to defend the borders. All their activities, such as supporting a particular church, establishing schools, housing and offering work to an itinerant printer, financing the studies of promising young people abroad, building fortifications and castles, spreading garden culture as well as new plants (both ornamental and useful plants), inviting foreign architects, musicians, artists and schol-

2 For a summary, see: József Bessenyei: *A menekültek és a magyarországi városhálózat kialakulása a török hódítás kezdeti periódusában*. In: *Tanulmányok Szakály Ferenc emlékére*. Ed: Pál Fodor, Géza Pálffy, István György Tóth. Bp., 2002, MTA TTI (*Gazdaság- és társadalomtörténeti kötetek* 2.) 75–86.

3 István Monok: *Die Bibliothek des Johann Jacob Knaus. Die Reste einer württembergischen protestantischen Bibliothek in Güssing*. In: *Jahrbuch des Ungarischen Kulturinstitutes in Stuttgart*. Hrsg. von Gyula Kurucz. Stuttgart, 2003. 138–146.; –: *Württembergi exulánsok Batthyány Ferenc udvarában*. *Magyar Könyvszemle*, 2003. 205–211.; –: *Die kulturvermittelnde Rolle des Batthyány-Hofes an der Wende vom XVI. zum XVII. Jahrhundert*. In: *Deutsche Sprache und Kultur, Literatur und Presse in Westungarn/Burgenland*. Hrsg. von Wynfrid Kriegleder, Andrea Seidler. Bremen, 2004, Edition Lumičre, 75–90.; –: *Exulanten aus Bayern, Oberpfalz und Pfalz am Batthyány-Hof an der Wende des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*. *Ungarn Jahrbuch* 2004 [2005] 178–189.

4 Tibor Klaniczay: *Les intellectuels dans un pays sans universités (Hongrie: XVIe siècle)*. In: *Intellectuels français, intellectuels hongrois*. Ed. par Béla Köpeczi, Jacques Le Goff. Budapest–Paris, 1985. 99–109.; –: *Die Soziale und institutionelle Infrastruktur der ungarischen Renaissance*. In: *Die Renaissance im Blick der Nationen Europas*. Hrsg. von Georg Kaufmann. Wiesbaden, 1991. /Wolfenbütteler Abhandlungen zur Renaissanceforschung. Bd. 9./ 319–338.

5 István Monok: *A magyarországi főnemesség könyvgyűjtési szokásai a XVI–XVII. században*. *CaféBábel*, 14. kötet (Gyűjtés). 1994/4. 59–68.; –: *Über die höfischen Bibliotheken des XVI–XVII. Jahrhunderts im Karpatenbecken*. *Acta Comeniana* 15–16 (2002) [2003] 127–140.

ars,⁶ can only be interpreted from this perspective; priority was always given to the defence of their estates and the protection of the country.

From the prefaces written to books published in the 16th and 17th centuries in Hungary⁷ and the dedications of students studying abroad (“peregrinus”),⁸ it is possible to follow the change in cultural taste through the generations of the aristocratic families living in this area, as well as the steadfastness or, on the contrary, change in their religious faith. Basic books like the manuals of some highly respected authors from Wittenberg, Heidelberg and Tübingen were published to help the establishment of Protestant churches in Hungary as well as books, school manuals and some occasional pieces of ministers active in the magnates’ courts and other intellectuals. Until the end of the 16th century an increase in the proportion of books of non-religious themes can be observed among the publications while in the first half of the 17th century the emphasis is again primarily on theological writings.⁹ This is due to the increasingly heated disputes with the representatives of the Catholic Church but also to the growing difference in opinion among the Protestant churches. It was only at

the beginning of the 17th century that the Calvinist and the Lutheran Churches of Transdanubia were finally separated.¹⁰ It is remarkable how actively Ferenc Nádasdy (“the Black Lord”), Pál Nádasdy, Ferenc Batthyány, Miklós Bánffy, György Zrínyi, István Illésházy and Kata Pálffy, or Péter Révay influenced the disputes with the help of the printers operating on their estates. The reconverted members of these families (Ferenc Nádasdy, Ádám Batthyány, Kristóf Bánffy, Miklós Esterházy, etc.) transformed the cultural profile of the region by no longer financing the Protestant ministers, their schools or their printing shops and by providing space for the Franciscans, the Jesuits or, in the region where our attention is now focused (the former Western Hungary), for the Cistercian order.

