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The Scriptures in Hungarian in Early Modernity

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This paper offers an overview of the Hungarian translations of the Scriptures, printed in the sixteenth century. Both the translation of the Bible and print culture date from the fifteenth century in Hungary, but printing in Hungarian is a phenomenon of the sixteenth century. Before then, Scriptural chapters, translated by Hungarian Hussites and Minorite monks remained in manuscript, and the print of the Renaissance royal court served the needs of the humanist Latin literature. First, this paper will describe the development of the principles of translations from the cautious solutions of the Erasmian contributor of the first book printed in Hungarian, Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Kraków, 1535), to the conceptions of the well-organized Calvinist group of scholars that edited the first complete Hungarian Bible (1590). In the analysis of the terminology this paper will focus on the expressions of the divine and earthly power, in the context of the history of political ideas of the same epoch. The history of the early printed Scriptures in Hungarian runs parallel to the gradual enlargement of the earthly power in early modern Hungarian political thought, under the conditions of the Turkish occupation, Hapsburg Catholicism, and the special status of Transylvania. In the history of religion, the dominant strain of the Hungarian Reformation turned from Luther to Calvin, with the most important Hungarian publishing house at the time being that of the Unitarians in Transylvania. This change greatly influenced the development of the Hungarian theoretical culture. For instance, the main destination of *peregrinatio academica* of Hungarians turned from Wittenberg to the universities of the Netherlands, and the Hungarian printers finally opted for the Humanist Antiqua instead of the German *Frakturschrift*. The second part of the paper will illustrate this process with examples of the typography of the sixteenth-century Hungarian Scriptures, and of their target audiences.

1. Introduction

The main features of the impact of the early modern Scriptural translations on Hungarian culture can be briefly summarized in the following three points.

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(1) The use of the Humanist Antiqua for a normal Hungarian printed text, and not the German *Frakturschrift*.
(2) A highly developed standardization of the language; the different vocals, and diphthongs of the Hungarian dialects, used for the same phoneme were unified by the model of the texts of widespread editions of the Hungarian Scriptures. As a negative example for both phenomena consider Sylvester's Bible,[1] being typographically *Frakturschrift*, and using the highly rural native dialect of the translator. This remained a unique case, its typography and language never achieved the status of a standard.
(3) The book as an object evolved from a big, brute instrument of a collective, partly ritual family reading under patriarchal rule to a portable means for a reflective, personal reading of the same text. For example, compare two characteristic versions of the first complete translation, the first edition being a folio[2] and the second a pocket-book.[3]

The aim of this paper is to offer a detailed analysis of the vocabulary of earthly powers (*exousia hyperechousa*; in the terms of the King James Bible 'higher powers', Rom 13:1) in early Hungarian Protestantism based on the terminology of the translations of important loci of the Epistle to the Romans. Interpretations of this term are crucial for early modern Western political thinking, and their importance is mirrored in the terminology of the translations into the European national vernaculars. From a theological point of view, the dilemma of the concept of 'power' in political thinking is strongly connected with the most common text of the Scriptures in the epoch of the Reformation. From the special point of view of the Hungarian history of ideas and Hungarian culture, it is significant that the first Hungarian translation of the Epistle to the Romans, amongst the other apostolic letters of Paul, was also the first printed book in the Hungarian language.[4] In this analysis, I will use the known sixteenth-century translations of the *Epistle to the Romans*, beginning with the work of a Hungarian Erasmian, the humanist Benedek Komjáti (1533)[4] up to the version of the complete Hungarian Bible of Gáspár Károli (1590).[2] The latter has become a standard in Hungarian culture, achieving a status comparable to that of the King James Bible in English culture. (I do not discuss seventeenth-century translations here. They have their importance in the development of the text of Károli's translation in several *loci* on the one hand, and in the establishment of a Catholic tradition of the Scriptures in the national vernacular in Hungarian culture, on the other.) My research has led me to conclude that very often the opinions of the Protestant interpreters of these Scriptural loci have been encoded directly into the vocabulary of the Hungarian – dominantly Protestant – sixteenth-century translations. Because of this peculiarity, in what follows I will at first outline the Greek and Latin terminology of the crucial topics, and their interpretation in the humanist Latin of the Reformation. Secondly, I will summarize the general problems of translating juridical terms from the Scriptures into national vernaculars. Thirdly, I will analyse in detail the terms offered by the Hungarian translations. Finally, I will draw some conclusions about the

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implications of the Hungarian reformers' thoughts on, and their translation of, 'earthly powers' on the Hungarian history of political ideas.

