

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS OF JÁNOS BARANYAI DECSI

György GÖMÖRI

University of Cambridge, Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages
Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge CB3 9DA UK

Abstract: János Baranyai Decsi was one of the most versatile Hungarian Humanists of his age. His first work, *Hodoeporicon* (1587) is a travelogue describing a trip from Transylvania to Wittenberg. He spent two and a half years in Wittenberg, somewhat in the shadow of his wealthy student-companion, Ferenc Bánffi Losonci. In 1590 the Hungarians transferred to the University of Strasbourg and it was there that Baranyai Decsi's creative activity fully unfolded. Apart from writing numerous Latin poems, he helped to publish in Basle an important Protestant treatise (probably written by Demeter Krakкаи), as well as producing his own work in Strasbourg (*Synopsis philosophiae*, 1591). Baranyai Decsi corresponded with J. J. Grynæus and was influenced both by Johann L. Havenreuter and Denis Godofrey, while his scholarly work shows parallels with that of Nicholas Reusner's.

Keywords: Hodoeporicon, Wittenberg, Sturm, Strasbourg, Baranyai Decsi, philosophy, collection of laws, Transylvania, proverbs

János Baranyai Decsi (Czímor) was one of the most learned and versatile Humanists of his age. Born in County Tolna in Hungary, a region occupied by the Turks, he studied in Debrecen and Kolozsvár (now Cluj in Transylvania) and visited other countries only in 1587 accompanying, as instructor, a young Hungarian nobleman to Wittenberg. In fact his first published work the *Hodoeporicon* (Wittenberg, 1587), a travel account in Latin, was dedicated to the father of this nobleman, Ferenc Bánffi Losonci. This was by no means the first such work written by a Hungarian – already the 15th century neo-Latin poet, Janus Pannonius wrote poems about his travels and in the 16th century Baranyai Decsi had several predecessors, such as the German-speaking Hungarus, Paulus Rubigallus (1510?–1576). The latter's verse travelogue, *Hodoeporicon itineris Constantinopolitani* (1544) was also published in Wittenberg and enjoyed such popularity that it was frequently included in travel anthologies, such as the one edited by Nicolaus REUSNER several decades later.¹ Other travelogue-writing Hungarian poets included Zsigmond Dávid Kassai (*Iter Germanicum and Sarmaticum*) as well as a doctor of medicine, Ferenc Hunyadi whom Baranyai Decsi knew personally; in fact, Hunyadi's poetic account of Cardinal András Báthori's journey to Italy (*Ephemeron seu itinerarium Bathoreum*), was published only a year before our Humanist's journey to Wittenberg. While the travellers

¹ Nicolaus REUSNER (ed.) *Hodoeporicon, sive Itinerum totius fere orbis*, Basle, 1580.

passed through Poland, the city of Danzig/Gdańsk and parts of Germany, it is clear that only in Wittenberg could they make lasting contacts, becoming part of the international Humanist network of the times.

From *Hodoeporicon* we know who was Baranyai Decsi's first contact in Wittenberg: he, as well as other members of Bánffy Losonci's entourage lived in the house of Salomon Alberti (1540–1600), a Professor of Medicine who was the author of several medical tracts as well as of speeches made on various occasions. (A collection of these, *Orationes*, was published a few years later, in 1590, also in Wittenberg). Another lodger of Alberti's was Andreas Dudith Jr., son of the ex-Bishop and imperial diplomat of the same name and a Silesian nobleman, Andreas Kochtycki (in Alberti's spelling "Kochtyzky") to whom *Orationes* was dedicated – they are both mentioned by name at the end of Baranyai Decsi's *Hodoeporicon*.²

During his stay in Wittenberg (from July 1587 to the end of 1589 or beginning of 1590) Baranyai Decsi had to remain to some extent in the shadow of the high-ranking youth whom he accompanied: Ferenc Bánffy Losonci. While as students they had the same academic status (they signed their names on the same day in June 1588, though on different pages in the *album amicorum* of a Swedish student),³ towards the end of 1588 Ferenc Bánffy became the Rector of Wittenberg University, a purely honorary post, but one which clearly marked the social distance between the two Hungarians. During his studies in Wittenberg Baranyai Decsi played an active part in the life of the Hungarian *coetus* (academic community) and wrote a number of Greek and Latin poems to fellow-students departing for Hungary.⁴ He also wrote a Latin greeting poem to Mihály Forgách, another Hungarian Rector of the University who made a farewell speech there in 1589.⁵ So while he obviously profited from his stay in Wittenberg, attending lectures of various professors and reading their works, in a sense he was still restricted to the Hungarian circle surrounding him at the University.

