

**History of Reading And Publishing Policies  
In 16<sup>th</sup> Century Transylvania  
(Or: The Name of Mrs Heltai)**

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**Abstract:** Scholars of the history of literature and printing in the 16<sup>th</sup> century agree that the most prolific printing press of 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungary was the Heltai-Hoffgreff print in Cluj (Koložsvár, Klausenburg, present-day Romania). After Gáspár Heltai's death in 1574, his widow took over the print, becoming the only effective woman publisher of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Hungary. Her presence as the owner of the Heltai print is attested by 47 publications between 1575 and 1582 (the year of her death). This period of eight years of the Heltai print is very laconically reflected in the scholarship. The generally accepted view is that Mrs Heltai was a talented businesswoman, who continued to publish the profitable penny-books, in even larger number than previously her husband. This paper argues that Mrs Heltai developed a publishing policy of her own, different from her husband's, and investigates two aspects of this argument. On the one hand, it traces Mrs Heltai's financial interest in her enterprise as a business woman, ensured by the publication of a very popular secular genre of early modern Hungarian literature, the history in verse. On the other hand, it sketches the importance of women's particular education and literary preferences in an attempt to suggest the possible gendered nature of Mrs Heltai's printing policy.

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**Captatio Benevolentiae**

Scholars of the history of literature and printing in the 16<sup>th</sup> century agree that the most prolific printing press of 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungary was the Heltai-Hoffgreff print in Cluj (Koložsvár, Klausenburg, present-day Romania). In the words of Judit V. Ecsedy: "the press producing the largest number of publications in the century, the most popular works of which were re-printed by other Hungarian offices as well."<sup>1</sup> The history of the Heltai press, just like that of other printing press enterprises of the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century, stands at the crossing point of several disciplines (history of books, libraries, printing, and reading), but none of these can be separated methodologically from any of the others.

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<sup>1</sup> Judit V. Ecsedy, *A könyvnyomtatás Magyarországon a kézisajtó korában, 1473–1800* (Book printing in Hungary in the time of the manual press, 1473–1800), (Budapest: Balassi, 1999), 51.

Over and above being the workshop that produced the largest number of prints in 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungary,<sup>1</sup> the Heltai press in Cluj published most of the books which from a generic-thematic perspective can be called popular literature.<sup>2</sup> I define as popular literature any secular work of a non-scientific nature, which, besides its educational and norm-giving role (*docere*) allegedly also has a rhetorical task of delectation (*delectare*). Or, in other terms: it is at the same time **good** (moral function) and **nice** (aesthetic, i.e. function of delectation). Of all the literary genres present in 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian writings, the genre of the *históriás ének* (historical song) stands out as most widespread, popular, and characteristically Hungarian. The term *históriás ének* – as repeatedly signalled by Béla Varjas<sup>3</sup> – referred to all text types that had common poetical features in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (secular, narrative history in verse, usually with stanzas having an equal number of verses, and four-verse rhyme structure). This means that the threefold division of the terms adopted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – *históriás ének* (historical song) - *bibliai história* (biblical history) - *széphistória* (romance) – did not mirror the 16<sup>th</sup> century reality regarding the perception of these text types, describing not a generic, but merely a thematic difference within the same genre. The analysis of the adjective *szép* (nice) is relevant both from a generic, and a rhetorical perspective; the fact that this term is not suitable to dissociate an independent literary genre (*széphistória*) has already been argued by Béla Varjas,<sup>4</sup> as the adjective in question appears in the titles, subtitles, or *incipits* of all kinds of histories in verse (biblical, historical), not only in those with an amorous or adventurous topic. In my opinion, the adjective *szép* should not be perceived as a genre determiner, but as a signifier of a certain rhetorical principle. It is commonly known that the division of the ethical and aesthetic principle, or rather the autonomy of the aesthetic principle did not take place until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. That is, in 16<sup>th</sup> century vocabulary the term *szép* (nice) did not imply the aesthetic principle only, its meaning shared something of the ethical principle as well. In other words: that which is nice, is also good. This is the sense in which I consider the term *szép* as a signifier of a rhetorical principle, meaning a defining adjective that refers to an implicit rhetorical concept underlying the *históriás ének* as a genre: the simultaneous presence of an intent of usefulness (moral) and delectation (aesthetic).

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<sup>1</sup> “Hungary” refers to all the three parts of the former Kingdom of Hungary, but most of all to its central part, the remains of the Kingdom, under Habsburg rule, and Transylvania, autonomous, but also a taxpayer to the Ottoman Porte (if not mentioned separately). In the southern part of the former Kingdom, now under Turkish occupation, there were no printing presses in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>2</sup> In Paul F. Grendler’s opinion, popular literature has two main aspects: “(A) popular book was one written to be easily understood by a non-expert reader. (...) (it) is a book that exerts a very broad, nearly universal appeal.” See Paul F. Grendler, “Form and Function in Italian Renaissance Popular Books”, in *Books and Schools in the Italian Renaissance*, (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), 451–485; 453.

<sup>3</sup> Varjas Béla, “Heltai Gáspár, a könyvkiadó”, in *Magyar Könyvszemle* 80 (1973): 281.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Mr Gáspár Heltai**

The life of Gáspár Heltai (or, as his name appeared on 16<sup>th</sup> century prints: Heltai Gáspár in Hungarian, or Kaspar Helth in German)<sup>1</sup> was something of a typical 16<sup>th</sup> century intellectual's life; he began as a Catholic priest, gradually accepting Lutheran principles, probably also due to the Transylvanian German printer, writer, and propagator of Lutheranism, Johannes Honterus. In 1543, he carried the documents of the Lutheran Council from Braşov (Brassó, Kronstadt, present-day Romania), held in 1542, to Luther and Melanchthon in Wittenberg. From 1544, he settled in Cluj, as a Lutheran pastor; gradually, he attracted the majority of the population to the new faith. He was Saxon by origin, having German as his native language; however, he learned Hungarian so well that he came to be considered one of the finest writers of 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian literature. Indeed, he wrote only in Hungarian, and preached much in Hungarian as well.

Not very unusual for his time, Heltai passed through all the possible religious choices of his time; he started, as I said, as a Catholic, converted to Lutheranism, then Calvinism, then, under the influence of Ferenc Dávid, to Anti-Trinitarianism – becoming, as he did, the publisher of the Transylvanian Anti-Trinitarian theologian's works.