2. Greek and Latin Scriptural Terms for Power and Subjection

The largest group of terms connected with power has to do with subjection: *doulos* (Rom 1:1), *diaconos thou theou* (Rom 13:4), *leitourgos thou theou* (Rom 13:6). These expressions have become homogenized in Latin as *minister Dei*, a term for earthly power – different from *servus Christi* – for the priesthood. In the Reformation, Scriptural interpretations often discuss this difference. Calvin in his *Commentarius* in 1539[5] declared that *servus* has the same meaning as *minister*; later, in the interpretation of Benedictus Aretius, *minister* had the same meaning as *servus*.[6] Aretius' work is a typical example for the genre of *loci communes* in the literature of early modern Protestant theology. It is interesting that the exemplar used here was a part of a *colligatum* of a probable Hungarian early modern *possessor*, in the same binding with a work of the same genre written by Stephanus Szegedinus (later we will return to the works of this important author of the Hungarian early Reformation). In conclusion, there is no special term for the power and subjection of the priesthood, because priesthood has no special status in society. In the King James Bible the difference of terms has survived as a linguistic requisite, the words 'servant' and 'minister' being used as synonyms; Hungarian translations consistently enforced the interpretation of the Helvetian Reformation, using the same word for these two Latin and three Greek terms. The Hungarian word '*szolga'* means both *doulos* (*servus*) and *minister* (*diaconos*/*leitourgos*). Consequently, this did not appear as a problem in the Scriptural interpretations in the native vernacular. (In Calvin's thought it was the task of the genre of the commentaries of the Scriptures.)

The case of the terms for the owners of power is more difficult. Even though the only pair of words for authority – *archōn* (*princeps*) for the person of the ruler, and *exousia hyperechousa* (*potestas sublimioris*, or *potestates supereminentes*) for institutionalized power – was part of a precise Greek juridical vocabulary in Paul's lifetime, its field of meaning has considerably expanded. This is detectable in the classic translations of the Reformation: Martin Luther's *Obrigkeit* and the higher powers of the King James Bible are neutral; it is up to the reader to decide who this higher power actually is. The term governing authority used in the new English version of 1973 seems to be a too direct interpretation of the original expression in an age in which institutions of earthly power were easily identified. In the earlier versions, born in an age without yet an established vocabulary of the law, the malleability of the national languages is palpable. Early modern interpreters, who were humanist scholars with an educated Latin background, could not disregard the differences of the Latin juridical terms of *potestas, imperium*, and *magistratus*; they had to choose one of these possibilities. (There is a symbolic difference in this respect between Calvin, the law graduate with late Renaissance humanistic knowledge, and Luther who radically ended his legal studies, and had a different relationship with the humanities in his young age.)

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This problem of interpretation is a composite of questions of philology, theology, and political theory. An interpreter of this age conceived of his own task as being the faithful, strict, and often literary rendering of the meaning of the Scriptures. However, according to the standards of his own humanist Latin juridical vocabulary, the Bible was obscure on this point. Thus, the translator had to explain this obscure content in a vernacular that was not abundant in precise juridical terms. *Potestas*, *magistratus*, and other terms of the Latin Bible lost their precise juridical meaning in the biblical context; the crucial point of their interpretation was their relation to the term *imperium*. To demonstrate the significance of the possible interpretations of 'higher powers' it is enough to quote two fundamental instances of the history of ideas: that of Calvin's *Commentarius*, and a text of a young Fellow of Oxford University, John Locke, commonly entitled 'Latin Tract', written in 1660–1661:[7]

> Potestates supereminentes vocat, *non* supremas *quae summum imperium obtineant*, sed quae excellant supra reliquos homines [By magistrate we here understand one who has responsibility for the care of the community, who holds a supreme power over all others and to whom, finally, is delegated the power of consulting and abrogating laws]. (Ref. 7 pp. 187; 212)

Even though the modern English version is correct; it clearly cannot mirror precisely the differences of the Latin juridical terms.

Calvin wrote in his *Commentarius*:

> Per magistratum hic intelligimus illum qui curam gerit communitatis qui summum in reliquos omnes obtinet imperium, et cui denique condendarum abrogandarumque legum delegata est potestas. [By magistrate we here understand one who has responsibility for the care of the community, who holds a supreme power over all others and to whom, finally, is delegated the power of consulting and abrogating laws]. (Ref. 5 column 249, with my translation)

This is how John Locke formulated his ideas about the same question in 1660–1661. (Again, even though the modern English version is correct; it clearly cannot mirror precisely the differences of the Latin juridical terms.) Calvin and Locke are using the same vocabulary here – I suppose that this paragraph of Locke's text is a direct reference to Calvin's *Commentarius* – but their conclusions are diametrical opposites. It is evident for Locke that 'higher powers' are identical with the owner of *imperium*, that is the King or Queen, or at least the Parliament of England. Calvin, with the confused political state of affairs on the Continent during his lifetime, could not choose a single element of these political rulers for the position of the Scriptural 'higher powers' and left the concrete decisions to the *iustitia civilis* of the Christian people.