This situation underwent a radical change in 1590 when Bánffy and his companion transferred to the Academy of Strasbourg. This academy had already become a centre of Protestant learning already decades earlier thanks to Johannes Sturm (1507–1589), a teacher and educational reformer of great international fame. In fact, part of the collection mourning Sturm's death, *Manes Sturmiani* published in Strasbourg in 1590, is devoted to the enumeration of all his foreign contacts and admirers, including the passage: "Ut nihil dicamus de omnibus ubique gentium & locorum

² Cf. KOVÁCS, Sándor Iván (ed.) *Magyar utazási irodalom, 15–18. század* (Hungarian travelogues in 15th–18th Centuries). Budapest, 1990, p. 264.

³ Anonymus mit bintrag aus Helmstedt u. Wittenberg, J. X. 1., Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm, p. 37. and 75.

⁴ See the references: poems to Miklós Debreceni, in: RMK (= Old Hungarian Bibliography) III. 777; János Tolnai Szabó, in: RMK. III. 781; Demeter Eszlári F., in: RMK III. 795; Zsigmond Péchy, in: RMK III. 798.

⁵ RMK III: 794. Referred to by A. SZABÓ, *Johann Jacob Grynaeus magyar kapcsolatai* (Hungarian Relations of J. J. Grynaeus). Szeged, 1989 (Adattár XVI–XVII. századi szellemi mozgalmaink történetéhez, 22. = Thesaurus to the History of Our Spiritual Movements in the 16th–17th Centuries.)

hominibus doctis, & quocunque genere studiorum claris, etiam remotissimis in Regnis Hungariae, scilicet Poloniae, Bohemiae, Transylvaniae, & qui vel ipsi coram vel per literas, vel clarissimis suis pignoribus missis Sturmium nostrum sua notitia...”.⁶ These were the words of Philip Glaser, the University’s Rector after Sturm’s death, and a devoted disciple of the deceased Humanist and it is no surprise that we find in the same collection of *epicedia* a very long mourning poem by Gallus Rhormannus Teckensis Transylvanus, a short piece by Georgius Deidricius, Teckensis Transylvanus, as well as a 24 lines long poem in Latin by “Ioannes C. Deczius Ungarus”⁷ beginning with the words: “Smyrna, Rhodos, Colophon, Salamis, Chius, Argus, Athenae / Moeonii cunas vatis habere volunt” – in other words, the poet compares Sturm’s fame to that of Homer for whose birthplace seven towns were competing; the Protestant educator has a similarly great reputation in a number of European countries, including England and Poland. (In the same anthology there are poems by Adam Thobolius/Tobolski and Ioannes Turnovius/Turnowski, two Polish Humanists who also studied in Strasbourg). Apart from knowing Glaser and another neo-Latin poet of this anthology, the Silesian Georgius Calaminus, one could guess that Baranyai Decsi made the acquaintance of most Poles who studied in Strasbourg between 1590 and 1592.

This conjecture was unexpectedly confirmed by an entry in Karol ESTREICHER’s great Polish bibliography, where in Volume XXXI under the name of Tobolski, Adam, I found a hitherto unknown poem of Baranyai Decsi: an epitaph by him on the sudden death of the Polish nobleman Krzysztof Męciński.⁸ This anthology lists the Poles who have traveled to Strasbourg with Tobolski and the deceased young Pole, namely the Latalski brothers, Mikołaj and Stanisław, Abraham Zbąski, Krzysztof Drohojowski and Andrzej Męciński. The collection also includes a letter by Dionysius Gothofredus and another one by Melchior Junius to Tobolski – indeed, both these academics had long-standing Polish connections going back to visits of various members of the Ostroróg family to Strasbourg. Unfortunately, the only known collection of these epitaphs is now reported to have been lost during the second World War,⁹ but it clearly demonstrated the existence of the Hungarian’s friendly ties with the Polish community at Strasbourg Academy. (According to Estreicher Rhormann also has an epitaph in the same anthology.)