Besides his religious career, Heltai was also a well-to-do businessman and a prolific writer. He owned one of the best functioning printing presses of his time, first as an associate of Georg Hoffgreff, who actually founded the print (probably) in 1550; and later on his own.<sup>2</sup> There are sources about several of his successful enterprises, among which a paper-mill built in 1564 – an essential aid for the good functioning of a printing press. As a printer, Heltai published in Hungarian and Latin, mostly religious writings, among which parts of a planned complete Bible in Hungarian (an enterprise which unfortunately remained uncompleted). Heltai's publishing of religious writings was halted, as we shall see, by the ordinance of censorship of the Catholic Prince István Báthory, a fact which led to the writing and publication of secular works. Heltai himself is a distinguished figure in the creation of Hungarian Renaissance prose, as writer of a *Dialogue on the Dangers of Drunkenness* (1552), translator of Aesop's fables (1566), the *History of Emperor*

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<sup>1</sup> Time and place of his birth is uncertain; arguments are for Cisnădie (Nagydisznód, Heltau, present-day Romania) or Sibiu (Szeben, Hermannstadt, present-day Romania), around 1510 or 1520; died in Cluj (Kolozsvár, Klausenburg, present-day Romania), 1574. See Varjas, "Heltai Gáspár..."; József Fitz, *A magyarországi nyomdászat, könyvkiadás és könyvkereskedelem története* (The history of Hungarian bookprinting, publishing, and booktrade), vol. 2. *A reformáció korában* (The period of Reformation), (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> The publications of the press bear the name of Heltai alone (1553; 1559–1574), or Hoffgreff alone (1554–1558). This may mean that the association was not working very well; actually, only the first two years of the existence of the printing press produced books which bore both of the names.

*Poncian* (1572?), the *Chronicle of the Hungarians* (1575), or editor of a collection of historical songs (*Cancionale*, 1574).<sup>1</sup>

As previously mentioned, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the largest number of publications I defined as entertaining was printed at the Heltai press. One may witness a rapid increase in the number of such publications beginning with the 1570's; the *históriás ének* was not such a widespread literary form in the period preceding it. The scholarship largely agrees that Heltai borrowed the idea of printing works with a worldly topic from the printer András Komlós in Debrecen (who, according to certain considerations, could have been called to the Debrecen printing press exactly from Heltai's *officina*<sup>2</sup>). Understandably, this was then also the time when Heltai wrote the best of his literary works and translations. The general opinion of the scholarship almost unanimously explains this new practice with the ordinance of censorship issued in 1571 by Prince István Báthory, ordering that no books, old or new, should be printed in Transylvania without princely permission.<sup>3</sup> The result of the ordinance was, that first Komlós, then Heltai, more or less willingly had to find a new business opportunity, namely, the publication of the cheap, profitable, booklet editions of the well selling *históriás ének*. Whether or not was this the reason that justified this new policy, it is obvious that Heltai's printing practice and the subject of his publications changed from this time onward. In the period before 1570 one could rarely find books of a worldly nature among Heltai's publications (notwithstanding the period between 1553 and 1558, when Hoffgreff alone conducted the printing press); his publishing policy included first and foremost the printing of the Bible in the vernacular, or of theological works and disputes of the Reformation. Following this period, however, whether because of the princely ordinance or other reasons, religious writings tended to disappear, and Heltai's literary works, the *Ponciánus históriája* (The history of the Emperor Poncian), the *Cancionale* (a book of historical songs), and the *Chronica az Magyaroknac dolgairól* (A Chronicle on the Deeds of the Hungarians) were published. The last two appeared posthumously in 1574 and 1575, respectively, their printing was finished by Heltai's widow (signalled in the colophon).

### **Literature for pleasure**

The analysis of popular literature from the viewpoints of the history of reading and reception is a field that raises several problems. First in the line is the fact that Hungarian books (and the *históriás ének* belonged to this group) were only accidentally listed in the inventories or lists of the period. István Monok explains this hiatus on account of the administrative practice of the Hungarian towns, superficial, and therefore less efficient than in the German towns (consequently, the sources are rather synthetic, lacking detailed information). In addition, he argues that most 16<sup>th</sup> century libraries of the low nobility or the townspeople were not of such a

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<sup>1</sup> Generally about the life and work of Heltai see Varjas, "Heltai Gáspár". For a short, but thorough overview see the entry "Heltai Gáspár" in *Új Magyar Irodalmi Lexikon* (New Hungarian Literary Lexicon), vol. 2. (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1994), 789–790.

<sup>2</sup> Fitz, 203.; also V. Ecsedy, 54.

<sup>3</sup> Varjas, "Heltai Gáspár", 285; Fitz, 177.

size that would have justified a detailed cataloguing, or a complete listing of their books.<sup>1</sup> The circulation number of the publications can only be assumed, and it is usually impossible to reckon the audience of the books or the reading habits based only on the copies extant. The most convincing evidence on the wide circulation of the entertaining *históriás ének* is first of all the large number of prints with such topics: if so many were published, they must have been considered a good investment, many copies were sold, consequently many people must have read it.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, all over the scholarship one may find widespread references to the proportion of printed literary, popular works – and all agree (since the sources reveal so) that this proportion was quite high in favour of secular works, even the very genre of *históriás ének*.<sup>3</sup> Why was then popular literature a rejected product of past centuries?

### Excursus I

*In the process of analyzing medieval and early modern literatures it is not a widespread view that taking delight in reading could have been a primary, or at least existing interest of these literatures. This is the idea that opens the book of the American medievalist Glending Olson, treating this same topic in his Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup> The discussion of the different uses of literature for the purpose of recreation or pleasure as opposed to education and instruction reveal that it is not an anachronistic and irrelevant issue to speak about literature intended partly or entirely for entertainment and delight. The chapter titles are relevant themselves: The Hygienic Justification; The Recreational Justification; Some Literature for Solace; and From Plague to Pleasure. It derives from the nature of the problem that the author primarily touches upon worldly literature; it is also worldly literature, by definition, which offers, as part of a self-*

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<sup>1</sup> Edit Madas, and István Monok, *A könyvkultúra Magyarországon a kezdetektől 1800-ig* (Book culture in Hungary from the beginnings till 1800), (Budapest: Balassi, 2003), 202.

<sup>2</sup> See Fitz, 202–206. These books were favoured merchandise of the town fairs – notable is the case of Komlós’ printing enterprise in Debrecen, a privileged town, which was the site of two important fairs yearly.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Madas-Monok, 199. (Referring to Katalin Péter): of 605 works published between 1571–1600, 140 were literary works, and 75% of these were written in Hungarian! Ádám Dankanits, *XVI. századi olvasmányok* (Readings from the 16<sup>th</sup> century), (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1974), 24: the proportion of secular and religious publications in Transylvania is three to one; possible reason for this is the fact that publishers were forced to print more marketable, worldly products because of financial reasons (these had a larger public, were selling better than other types of publications; moreover, the religious elite acquired part of his books from abroad). Explicitly referring to the genre of our concern, *históriás ének*, and its most “delightful” type, the amorous stories of ancient or contemporary humanist origins: before 1560 there were three histories of this kind; until the end of the century 28 more were written. (Varjas, *A magyar reneszánsz irodalom társadalmi gyökerei*, (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1982), 136.), etc.