3. The Case of the Hungarian Translations

Following an overview of the general problems of the translations and interpretations of these terms, this paper now turns to examining the Hungarian versions in detail. It must be mentioned that Scriptural translation, even though it had several previous instances, such as the passages of the Bible translated by Hungarian Hussites, and a

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series of written sermons, did not have a strong, established tradition and linguistic standard by the time of the Reformation. The language and vocabulary of the passages of the Scriptural translations made for Hungarian Hussitism, and their survival in the sermons, especially of the Franciscans, are frequent topics of Hungarian philology. Unfortunately, this *corpus* of texts does not abound in passages from the Epistle to the Romans. It is almost useless regarding the terms that form the topic of the current text.

Our first instance is the translation of a Hungarian Erasmist writer, Benedek Komjáti.[4] His text is a splendid instance of both intellectual care and the incertitude of a humanist intellectual. Komjáti's solution to the problem discussed above was to refer to all the linguistically possible Hungarian alternatives for the important terms, choosing one word as his favourite, and including the others in brackets. It is interesting to see that his incertitude is highest in the cases of the above-mentioned terms of rule and subjection.

The following generations inherited all of Komjáti's linguistic solutions without his incertitude: being theologians with dogmatic opinions they had to solve these dilemmas. With the exception of the previous example, Gáspár Károli's translation,[2] the Hungarian versions under discussion are not complete Bibles. Most of them are complete or almost complete editions of the New Testament, and one of them – the most interesting text translated by Petrus Melius in 1563 – is a cycle of sermons by its declared genre.[8] In what follows, we will focus on this text, comparing it with other translations, and we will attempt to outline the typical tendencies of the translators' thought. It is interesting that Melius' older contemporary, Stephanus Szegedinus, who played a crucial role in the turn of the Hungarian Reformation to the Helvetian ideas, and in the personal turn of Melius' ideas from Luther to Calvin, almost never refers to the Epistle to the Romans in his widespread works.[9,10] A glance at the portrait of Szegedinus on the frontispiece of his posthumous work of 1585 makes us curious.[9] It is the only authentic portrait of a Hungarian reformer, engraved by his best disciple. Szegedinus here looks like a literary gentleman, without a hat, with a fur-collared coat, and holding a large volume. It is a picture made before the iconography of a Protestant Pastor became firmly established. Several decades later he would be without any fur, but with a hat, and with a small, portable book, like the well-known portraits of Calvin, or Melanchthon. In Szegedi's case the size of the book is important, as his masterpiece was really published in folio volumes because of the special writing technique of tabulation. It is interesting that Szegedi has become part of the canonized list of Protestant Martyrs with this extraordinary iconography. Due to its title, *Magiar praedicatioc* (*Sermons in Hungarian*) Melius' booklet is not a usual topic of the literature about Scriptural translations.[8] Being familiar with the author's concept of sermon by the evidence of the preface of this booklet, we can conclude that it is not an interpretation or paraphrase of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, but a complete translation with a detailed commentary. According to Melius, the task of the teacher of the Christian community – he uses this word instead of the Catholic term 'priest,' in the meaning of Pastor, and in accordance with the task of a Jewish rabbi – is to interpret the Scriptures for the people of God in sermons from

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the beginning to the end of a Scriptural chapter. (This is in contrast to the 'Papist' usage of the Scriptures, which is the arbitrary choice of any quotation for the priest's aims.) Melius' booklet contains a complete translation of the Epistle to the Romans, with a large commentary in the form of sermons. It should be mentioned at this point that there is a bibliographical tradition about Melius' complete translation of the New Testament,[11] and his successor in the seat of the Calvinist bishops in Debrecen; Tamás Félegyházi actually had a complete translation of the New Testament.[12] We do not know at the moment whether the text of the Epistle to the Romans in this unknown translation is identical with the known text in the booklet of sermons; and whether Félegyházi was a follower of his predecessor in his ideas about Scriptural translation.