Nonetheless, the most important traces of Baranyai Decsi’s new orientation can be found in his correspondence with Johann Jacob Grynaeus (1540–1617). This eminent Professor of Theology, first in Basle, then in Heidelberg and after 1586 once again in Basle had extensive foreign contacts, especially with Polish, Czech and

⁶ *Manes Sturmiani sive Epicedia scripta in obitum Summi Virid. Ioan. Sturmii, Argentorati, MDXC, A 4/v.*

⁷ Elegia IX, G/4-H.

⁸ *Epitaphia Generosi Adolescentis, D. Christophori Męcinii a Kurozwęki... Argentorati, excudebat Antonius Bertramus, MDXC, in K. ESTREICHER, Biblioteka Polska, T. XXXI, XV–XVIII Stólecia, T., Kraków, 1936: 182.*

⁹ Letter to George Gömöri from the Department of Old Prints of the Wrocław Univ. Library, dated 7th July 1998.

Hungarian theologians, but he also corresponded with Dutch Calvinists such as Sibrandus Lubbertus. His correspondence with Hungarians began in 1579 and lasted well into the 17th century. In 1584 he was instrumental in the posthumous publication of a very successful book, *Speculum Romanorum pontificium* by István Kis Szegedi. Recently András SZABÓ collected all letters written by Hungarians and Transylvanians to Grynaeus and published them in a scholarly series of the Attila József University of Szeged (*Adattár...* Vol. 22). It includes five letters written by Baranyai Decsi, all from Strasbourg; in the first one, dated from 31st May 1590, he appears as the transmitter of a letter by Grynaeus to the Protestant minister of Késmárk, Sebastian Ambrosius and expresses his wish to visit Basle in the company of Ferenc Bánffi.¹⁰ His next letter (of February 26, 1591) is more interesting: he relates Grynaeus the position of Jesuits in Transylvania in István Báthori's lifetime and after his death, and tells about the Diet's recent decision to expel them; he also sends an *oratio* to Basle, a speech made by one of the Hungarians who at that time were in Wittenberg. In this Latin speech the main theses of Roman Catholicism are refuted by a learned Protestant. Decsi wants it to be printed as attractively as possible ("*elegantissimis typis*") so that it could be presented to the young Catholic Prince, Zsigmond Báthori. The author wishes to remain anonymous. Baranyai Decsi cannot pay the printer but will order many copies of the tract for potential readers in Transylvania.¹¹

Grynaeus received both the letter and the treatise and had the latter printed very quickly (in April 1591!) under the title *Oratio de constituendo iudice controversiarum religionis Pontificiae atque Reformatae* in Basle. The treatise was well received and indeed, almost immediately translated into English by Richard Smith and printed by John Windet for R. Dexter still in 1591 in London. Entitled *The Trial of Truth*,¹² this publication was clearly written with an international audience in mind – apart from one quote from Janus Pannonius there is absolutely no reference in it to Hungary or Transylvania. This fact suggests that its anonymous author was indeed Demeter Krakкаи, a Transylvanian theologian accompanying Mihály Forgách, who had already published in Wittenberg a short work (*Index in Novum domini nostri Jesu Christi Testamentum*, 1588), and not one of the rich noblemen of Ferenc Bánffi's or Mihály Forgách's ilk or Baranyai Decsi himself. András SZABÓ thought of this possibility, but then ruled it out, for Krakкаи also corresponded with Grynaeus, so why did not he send him the treatise directly?¹³ On the other hand, if you did *not* want anyone foreign to know that you were the author of this trenchantly anti-Catholic treatise, it would make sense that only before your return to Transylvania would you entrust your text to a fellow-Hungarian with the right foreign contacts, hoping for eventual publication.

¹⁰ SZABÓ, 1989: 51.

¹¹ SZABÓ, 1989: 53.