<sup>4</sup> Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982).

reflecting theoretical discourse, the possibility of a reading that leads to delightful entertainment. One of the most relevant similar approaches in the context of Hungarian literature is the article of Pál Ács, “A magyar irodalmi nyelv két elmélete: az erasmista és a Balassi-követő” (Two theories about the Hungarian literary language: the Erasmian and the one following Balassi).<sup>1</sup> In a different theoretical-methodological framework, this article also examines the role of entertainment (*delectatio*) besides usefulness (*utilitas, prodesse*) in 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian literary thinking. The analysis of 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian popular literature in a social-historical background is one of Béla Varjas’s recurring subjects,<sup>2</sup> and a favourite subject also of István Nemeskürty. Popular readings of the 16<sup>th</sup> century have also formed the topic of a book by the Transylvanian historian Ádám Dankanits, who published his *XVI. Századi olvasmányok (16<sup>th</sup> Century Readings)* in 1974. Apparently, there is a discrepancy between the publishing practice (or even policy) of 16<sup>th</sup> century printing offices, and the “official” thinking about literary products. On the one hand, there are extended literary historical discussions about the existence and acceptance of literary works written only with the purpose of taking delight in reading them (as mentioned above). On the other, there is a large amount of such works extant, which should prove, in principle at least, that such a discussion of the problem is irrelevant. However, the case is similar everywhere in Europe: popular literature, vernacular and secular, existed everywhere, but so did vehement criticisms against it, primarily of course against its amorous types (novels, romances) which purportedly would ruin their readers, and lead them onto the way of temptation and moral decline.

The great difference still, compared to literary ideas in 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungary, was the lack, in this literature, of a theoretical literary background which would have legitimated secular-vernacular-popular literature against educational and moral precepts imposed by an authoritative moralizing clerical ideology. In other words, a theoretical literary thinking in 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungary which would have approved of romances or novels (or their Hungarian equivalent, as we shall see, the *széphistória*) was almost non-existent, save the very restricted (and indeed, mostly non-printed) attempts of Bálint Balassi and his circle. The practice of writing and publishing such works existed nonetheless; hence, one finds the situation, even more emphatically here than elsewhere in Europe, that the majority of these texts have a moral substratum or control added to them. Some degree of moral claim (or

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<sup>1</sup> In *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 4 (1982): 391–403. (Onwards: *ItK*)

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Béla Varjas, *A magyar reneszánsz irodalom...*. Also, he was the editor of several works of popular literature (complete works of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian Renaissance poet, Bálint Balassi; Gáspár Heltai’s *Cancionale*; 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian translations of two histories by Caius Crispus Sallustius, etc.). This is again true for István Nemeskürty, whose main topic of investigation is 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian entertaining prose: *Olvasók és olvasmányok: tanulmányok a régi magyar irodalomról* (Readers and readings: Studies on early Hungarian literature), (Budapest: Magvető, 1984); or “Szórakoztató olvasmány és közönsége a XVI. századi Magyarországon” (Entertaining readings and their audience in 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungary), *ItK* 5-6 (1980). Nemeskürty is also the editor of several 16<sup>th</sup> century texts, among which the works of Gáspár Heltai and Péter Bornemisza, the histories of Fortunatus and Magelona, the history of Emperor Poncian, etc.

rather, the claim of instruction) existed everywhere as a strategy of legitimating popular literature, but nowhere as emphatically and as concealing of any intent of entertainment than in Hungarian literature in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

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Practice shows that both the public's eagerness for such readings, and the printers' willingness to publish them existed; Cluj and Debrecen (and later on Bártfa, Bardejov, present-day Slovakia) are the main centres for the printing of such works. The *officinae* of both towns were in the hands of individual contractors (Hoffgreff and Heltai, and later on the latter's widow in Cluj; and András Komlós, and later Rodolphus Hoffhalter in Debrecen<sup>2</sup>). Thus, they had free initiative in choosing the material to be published, whether they looked for protectors or published on their own expense; they were not constrained – at least, directly – by any lay or ecclesiastical authority as to the printing material, or the finances of their printings. There were constraints nonetheless: in 1570, the restrictions of János Zsigmond, the Prince of Transylvania, himself a sympathizer of Anti-Trinitarianism (directed against Péter Melius Juhász, the Calvinist bishop of Debrecen and fearsome opponent of the Anti-Trinitarians), as to the printing of religious writings.<sup>3</sup> Then, the already mentioned ordinance of censorship – this time formal – of the next Prince of Transylvania, King of Poland, the Catholic István Báthory from 1571, presumably directed against Heltai, whose printing press was at that time the stronghold of Anti-Trinitarian publications.<sup>4</sup> The general view, sustained even in the framework of this paper, based on the restrictions formulated in these ordinances, holds that Komlós and Heltai began the printing of cheap, entertaining works forced by these circumstances.

An important division should be made however: Heltai's popular books were different from Komlós', and different from Mrs Heltai's as well, later on. This was the time of his best literary works: the *Cancionale* edited by him – containing several *históriás ének* – is a conceptualized historical work, where Heltai radically

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<sup>1</sup> The question leads to the considerations exposed in my article, *A szerelem retorikája: A levélműfaj alakváltozatai az Eurialus és Lucretiá-ban* (The rhetoric of love: Letter-forms in the romance Eurialus and Lucretia, forthcoming) about the theoretical registers of literary thinking available in 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungary, and their influence on the various types of the *históriás ének*. To continue such a discussion would mean, however, to switch the focus from cultural history to the history of literary ideas, and this is not an aim of the present paper.

<sup>2</sup> The case of the Debrecen press was debated, however, whether or not it was a private enterprise, or possessed by town- or ecclesiastical authorities. The scholarship settled the problem in the favour of the former variant, see: Fitz, 224., V. Ecsedy, 54.

<sup>3</sup> It is arguable still whether the ordinance in question was a formal ordinance of censorship; see Mihály Balázs, "Zsigmond fejedelem és a cenzúra" (Prince János Zsigmond and censorship), in András Kovács, Gábor Sipos, and Sándor Tonk, *Emlékkönyv Jakó Zsigmond születésének nyolcvanadik évfordulójára* (Festschrift for the eightieth birthday of Zsigmond Jakó), (Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca): Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 1996), 25-37.