Scholars of the early modern Hungarian history of ideas agree that there was a tacit collaboration between contemporary translators: their endeavour was to publish the complete text of the Scriptures, at least in separate parts, and they borrowed Hungarian terms from one another. (Here, I have discussed translations containing the Epistle to the Romans, which has the highest number of parallel translations because of its importance in the theology of the Reformation. I will not refer here to an important translation of the four Gospels, printed in the same epoch.)[13] In Melius' text, we can observe both the influence of the Calvinian interpretation of the text, and references to allusions to the terms of his Hungarian fellow-Reformers. Even though Melius developed his own vocabulary, in his interpretations and commentaries he often uses all the synonyms known from other contemporary versions. His aim was to demonstrate to his audience that the various Hungarian translations all refer to the same Scriptural loci.

Melius' first peculiarity is the interpretation of the first words of Rom 13:1, derived from his anthropological opinions: 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers'. In his interpretation, this passage refers to the current condition of humanity: we are not spiritual (*pneoumaticos*), but 'soulful,' psychic (*psychicos*) humans only, which has caused the need for earthly power after Adam's fall. Or, in other words, the corrupted soul (*psychē*) – and not the spirit (*pneouma*) – is subjected to the higher powers.

Apart from this unique idea, the main line of Melius' thought follows the fundamental Calvinian teachings about earthly power, probably based directly on Calvin's widespread *Commentarius*. The concept of power in his system of ideas has an extremely wide range: representatives of power from emperor or *Imperator* to janitors, guards and rural constables of local authority have the same kind of earthly power and require the same type of civic obedience. The homogeneity of rulers matches the homogeneity of the common people subject to their power. Concerning civil obedience, there is no difference between the priesthood and the laity, including the monks and the Pope. The only way to differentiate on this large scale of earthly powers, and of the obedience owed to them, is through the process of *election.* Using the well-known Augustinian example of the difference between a band of brigands and a state – with a direct reference to Augustine on the frontispiece – he characterizes them in another way. Augustine's criterion of the state is based on the concept of justice; Melius' criterion is the procedure of election. Both robbers and executives in a

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state are punishments of God because of our sins, and both command obedience of Christian people. The only difference is that a robber is sent suddenly, as a disaster, by the Lord's will; whereas representatives of a state have been elected – at least by tacit consent – by the people. The evaluation of the different, often fictive election processes of early modernity and the collision of different powers with different forms of legitimacy belong to the sphere of a special political faculty of human *ratio*, called *iustitia civilis*. This system of political ideas is connected with the incertitude about the actual ownership of the *imperium* for a citizen of Debrecen, living between the territories of the Turkish Sultan, the (actually Hapsburg) King of Hungary, and the Prince of Transylvania. This is similar to the situation of Geneva in the same age in which territories and power were divided among Savoy, Switzerland, and France. In what follows, we will look at the consequences of this concept of power in Melius' Hungarian terms.

It is remarkable that the usage of the vocabulary of other translators concerning the concepts of power is most frequent in the loci of the interpretative parts of Melius' booklet. In his rhetoric, superfluous terms for power are tools to emphasize the homogeneity of earthly power, suggesting that biblical ideas are true no matter which human words denoting power are used. There is a terminological invention in his text, connected with the terminologies of his fellow-Reformers, and the traditions of the Hungarian humanist juridical terminology. His first terminological invention consists of the terms used for the 'person in authority' and for the same 'authority as an institution,' represented by a ruler. (For the difference of the meanings of the word 'authority' in the context of 'someone is in authority,' and 'someone is an authority,' in modern political philosophy, see Friedman's[14] well-known essay.) In the Greek and Latin texts, personal representatives of earthly power and power as a concept are terminologically different; *archōn* (*princeps*) for the person, and *exousia hyperechousa* (*potestas sublimioris*, or *potestates supereminentes*) for the concept, and for institutional power. Most translations of the Bible in national languages follow this model, and the standard Hungarian vocabulary of this epoch was suitable for expressing these concepts in a similar way. In the sixteenth century, it was Gáspár Heltai's translation, published in the same year,[15] which solved the problem similarly and in the clearest form. I suppose that the difference is not based on the Unitarian faith of Heltai, but rather on the clear structure of earthly power in his home, the principality of Transylvania.

Melius has chosen another solution, making a continuous, dynamical reference between the personal and institutional representatives of power, and the concept of earthly power. His terminology has its parallels in English. He used the word 'rule' for the institution, which is 'an authority', and also for the concept; and 'ruler' for the person 'in authority'. The Hungarian vocabulary is actually more confusing than the simplified sketch here suggests. The derivation of the later term from the former is only a trend in several texts of the Reformation.