¹² Its full title being *The Trial of Truth, or A Treatise Wherein is declared who should be Iudge between the reformed Churches and the Romish... Published in Latine by a certaine Hungarian, a favourer of the truth and translated into English by Richard Smith*, London, 1591.

¹³ SZABÓ, 1989: 142.

Baranyai Decsi could not visit Basle but sent another letter to Grynaeus (acknowledging the receipt of the now printed anti-Catholic treatise) with his fellow-Transylvanian, Gallus Rhormannus. He sounds apologetic in his third and fourth letters to the Basle scholar – while they had planned to visit Grynaeus with Bánffi and bring him some gifts (i.e. payment for his help) the money expected from Transylvania failed to arrive.¹⁴ In the meantime, however, he must have been working hard on his thesis *Synopsis Philosophiae* which he eventually presented at the Academy of Strasbourg for examination (probably in mid-1591) under the guidance of Johann L. Havenreuter, a Doctor of Medicine and Philosophy and one of Sturm's ablest disciples. This work is a compendium of philosophical statements and aphorisms and it has two editions: the first, a quarto (RMK III 815) consisted of 35 pages marked with the letter A-I/2 and was printed by Antonius Bertram in Strasbourg in 1591 and the second one, an octavo reprint on 63 pages (RMK III 864) came out in Wittenberg in 1595. From an English handwritten copy of the second edition which I found in the British Library some years ago,¹⁵ it is possible to tell that the second edition is indeed a reprint – in it even the dedication to Farkas Kovacsóczy [“Lord Wolphgangus Roudeziockius” (sic!)] ex-Chancellor of Transylvania who was in the meantime executed by Zsigmond Báthori, is unchanged. *Synopsis Philosophiae* is amongst the first products of philosophical literature written by a Hungarian in the 16th century, and while it did not have a particular impact on philosophical thinking in Hungary, it is different from the run-of-the-mill treatises or orations delivered in Strasbourg at the time by other Hungarians, such as Zsigmond Balassi or Péter Révay. The latter, for example, gave a long speech on January 6, 1591, entitled “*De laudibus M. Tullius Ciceronis*” which later was included in an anthology of Strasbourg orations edited by Melchior Iunius in Wittenberg;¹⁶ by the title this appears to be just a light exercise in rhetoric.

If we look for a significant influence on Baranyai Decsi, it is obvious that Havenreuter's name should be mentioned. This scholar was born in 1548 in Strasbourg, acquired a doctorate in medicine in Tübingen and then took up teaching philosophy at Sturm's Academy. His works include a *Compendium librorum physicorum Aristotelis* (Strasbourg, 1593), reprinted under a slightly changed title in Cambridge, England in 1594, as well as a short philosophical treatise (“*Sententia de quaestione...*”) included in Rudolph Goclenius's influential anthology ΨΥΧΟΛΟΓΙΑ (*PSYKHOLOGIA*) *hoc est De Hominis Perfectione* first published in Marburg and then twice reprinted (1594, 1597) at the same place. (It also includes contributions by J. J. Grynaeus and the Hungarian Petrus Monavius Lascovius, i.e. Peter Laskai

¹⁴ SZABÓ, 1989: 56–57.

¹⁵ Harley 405, fol. 42–61. It was miscatalogued at the time under “Doczius”. The English translation of the MS was completed in September 1615, but *Fontes Harlianae* does not know of its provenance. Cf. also GÖMÖRI, György, *Angol–magyar kapcsolatok XVI–XVII. században* (Hungarian–English Contacts in 16th–17th Centuries). Budapest, 1989. 16–21.

¹⁶ *Oratorum que Argentorati in Academia, exercitii gratia, scriptae et recitatae ab Ill. Generos. Nobilibus et aliis, Melchior Iunio Vvitebergensi Eloquentiae ibidem Professore, Montbelgardi, L. Zetzner, 1595, 208–218.*

Csókás.¹⁷ We do not know whether Baranyai Decsi wrote some letters to Havenreuter after his return to Transylvania; at any rate the Strasbourg Professor resigned his post in 1595.