<sup>4</sup> See Varjas, *Heltai Gáspár*, 285. Details later on.

changed the ideology of the texts of different authors; the *Chronica* is a coherent and very much Protestant history of the Hungarians, based on Bonfini; the history of the Emperor Poncian is one of the few attempts of literature in prose in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; and there are more to add. In other words, Heltai himself always rigorously controlled the literary and ideological value of his publications. Moreover, in the Prologue of the *Poncianus császár históriája*, he complained that he was hindered from publishing works more useful and instructive for his readers: “It is true that we should have different things to busy ourselves with; which were more useful for the human society, especially in things of the soul, than this history of Emperor Poncian. But since Our Lord permitted that hindrances fall onto our way in the most important things, there is nothing we can do...”<sup>1</sup> In the following, he explained the edificatory and useful features of the *Poncianus* – he found ways not to present it as literature for *delectatio*.<sup>2</sup>

Komlós’ case was different: he published, willingly, his cheap and well-selling books; he did it not only in the period following Báthory’s ordinance, but all along his lifetime. For comparison’s sake: 21 of his 44 publications, between 1569–1575, were *históriás ének*. And this was what Mrs Heltai did, as well.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Mrs Heltai, Mr Gáspár Heltai’s Widow<sup>4</sup>**

After Heltai’s death, his widow took over the print. This was a customary procedure all over Europe,<sup>5</sup> in Hungary and Transylvania as well. Still, the widow who inherited the print with all the equipment from her late husband hurried to remarry, usually with the workshop master, who thus became the new owner and printer of

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<sup>1</sup> “Bizony az, hogy egyéb dolgaink volnának, melyekben kellene foglaltatosoknak lönnünk; mellyekből nagyobb haszon is következnék az emberi társaság között, kiváltképpen lelki dolgokban, hognem mint ez Poncius császár históriájából. De miért hogy az jó Isten megengedte, hogy akadály essék az földolgoiban előnkbe, nincs mit tönünk...” In Nemeskürty, ed., *Heltai Gáspár és Bornemisza Péter művei* (The works of Gáspár Heltai and Péter Bornemisza), (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1980), 271. Heltai also speaks in this way in the Prologue of the *Cancionale* – he writes or publishes such things because he cannot publish other, more important works.

<sup>2</sup> Interesting coincidence; the other, Viennese edition of the *Poncianus*, from the very same time (1573) is (one of) the first examples of a literary work offered for nothing more than pleasure. Does it mean anything that one is published in the Western, the other in the Eastern limits of Hungarian printing (and speaking, as well)?

<sup>3</sup> Interesting is the case of *Páris és Görög Ilona históriája* (The history of Paris and Greek Helena) – it was published in 1576 with the imprint of “Colosvarot 1576” (in the time of Mrs Heltai. Still, the characteristics of the letters, ornaments, and spelling clearly indicate that it was printed in Debrecen (where the printer at that time was Rodolphus Hoffhalter). Béla Varjas explains: “any author or printer of the time hardly dared to admit that he only wants to delight his readers or audience with his song, publication.” This was only confessed by the Viennese editor of the *Poncianus*, and (presumably) Rodolphus Hoffhalter, who “did not take on the odium of his deed, and fended it to Mrs Heltai”. Varjas, *A magyar reneszánsz irodalom...*, 137.

<sup>4</sup> Mrs Heltai’s name appears nowhere in the records. Nobody knows what her name was. Presumably she was Hungarian.

<sup>5</sup> Fitz, 223. V. Ecsedy, 63.



the business. This custom accounts for the fact that, in spite of the family tradition that the widow inherited the late printer's *officina*, one hardly finds women printers in 16<sup>th</sup> century Transylvania. A list of all the printers and printing presses in Hungary before 1800<sup>1</sup> names three women for all sixteenth-century offices (both in Transylvania and the Kingdom of Hungary), and the names of two of them (the third is Mrs Heltai) only appears for a single year (presumably, the year of mourning, while they couldn't remarry). One is the widow of the printer of the Debrecen press, András Komlós, who died in 1575; her name appears on four penny-books; she probably married Rodolphus Hoffhalter, the next printer of Debrecen, who thus became the owner of the printing press as well.<sup>2</sup> The other case is the widow of Rafael Hoffhalter, Rodolphus's father; her name appears on a single book from 1568, a religious debate printed in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia, the Transylvanian Princely Court).<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion, the only effective woman publisher of the 16<sup>th</sup> century remains the widow of Gáspár Heltai. Her presence as the owner of the Heltai print is attested by 47 publications between 1575 and 1582 (the year of her death).<sup>4</sup> This period of eight years of the Heltai print is very laconically reflected in the scholarship. The generally accepted view is that Mrs Heltai was a talented businesswoman, who continued to publish the profitable penny-books, in even larger number than previously her husband. This is what one may find at Fitz, then Varjas, and V. Ecsedy.<sup>5</sup>

Now, the fact that Mrs Heltai was indeed a 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian businesswoman is nothing to be neglected. The social and economic role of a woman in the Early Modern Age did not favour the undertaking of such an individual enterprise for a single woman. As it is, there is no knowledge about any other woman in 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungary whose individual business could be so well

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<sup>1</sup> As an appendix of V. Ecsedy, 367.

<sup>2</sup> Fitz, 283. V. Ecsedy, 56.

<sup>3</sup> For more details on this situation, see several works of Cluj historian Enikő Rűsz-Fogarasi: "Mesterözvegyek a XVI. századi kolozsvári céhekben" (Widows of masters in 16<sup>th</sup> century guilds in Cluj), in *Emlékkönyv Kiss András nyolcvanadik születésnapjára* (Festschrift for András Kiss's eightieth birthday), ed. Sándor Pál-Antal, Gábor Sipos, András Kovács W., and Rudolf Wolf (Kolozsvár (Cluj): Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2003), 482–486.; Idem, "Statutul Juridic al femeii în familiile burgheze din Clujul secolului al 16.-lea" (The legal status of women in burgher families in Cluj in the 16<sup>th</sup> century), *Caiete de Antropologie Istorica* 1 (3) (2003): 7-16.