The history of the libraries belonging to the aristocratic families – and especially the composition of these libraries – precisely reflects this change. In general, we can state that by the end of the 16th century these libraries gathered a humanistic collection of books (authors of Antiquity, critical editions of the Church Fathers, contemporary humanists), early Protestant literature independent of their denomination (Luther, Melanchthon, Bu-

6 The classical literary history follows in structure the courts: János Horváth: *A reformáció jegyében*. Bp., 1957; –: *A Perényiek csoportja, János király körül, Nádasdy csoportja, Az Enyingi Török-család kötelékében* and a source edition of modern view: *Magyar udvari rendtartás. Utasítások és rendeletek 1617–1708*. Edited by András Koltai. Bp., 2001, Osiris Kiadó.

7 Károly Szabó: *Régi Magyar Könyvtár* I. kötet (RMK I.). *Az 1531-től 1711-ig megjelent magyar nyelvű hazai nyomtatványok könyvészeti kézikönyve*. Bp., 1879; Károly Szabó: *Régi Magyar Könyvtár* II-dik kötet (RMK II.). *Az 1473-tól 1711-ig megjelent nem magyar nyelvű hazai nyomtatványok könyvészeti kézikönyve*. Bp., 1885; *Régi Magyarországi Nyomtatványok (RMNy). 1473–1600* by Gedeon Borsa, Ferenc Hervay, Béla Holl, István Käfer and Ákos Kelecsényi. Akadémiai Kiadó, Bp., 1971; *Régi Magyarországi Nyomtatványok (RMNy). 1601–1635* by Gedeon Borsa, Ferenc Hervay and Béla Holl, with the help of József Fazakas, János Heltai, Ákos Kelecsényi and Judit Vásárhelyi. Akadémiai Kiadó, Bp., 1983; *Régi Magyarországi Nyomtatványok (RMNy). 1636–1655* by János Heltai, Béla Holl, Ilona Pavercsik and Judit P. Vásárhelyi, with the help of Sándor Dörnyei, Judit V. Ecsedy and István Käfer. Akadémiai Kiadó, Bp., 2000.

8 *Régi Magyar Könyvtár. III-dik kötet. Magyar szerzőktől külföldön 1480-tól 1711-ig megjelent nem magyar nyelvű nyomtatványoknak könyvészeti kézikönyve*. Written by Károly Szabó and Árpád Hellebrant. Bp., 1898; *Régi Magyar Könyvtár. III-dik kötet. Magyar szerzőktől külföldön 1480-tól 1711-ig megjelent nem magyar nyelvű nyomtatványoknak könyvészeti kézikönyve*. Written by Károly Szabó and Árpád Hellebrant. *Pótlások, kiegészítések, javítások. 1–5. kötet*. by Dörnyei Sándor and Irma Szálka under the direction of Gedeon Borsa. Budapest, 1990–1996, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár.

9 Katalin Péter: *Aranykor és romlás a szellemi műveltség állapotában*. In: K. P.: *Papok és nemesek*. Bp., 1995, Ráday Gyűjtemény. 77–97.; For a more recent study see: János Heltai: *A XVII. század első felének (1601–1655) kiadványstruktúrája Magyarországon (Az egyházi-vallási művek funkcionális és használati műfaji rendszere: Műfajteremtő elvek és célok, nyomtatott műfajok)*. unpublished, 2003. For a summary study cf.: János Heltai: *A 17. század első felének kiadványszerkezete: Műfajteremtő elvek és célok*. In: *Fejezetek 17. századi nyomdászatunkból*. ed.: Judit P. Vásárhelyi, Budapest, 2001.