Another master of the Hungarian Humanist was Denis Godefroy, or Dionysius Gothofredus, a French Huguenot jurist and historian. His name is mentioned by Decsi in his last extant letter to J. J. Grynaeus and, in my view, he is perhaps the one single scholar who made the greatest impact on the Hungarian's thinking. Or rather he was the person whom Baranyai Decsi most wanted to emulate. Godefroy first taught in Geneva and then from 1591 in Strasbourg. He brought out a *Corpus Juris Civilis* with commentaries in 1594, but already in 1590–91 he edited a large anthology of historical extracts, *Antiquae historiae... Libri VI* in Leiden which he dedicated to some of his Polish students and patrons: the Ostroróg brothers, Adam Tobolski and Andreas Leszczyński.¹⁸ It is while Godefroy worked on the manuscript of his own important collection of laws that Baranyai Decsi (by now an established poet in Latin and a successful student of philosophy) embarked upon his next project – one has the feeling that he worked furiously his way from project to project – a comparative collection of laws. This, the *Syntagma institutionum imperialis et Ungaricis* he first had hoped could be printed in Basle – he says so in his letter of February 5, 1592 to J. J. Grynaeus – and only when this had fallen through gave it to a printer at Kolozsvár/Klausenburg. From the same letter it transpires that he had consulted a number of “learned doctors” both in Strasbourg and Wittenberg while working on his book and one of these was indeed Denis Godefroy.¹⁹ It is also interesting how he commends his MS to Grynaeus, suggesting that his *Syntagma* will have the same significance for law as Szegedi Kis's *Loci communes* (published in Basle seven years earlier) had for theology.²⁰ That is to say Baranyai Decsi at this point is already aware of his numerous talents and does not don the cloak of false modesty even when corresponding with an internationally well-established scholar. (Also from Strasbourg we have Decsi's inscription in a copy of Alciati's *Emblemata* used by Georg Paul Nutzelt of Nuremberg as an *album amicorum*. It gives us his sentence-byword quite popular among Protestants: “Spes mea Christus. – Quem referunt musae, nivet / dum robora tellus / dum coelum stellas, dum debet omnis aquas” – the date of the entry is 16th March 1592.)²¹

In his first letter from Strasbourg to Johann Jacob Grynaeus Decsi makes a passing reference to a visit to Frankfurt am Main where he had met Sebastian (according to András SZABÓ probably his son, Friedrich) Castellio, a professor of Rhetorics in Basle from 1589.²² We do not know why Ferenc Bánffy and his companion visited Frankfurt and for how long did they stay in this town, famous for its book-

¹⁷ See pp. 76–86 and 192–260 in the 1594 edition.

¹⁸ Dionysius GOTHOFREDUS. *Antiquae Historiae ex XXVII Authoribus Contextae, Libri VI.*, Lugduni 1591, unnumbered pages of the preface.

¹⁹ SZABÓ, 1989: 57.

²⁰ SZABÓ, 1989: 58.

²¹ British Library, MS Egerton 1213, fol. 159/v.

²² *ibid.*, 51.

fairs already at this time, but if I may surmise, it is very likely that they also made the acquaintance of Nicolaus REUSNER, one of the Humanists whose activities can be compared with that of the Hungarian scholar. Reusner's first work was, of course, after his collection of travelogues in 1580, a book of *Emblemata* (Frankfurt, 1581), but he also published a collection of laws in Strasbourg (*Partitio, sive Oeconomia Iuris Utriusque, civilis et canonici...*), a vast selection of speeches urging a war against the Turks (in Leipzig, 1595–96, cf. with Baranyai Decsi's *Oratio... de bello adversus Turcam fortiter et constanter persequendo* (1598) and last but not least, *Rerum memorabilium in Pannonia sub Turcarum imperatoribus* (Frankfurt, 1603). REUSNER of course did not edit a collection of proverbs, so at least in one respect, Baranyai Decsi achieved even more during his rather short creative period than his Western contemporaries. This is why he then could serve as a kind of model, that of a many-sided and conscientious scholar and writer to the great synthesizer and editor of the 17th century, (whom he once met personally), to Albert Szenci Molnár. The latter did not live in more peaceful times but had more luck with his financial supporters than Baranyai Decsi, the importance of whose work is just beginning to appear to historians of all kinds both in Hungary and elsewhere in Europe.