<sup>4</sup> Afterwards, on a single book (the fourth edition of Donatus' grammar from 1583) the imprint refers to a certain Gaspar Schespurgensis (*Typis Gasparis Schespurgensis*). As Gáspár Heltai Jr. came to age (beginning with 1584), he came into the possession of the business; from then on the imprints refer to "the press of G. Heltai": *Officina Heltana; Typographia Gasparis Heltj; Typis Heltanis; In aedibus Gasparis Heltj*; or, in Hungarian books: *Heltai Gaspar muhelyeben Colosvarat az o varban; Helthaj Gaspar házanál az o Várban*; or, *H. G. muhelyeben*, etc. Fitz, 182.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.; Varjas, *A magyar reneszánsz irodalom...*, 242–243; "Heltai Gáspár", 289–290. V. Ecsedy, 52.

attested as Mrs Heltai's.<sup>1</sup> Although there is not much external evidence (other than her books) about her enterprise, there are some mentions of her name in the Cluj Archives about some legal issues connected to family estates,<sup>2</sup> and we also know of her possible connections with András Komlós, the owner of the Debrecen printing press.<sup>3</sup> Yet, more than any other evidence, the mass of books that she published during her eight years of activity, prove her uninterrupted interest in business, and her economical power to conduct it.

### **Mr and Mrs Heltai – compared**

Nevertheless, a comparison of the publications of Gáspár Heltai and his widow may lead to several interesting conclusions. The most conspicuous of differences is the extraordinary increase in number of publications of a worldly character; in my opinion the ordinance of censorship is an insufficient account for it. As I have mentioned, it is not very clear that Heltai gave up publishing religious writings because of the ordinance; and it is even less possible to accept it as a fact in the case of Mrs Heltai, who most probably did not have any ambitions of a religious reformer, as Heltai did.

39 out of 47 publications (83%) of Mrs Heltai are *históriás ének*.<sup>4</sup> The rest of the books are manuals (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics, Cicero's *Epistles* edited for usage in schools), one scientific work (the *Herbarium* of Péter Melius Juhász – a work of botany), and only two (!) Anti-Trinitarian religious works. The numbers for Heltai's time – needless to say – show a situation radically different. According to the handbook of early Hungarian printed books,<sup>5</sup> 79 of Heltai's publications are still known by copy or contemporary reference (between 1550–1552 with Hoffgreff, and between 1559–1574, alone). 12 of the 79 are what could be called “entertaining” (not including Bonfini's *Historia inelyti Matthiae Hvnyadis*), that is, 1.5% of his entire publications. More than half of these (7, more exactly), were printed after 1571, perhaps due to Báthory's ordinance of censorship.<sup>6</sup> So, a strong tendency towards the publication (and writing) of worldly literature could be proved only for the last three years of Heltai's life, when most of his literary works were written as well. Furthermore, Heltai chose the works that he intended to print according to a

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<sup>1</sup> Being an individual businesswoman was not a customary state for a woman in Western Europe either. A proof for it is the interest of contemporary scholarship in such cases – since there were not so many –, such as Marianna Birnbaum's monograph about the 16<sup>th</sup> century Dutch businesswoman, Gracia Mendes. (Marianna D. Birnbaum, *The Long Journey of Gracia Mendes* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> See Attila Szabó T., “Hogyan lett Heltai Gáspár kolozsvári halastó-birtokos?” (How Gáspár Heltai became a fish-pond owner?) In Attila Szabó T., *A szó és az ember* (The word and the man), (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1971), 502–504.

<sup>3</sup> V. Ecsedy, 53–54.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>5</sup> *Régi Magyarországi Nyomatványok* (Early Hungarian prints), Vol. I. 1473–1600. (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1976). (Henceforth: RMNy.)

<sup>6</sup> By comparison, András Komlós, the owner of the Debrecen print, the second most prolific print of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and also closely following Cluj in the publication of “entertaining” literature, published 21 popular books from a total of 44 entries in the RMNY – almost 50%.

well defined publishing policy, influenced just as much by his ambitions as a reformer and writer, as by his ambitions as a well-to-do businessman.<sup>1</sup> His case is a fortunate encounter between a committed reformer, on the one hand, whose program, meeting the general program of the Reformation as to the printing of the Bible and ecclesiastical texts in the vernacular, and a burgher and patrician on the other, who recognized the business possibilities of a printing enterprise. The Hungarian Bible, catechisms, or other religious works, as well as the so ardent religious disputes of the 16<sup>th</sup> century were marketable products, and proved to be a good investment. These types of publications form quite a significant proportion of the library catalogues and inventories still extant from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Besides, Heltai was a very rigorous publisher, who corrected and adapted the works that he was to publish, both orthographically and ideologically, sometimes even to the extent of offending any “copyrights”.

Heltai’s death, however, caused the decline of this clear publishing policy, and consequently, the standard level of the printings decreased, first of all with respect to the literary value of the books.

It is a question yet to be answered whether Mrs Heltai had a publishing policy just as well outlined as previously her husband’s. At all events, a definite tendency towards a certain type of printing material can well be proved during the eight years of Mrs Heltai’s activity. This tendency seems to be based on and satisfy a unitary and definite reader’s taste. Mrs Heltai’s book production contains readings generally of a lower literary level, yet emphatically meant as “entertaining” (read for the joy of reading), i.e. popular; furthermore, in a massive amount, and not just accidentally. I perceive this tendency as directly pointing towards Mrs Heltai’s changed reading public as compared to her husband’s. A numeric, statistical analysis of Mr and Mrs Heltai’s publications may lead to a conclusion that the public that Heltai had in mind when publishing his books was different from the intended public of Mrs Heltai. Mrs Heltai’s publishing practice seems to have been a successful one – as it remained the same all throughout her lifetime –, and it leads to the conclusion that the actual audience of her books coincided with the publisher’s intended public, the published material satisfied the readers’ needs and expectations. That such expectations existed can be deduced from the large number of such publications, as previously discussed.

The 47 publications of Mrs Heltai listed in the *RMNy* naturally refer only to those works, which are known today either by one or several copies and/or fragments, or by contemporary or later references. The total number of Mrs Heltai’s publications – as in case of the products of any other printing press of the time – is impossible to estimate. According to the calculations of Ádám Dankanits in his

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<sup>1</sup> V. Ecsedy, 50, also Varjas, “Heltai Gáspár”, 277.