10 István Monok: *Nyugat-magyarországi olvassmányok a XVI–XVII. században*. Muratáj 2002. [2003] 51–66; István Monok: *Lesende Magnaten und Bürger im Westungarn*. In: *Bibliothekar und Forscher. Beiträge zur Landeskunde des burgenländisch-westungarischen Raumes. Festschrift für Norbert Frank zum 60. Geburtstag*. Hrsg. von Felix Tobler. Eisenstadt, 2003. (Burgenländische Forschungen. Sonderband XXV.) 179–190.

genhagen, Calvin, Beze, Zwingli, etc.), Latin, German, Italian and especially French historical literature, legal manuals, as well as the publications of the printing shops financed by the respective family. The magnates who themselves were involved in church organization (István Illésházy, Ferenc Batthyány, György Thurzó) purchased large numbers of books in this field, even ones dealing with details of these issues.

Besides administering a serious blow to the institutional network of the country, the Fifteen Years' War focused the attention of the European powers on the necessity and the urgency of driving the Turks out of the Carpathian Basin and the Balkans. This is why the turn of the 16th and the 17th centuries was in part marked by the idea of combined efforts by the Christian powers. In theology it was the Irenic thoughts, in philosophy the Christian Neo-Stoicism, while in political thinking the books of "unio christiana" that became popular. The ideas and plans, mainly of French origin, for an alliance to expel the Turks reached the libraries of the Hungarian aristocrats in different forms. This is not surprising since the plans suggesting the alliance of the French king and the Habsburg emperor as the basis of "unio christiana" broke away from the traditional idea of one great power defeating the other. Unfortunately the Thirty Years' War made this latter the prevailing reality. For Hungarian and Transylvanian politics it meant that the choice narrowed down to "either with the Habsburgs or without them" and there

was no unanimity on the answer to be given. Péter Pázmány tried to influence the young generation of aristocrats to think in other terms. For him, as well as for Miklós Zrínyi, Ferenc Nádasdy, Miklós Pázmány and others, later on, the alternative of an alliance with the Habsburgs and Protestant Transylvania, without this latter being defeated, was a plausible one. It is no wonder then that the aristocrats who collected books enriched their knowledge and their libraries in the field of political science. When preparing for the war they did not forget about books on modern fortification and the art of war.¹¹

By the middle and the second half of the 17th century there was a change of lifestyle among the aristocrats of the Western region of Hungary in the sense that they devoted increasing attention to modernizing their environment and way of life. They studied languages. Besides German and Italian, French was more widely used. They focused the education of their children on civilizational matters and on teaching them the knowledge that would be of use to them as adults in politics (geography, political science, military strategy, fencing, dancing, etc.). Accordingly, the stock of the libraries became more modern.

Ending our Preface we can thus state that by the end of the 17th century most members of the families present at this exhibition acquired an education similar to that of their contemporary Austrian and Bohemian aristocrats with ties to the imperial court.¹²



11 Tibor Klaniczay: *Korszerű politikai gondolkodás és nemzetközi látókör Zrínyi Miklós műveiben*. In: *Irodalom és ideológia a 16–17. században*. Ed.: Béla Varjas, Bp., 1987, Akadémiai Kiadó, 337–400; Péter Ötvös: *Pázmány Miklós gróf könyvei*. In: *Klaniczay-emlékkönyv*. Ed.: József Jankovics, Bp., 1994, Balassi Kiadó, 344–364.

12 Cf.: *Adel im Wandel*. Ausstellung. Horn, 2-5. Juli 1990. Hrsg. von Helmuth Feigl. Wien, 1991. (*Studien und Forschungen aus dem Niederösterreichischen Institut für Landeskunde*, 15)



SEBACHER, JOHANNES CAPISTRAN: DER ZUM VIERTEN ERBAUTE TEMPL SALAMON,
 DAS IST: HÖCHST-SCHULDIGST-DEMÜTHIGE DANCK-LOB-EHR UND DEDICATIONS-PREDF/ VON DER ZUM VIERTEN HÖCHST-KOSTBAR
 VON IHRO HOCH-FÜRSTL: DURCHLEUCHT PAULO ESTERHASY ERBAUTEN KIRCHEN DESS WEIT-BERÜHMTE GNADEN-ORTHS MARIA
 AUF DER HAYDT HINTER DEM UNGERISCHEN SEE-FÖRTO..., TYRNAVIAE, JOHANN ANDREAS HÖRMANN, 1703.



LUCA ASSARINO: LA RIVOLUTIONI DI CATALOGNA, 1648. – BOOK-PLATE OF MIKLÓS ZRÍNYI 1646.