We could attribute this terminology to linguistic poverty, and to residual pre-modern thought, which cannot imagine a power without a close relationship with the person who is its representative. (However, Heltai's solution contradicts this

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suggestion.) Melius' linguistic trick of linking the person and the institution rhetorically emphasizes their definite difference in the next step of his interpretation. 'Why does he [Paul] call it by the abstract term powers, and not in concrete words, powerful persons? Because you should distinguish between the office [*tiszt*] of "prince-ness" ["*feiedelemség*"] and the person of prince [*feiedelem*].' The conclusion of Melius' rhetoric and argumentation is that even though the ruling person seems to be identical to the authority as an institution, civil obedience of Christian people always concerns the *institution*, not the *person*. In his sophisticated analysis of the concept of power we can detect the roots, or at least the earliest form, of juridical fictions, which have represented a significant line in the history of Hungarian political ideas during the centuries of early and classical modernity. Even though juridical fiction seems to be a strange handicap in Hungarian political thought, we should recognize its role in the political institutional modernity.

Melius' system of ideas cannot work without the above-mentioned concept of office. This is how I have attempted to render an early modern Hungarian term, *tiszt*. Even though it is etymologically an ancient Hungarian word, in this special meaning it has appeared only relatively recently, during the time of the Hungarian Reformation, under the influence of both humanist Latin, and the new Protestant theologies. On the one hand, it is the term of Marcus Tullius Cicero, introduced in his *De officiis*, and it is an early Latin equivalent for calling in the special political sphere of human life. In Calvin's *Institutio*, '*populares magistratus*' must resist tyranny *pro officio*. We can translate the Latin word here 'by their calling'. From the evidence of the dictionary of Albert Szenci Molnár, first published in 1604;[16] *tiszt* is a new term of early modern Hungarian vocabulary, borrowed from Cicero's *De officiis* by Hungarian humanist scholars. Its field of meaning contains both the elements of *position*, *rank*, and *obligation*, similar to its Latin model, Cicero's '*officium*'. This terminology, institutionalized by the dictionary of Szenci Molnár, has sunk deep roots in Hungarian lexicographical traditions. It was used in the early seventeenth-century Hungarian translation of Calvin's *Institutions* as well, made by the same person; Szenci Molnár.[17] Its influence was dominant in several fields until as late as the end of the nineteenth century.

4. Conclusion

Hungarian political thinking has had the intellectual ability to distinguish between persons and institutions, and has a term for the evaluation of a person in authority, as distinguished from an institution, which is an authority, thanks to the Scriptural translations of early modernity. Both of them are elements of heritage and were intrinsic tools for any relevant political discourse in the centuries that followed their creation.

The structure of the conceptual network of the earthly power, full of juridical fictions, was connected to a concept of a 'typographic human', and a typographic community. What concept of an ideal typical typographic community could emerge in early modern Hungarian thought? (I am using the term 'ideal typical' in its Max

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Weberian meaning). I can exemplify it here by a practical answer given by the greatest publishing house of this epoch, that of Gáspár Heltai (and his widow after his death); and in the theory the anthropological opinions of Petrus Melius.

Heltai's publishing house was a well-organized proto-capitalist company. Heltai established a paper-mill for his printing house; he controlled the sales policy, and the publishing policy as well. His aim was clear: to produce books for individual, reflective reading, rather than for collective and ritual usage. The best example is the edition of the Psalms in prose, turning the verses of the common worship almost into a narrative text, from an instrument of singing into a text for the silent reader.[18]

On the theoretical level, Melius' image of what humans are can be interpreted as a typographical utopia. His ideal typical target audience does not need any mediator between the Lord of Heaven and themselves, and is able to make a rational choice between the earthly powers' concurrent legitimacies. Humans are linked not by institutions, but by common readings, in his thought.

The concepts of these ideal typical communities of the 'typographic human,' based on Unitarian rationalism and Calvinist individualism, have left a deep imprint on the structure of the Hungarian nation as a cultural phenomenon. A definition of the modern nation in 1848 has identified the nation with the enthusiastic audience of the first products of the free press. This, however, would not have been possible without the early modern Hungarian collective consciousness as a virtual community of readers.

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Abbreviations

The literature of Hungarian early modern studies uses the numbering of the items of two important bibliographies of Hungarian early modern printings.

RMK = *Régi magyar könyvtár* [*Ancient Hungarian Library*] Vols. I–IV. Budapest: MTA, 1879–1898. Edited by Szabó, Károly.

RMNy = Régi magyarországi nyomtatványok [*Ancient Printings in Hungary*] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1971) – (it is not complete, yet.)

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