<sup>2</sup> See the many volumes of the *Adattár XVI–XVIII. századi szellemi mozgalmaink történetéhez* (Sources for the history of spiritual movements in the 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries), edited by István Monok et al., (Szeged: Scriptorum Kft); also Viliam Čičaj, *Bányavárosi könyvkultúra a XVI–XVIII. században: Besztercebánya, Körmöcbánya, Selmecebánya*, (Book culture in the mining towns in the 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries), *Olvasmánytörténeti dolgozatok IV.* (Papers in the History of Reading 4.), (Szeged: Scriptorum Kft, 1993).

study from 1974, “analyzing the products of the first ten years of printing in Kolozsvár, we noted that, while the maintenance rate of the short popular books by Hungarian authors is only two in a thousand, the maintenance rate of longer books by foreign authors, aiming at a more exigent readership, is over two percent.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, counting with an average of three hundred copies for 16<sup>th</sup> century publications, also on the basis of the publications from the first ten years of Heltai’s print, “from the assumable three hundred copies an average of four copies are extant today – that is, 1,3% ...”<sup>2</sup> And these numbers refer only to the publications that we know about; who knows how many were lost?

Eight of the 47 known publications of Mrs Heltai are only known from references and assumptions; 39 are known from (one or more) copies. I have seen 32 of Mrs Heltai’s printings, in 48 copies (which represents around 80% of all the extant copies).<sup>3</sup> For most part, the copies at our disposal are “clean”, that is, there are no possessor’s notes, or any other kinds of marginal notes in them preceding the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The bindings are generally new, later than the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in some cases even common, typical library bindings from around the turn of the last century (the case of most copies in the Academy Library in Budapest, and several of the University Library in Cluj). Notable from the collection of thirteen volumes of the University Library in Cluj, are the eight volumes that bear the *Ex Libris* of Count Imre Mikó; each volume has equal binding, they are all “clean”, and preserved in a good state. This feature is also valid for most volumes. The conditions in which we find these books today are probably due to the fact that these are copies that remained unbound in the depositaries of the printing press, and later on got into the possession of families (usually noble) or various institutions, who/which esteemed them as literary treasures, and did not use them as books. These copies remained untouched by 16<sup>th</sup> century hands, and bear almost no marks of reading. Yet, otherwise they would probably not have come down to us to bear witness to their own existence.

Among the few volumes that have indeed the marks of earlier hands (up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in binding, notes, owners, etc.) are the copies of Heltai’s *Cancionale* and *Chronica az Magyaroknac dolgairol*; these volumes, the printing of which was begun by Heltai, and finished by his widow,<sup>4</sup> are among the broadest, and also most significant enterprises of the Heltai-print. Also these are almost the only volumes that bear the signs of reading. For example, in the Teleki Téka-copy of the *Chronica* (Marosvásárhely, Târgu Mureş, present-day Romania), among many marginal notes, comments, etc., I found the earliest possessor’s note of the whole

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<sup>1</sup> Dankanits, 22–23. “a kolozsvári nyomdászat első tíz évének termékeit vizsgálva megfigyeltük, hogy amíg a belföldi szerzőjű, vékony tömegkönyvekből az eredeti példányszám két ezreléke maradt meg, addig a külföldi szerzőjű, vastagabb, igényesebb olvasóhoz szóló könyvek esetében több mint két százalék.”

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 21–22. “a feltehető háromszáz példányból napjainkig átlagosan négy példány – azaz 1,3% maradt meg...”

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix for details.

<sup>4</sup> Heltai, just like his fellow-printer from Debrecen, Gál Huszár, died during the great pest epidemic from 1574–75.

material at the end of a manuscript of the history of Emperor Jovenian (*Jovenianus császár históriája*), written on the pages left empty after the printed text, and reading: “Irttatot Szegedi Sigm. által Anno Domini 1634 M. Mart” (Written by Sigm. Szegedi Anno Domini 1634 M. Mart.). There is another inscription, equally interesting for our purposes, which reads: “Anno 1658 nagy kivansaggal kezdettem (?) olvasni die 14 Januarii” (I started reading it with great desire die 14 Januarii). The binding itself has the year 1744 inscribed, with the title *Magyar Bonfinius* (Bonfinius in Hungarian).

A somewhat distinct case is that of Melius’ *Herbarium*, or the editions meant for educational use, like Titelman’s *Compendium dialecticae* or Donatus’ *De octo partibus orationis methodus...*. Melius’ case is different on account of the type of the work, scientific rather than properly entertaining (it is the first botanical handbook in Hungarian). I included it in the list of popular literature on the basis of its descriptive elements: secular and vernacular, and appealing to more or less the same kind of audience than the rest of the items from the list. However, all the copies of the *Herbarium* that I have seen bear the mark of intense reading, or rather: use. All the three copies (Budapest, Cluj, Târgu Mureş) have a large amount of notes, and also completions, even of a medical nature: it seems to have been used as a tool, rather than read as a book. The books for educational purposes of Titelman and Donatus are yet another case. I did not include them in the list, but as a comparison, the state of their preservation is telling. They have contemporary bindings, look quite feeble, and are full with the notes of students of several generations. These characteristics seem quite natural in the case of textbooks. Still, this is how the books that were being continuously read in the course of centuries should look like. May we assume that the other copies of Mrs Heltai’s histories, the ones lost, would have looked the same?

### **Mrs Heltai and her audience**

Who was, how was this different reading public? Taking into consideration the language of Mrs Heltai’s publications (all Hungarian – around 90% –, except for Latin manuals for use in schools), one may speak about a public literate in Hungarian (being able to read, and partly even write), which then probably did not have a higher education. Both the low literary standard of the publications, and the (relative) lack of Latin books points into this direction. (Did Mrs Heltai herself know Latin? Nothing really indicates it.) Studies in the history of reading usually identify this stratum in townspeople with a lower level of education, and, as István Monok states: “Vernacular texts in Hungarian were mostly read by women, since learning Latin was not compulsory for them, and thus they did not have access to the largely Latin printed material from the country.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Az anyanyelvű könyveket Magyarországon is főként az asszonyok olvasták, hiszen a latin megtanulása nem volt számunkra elengedhetetlen, s így az országban lévő, túlnyomórészt latin nyelvű könyvanyag nemigen volt elérhető számunkra.” Madas–Monok, 203.



**Octavian Cosman, *The Well Known Harlequin*, 86 x 70 cm, oil on canvas, 1980**

## **Excursus II**

*The English medievalist Simon Gaunt mixes the approaches of genre-history and gender-criticism in his book, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, when discussing the ideologies lying behind the generic structure of medieval French literature. His research deals with the genres of medieval French literature (chanson de geste, fabliaux, courtly romance, or troubadour verse) in a perspective*

*different from the usual genre historical approaches in that he discusses how these genres are built upon and constructed by the ideology of a culturally created gender system. His hypothesis, as the Introduction shows, is based upon two premises: “firstly, that every genre is an ideological formation; secondly, that a crucial component of every ideology is its engagement with the sex/gender system of the society in which it is produced.”<sup>1</sup>*

*To put it in other words, and more plainly: Gaunt’s hypothesis is that all genres are defined by a certain gender ideology, and therefore all genres pertain to a gender. Thus, one may speak about male genres and female genres, based on the engendered ideology underlying them. This differentiation certainly and carefully has to be kept aside from a differentiation between sexes; this is to say that a gender-based differentiation between genres does not mean a sex-based differentiation of the reading public: males do not all read “male-genre” works, nor do females read only “female-genre” works. Pushed further on, and extended to a larger scope, this manner of approach may be of interest for disciplines other than literary history, the field from where Simon Gaunt comes. Educational history, with its recent interest in a gender-differentiated discussion of education, may have a word to say about different readings meant for the education of boys and girls. Research in the history of reading reveals that there is a theoretical background for choosing between books intended mainly for girls and books intended mainly for boys.*

*Despite all appearances, there is no discrepancy between my above statement (namely, that gender-based differentiation should not be mistaken for sex-based differentiation) and the examples I gave (that books are intended either for boys or for girls). It is exactly this intention which reveals the ideology of an age about what girls or boys should read and why. As Cornelia Niekus Moore puts it in her *The Maiden’s Mirror*: “The perception that adults hold of children in general and girls in particular are [...] a determining factor in the production and distribution of girl’s literature.”<sup>2</sup>*

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The first Hungarian examples of women’s demands for a vernacular written culture date back to the Late Middle Ages. The Latin prologue of the Carthusian Anonymous’ Hungarian sermonary informs about his work in the vernacular being inspired by “several lay brothers and nuns from different orders”<sup>3</sup> who were ignorant in Latin, among whom the author’s sister. The history of the *Székelyudvarhelyi*

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Cornelia Niekus Moore, *The Maiden’s Mirror: Reading Material for German Girls in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, *Wolfenbütteler Forschungen* 36, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Edit Madas, ed., *A Néma Barát megszólal: Válogatás a Karthauzi Névtelen beszédeiből* (The Mute Monk speaks: A selection from the sermons of the Carthusian Anonymous), (Budapest: Magvető, 1985), 5.

*Kódex*, dedicated by the Franciscan friar András Nyújtódi to his sister, Judit Nyújtódi, is very similar. Further sources on the reading of women in the 16<sup>th</sup> century can be found in the correspondences of the aristocracy and the nobility; many of these can be consulted in modern editions (e.g., the two volumes of the *Régi magyar levelestár*, that contains around 100 letters from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; with a Bibliography at the end<sup>1</sup>). This material, though fairly well known, has not formed the object of a systematic inquiry; still, up to now I only found references to medical books or herbariums,<sup>2</sup> notwithstanding those few exceptions which can be considered exceptions for the 16<sup>th</sup> century as well, such as the love letters of Tamás Nádasdy and his wife Orsolya Kanizsai, and the letter in verse of Kata Telegdy...<sup>3</sup> Urged by the same considerations, I began to browse through the family archives of Transylvanian noble families in the State Archives in Cluj. The work is enormous, and seems to yield no results (at least, it has not yielded any up to now).<sup>4</sup>

There is not much evidence on women's education and reading in other parts of Europe either, although considerably more than for Hungary. This state of affairs was due first of all to the uniform view about females in the 15<sup>th</sup> through 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, as a sex full of inborn weaknesses such as (most frequently) lasciviousness, garrulity, vanity, nosiness, indolence, gluttony, and showing off. Armed by birth with such a requisite, childrearing was considered a corrective measure for a girl, which, if correctly and successfully undertaken, would repress these innate features and enable her to be a good housewife and mother, and thus step on the path of salvation. One side of this corrective measure was reading, which was only regarded a skill similar to weaving, spinning, or sewing, and only defended in this context of girls' childhood education. Reading as an aspect of girls' education was mainly enhanced by the invention of printing, which made books accessible for a much larger number of young people than before. Book printing also increased the number

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<sup>1</sup> Edited by Emil Hargittay, (Budapest: Magvető, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> All evidence points indeed in the direction that the Herbarium (or even medical books) was a genre specifically intended for, and used by, women!

<sup>3</sup> József Jankovics and Péter Kőszeghy, "Telegdy Kata? verses? levele?" (The letter? in verse? of Kata Telegdy?), in *Erdély reneszánsza, I* (Transylvanian Renaissance, 1). ed. Csilla Gábor, Katalin Luffy, and Gábor Sipos (Kolozsvár (Cluj): Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2009), 118–140.

<sup>4</sup> One possible direction in this respect was to search the archives of the Mikó family: most of Mrs Heltai's publications extant at the University Library in Cluj bear the *Ex Libris* of Count Imre Mikó. However, I found no reference to such books in the Mikó family archive (at the State Archives in Cluj) on the provenance of these books. The relevant archival material was repeatedly studied in the 1970's and 1980's by prominent Transylvanian scholars (e.g. Attila Szabó T. or Zsigmond Jakó), so it is very likely that everything worth to be found was found before. The Heltai family was a wealthy and important member of the community of Cluj, so any information connected to the members of the family was at once considered important historical data and published accordingly.



of works written in the vernacular, making these the preferred reading of those who learned no Latin: mostly women.<sup>1</sup>

The statement that the intended public of vernacular works were women to some – lesser or greater – degree is widely heard in studies on the history of reading in the Early Modern period. Research made in different European cultures – German, Italian, or English – invariably reaches to this conclusion (or even takes this as a fact), yet again it is familiar in Hungarian scholarship as well.<sup>2</sup> For Hungary, sources on women’s literacy are even fewer than elsewhere (Western Europe). What is more, even the estimates are very contradictory: if one ventures to settle the question by comparing the works of István György Tóth and Katalin Péter, for instance, he or she will have a hard time outlining some sort of situation.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, there seems to be a general tendency in comparing female and male literacy rates, namely that literacy rates for women of a certain social rank corresponded by and large with literacy rates for men of a lower social rank. What we have, are letters by aristocratic women of the second half and the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century written to their husbands, or to each other, or to some relative. Among these, there are some outstanding examples: the letter of Kata Telegdy, written partly in verse, or the love letters of Palatine Tamás Nádasdy and his wife Orsolya Kanizsai, both mentioned before. She could write well, but this activity was tiresome for her. Kata Várdai, wife of Pál Telegdy, and later of Pál Nyári, learned to write in her

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<sup>1</sup> More on the education of girls and reading material intended primarily for girls’ needs in 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century Germany in Cornelia Niekus Moore, Chapter II: “The Intended Readers: Girls” (pages 9–38.) In Renaissance schools too, “a girl [of the middle or upper classes] acquired vernacular reading and writing skills sufficient for her expected role as a virtuous and practical wife and mother, but no more. Since she could not attend university or have a public role, she did not receive Latin schooling.” see Paul F. Grendler, “Schooling in Western Europe” in *Books and Schools in the Italian Renaissance*, Chapter V.

<sup>2</sup> See Cornelia Niekus Moore’s *The Maiden’s Mirror for Germany*, Margaret Spufford’s *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and Its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England*, London: Methuen&Co, 1981 for England, Paul F. Grendler’s collection of articles, *Books and Schools in the Italian Renaissance* for Italy, and more generally Western Europe, or the works of Natalie Zemon Davies for France, e.g. “A könyvnyomtatás és a nép” (Book printing and the people), in *Társadalom és kultúra a kora újkori Franciaországban* (Society and Culture in Early Modern France), trans. István Csaba and Péter Erdősi, (Budapest: Balassi, 2001), 169–198. In English: Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays*, (London: Polity Press, c1975). For Hungary, we have already quoted István Monok on the reading of women (see note 33.), but the works of other authors are also relevant: Katalin Péter, Ádám Dankanits, Kálmán Benda, etc.

<sup>3</sup> I have chosen two contradictory opinions on purpose. In István György Tóth’s opinion, literacy rates in 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century Hungary (primarily its Western, purportedly most developed part) were hopelessly low. In Katalin Péter’s opinion, things were not quite as bad. István György Tóth, *Mivelhogy magad írást nem tudsz ... : az írás térhódítása a művelődésben a kora újkori Magyarországon*. (As you yourself know no writing... the spreading of writing in Early Modern Hungarian culture), (Budapes: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 1996); and Katalin Péter, “A bibliaolvasás mindenkinek szóló programja Magyarországon a 16. században” (The universal program of Bible reading in 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungary), *Századok* 5 (1985), 1006–1028.

thirties, and Erzsébet Czobor, wife of Palatine György Thurzó, also learned to write as an adult (taught by her husband).<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the estimation of female literacy within the general state of literacy in the Early Modern Age as an issue closely connected to the possible readership of women may be misleading. I only wish to point out the fact that the number of literate women did not mean the number of the effective audience of these works. Reading – and especially in a time when orality was still a major feature of the society – meant only one way (perhaps not the most important way) of acquiring information. So, these songs (*ének!*) were just as much, or even more heard than read (via singing, or listening to these stories being read to a larger audience).

What exactly were the readings intended for, and/or read by, girls? Intention and preference describe the two sides – sometimes utterly opposite – of the same problem: what were girls *supposed to* read, and what *did* they read?

On the one hand, according to C. Niekus-Moore's evidence, the educational material primarily intended for girls contained popular devotional literature in the vernacular, the three main genres being: prayerbooks, books of virtuous example, and reflections on the single and married states.<sup>2</sup> These books, instructive, and holders of true morality, were intended for them to read by the males entrusted with their education: teachers, preachers, and fathers. The ideology underlying these books and these principles of girls' education, is reflected invariably in the educational handbooks of the 16<sup>th</sup> through 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, as the carriers of a religious burgher mentality. Girls' readings had to have the same purpose in their education as the learning of housekeeping skills, and had to ensure the counterbalance of their inborn weaknesses, as well as their proper behaviour as future housewives and mothers.

On the other hand, quoting again C. Niekus-Moore: "The secular equivalent of the book of virtuous example was the novel. ... Since the novel was the only secular genre for which girls are consistently recorded as readers, the observation could also be made that the works presented in this chapter ["The Trouble with Trivia, Novels" – a.n.] represent those chosen not by adults but by the girls themselves, and not always with the approval of the adults."<sup>3</sup> The other group of reading preferred by girls was, therefore, novels and romances, amorous writings the plot of which mainly took place in two territories, "the battlefield and the bedroom". Some of the titles are found among 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian *históriás ének* as well: the *Aethiopica* of Heliodoros, translated into Hungarian probably by Mihály Czobor around 1600, the *Magelona*, translated in 1676, some Boccaccio tales (*Historia Elegantissima* by Georgius Enyedi (the story of Gismunda and Gisquardus, Kolozsvár, 1582), *Historia regis Volter* by Pál Istvánfi (Kolozsvár, 1580), *Vitéz*

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<sup>1</sup> In *Régi Magyar Levelestár*, edited by Emil Hargittay, Vol. 1–2., (Budapest: Magvető, 1981). See also the preface of the book in volume 1 by Emil Hargittay (mainly pages 11–15), and Madas–Monok, 206.

<sup>2</sup> Cornelia Niekus-Moore, 32. All of these types were printed in Hungarian as well, although they were more common a century later: in the 17<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> *idem*, 189.

*Franciskó* by Gáspár Ráskai, (Koložsvár, 1579), and *Titus and Gisippus* by Gáspár Szegedi Veres, (Koložsvár, 1578), or Aeneas Sylvius' *Eurialus and Lucretia* (Koložsvár, 1592). Women also played an important role in the dissemination of such literature. They acted as patrons for the publication of these books (especially women of the higher nobility), and many of them were dedicated to “matrons and maidens of the higher and lower classes”, in the hope that they would find them useful and entertaining.<sup>1</sup>

Except for the intended readers – women – and the authors, nobody else considered these books appropriate reading material for “matrons and maidens”, mainly in burgher circles. Aristocratic ladies met with much less criticism, and indeed, most original manuscripts were owned by members of the higher nobility.

In Hungary, paratextual evidence such as dedications, prefaces and the like is scarce, compared to Western Europe. Women's voices were less heard. There is one excellent example nonetheless, which unfortunately remained in manuscript: the Prologue of Bálint Balassi's *Szép magyar komédia* (A nice Hungarian comedy). The drama had a printed version from the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, from Debrecen, a fragment of which is still extant, the Prologue however appears only in the full manuscript version in the *Fanchali-Jób* codex (1604). The first sentence of the Prologue could well stand as a motto of this paper: “To the noble and excellent ladies of Transylvania, as her benevolent ladies, he commends his services till death!”<sup>2</sup> And, onwards: “If Your Excellencies find pleasing this first servant of mine [i.e., his drama] for my service, in a short while I will invent other servants too for Your Excellencies, ornamented not only with verses, but, of all the things happened to me in my loves, I will delight You with love letters written thereof.”<sup>3</sup>

What concerns us here is the fact that the Prologue assumes the existence of a female audience (at least from the high nobility) with a clear expectation for readings of a worldly character, in the vernacular, and with an amorous topic. The relevance of the example is weakened by its uniqueness. Balassi is a rather extraordinary character of 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian literature, and accordingly, in this case too he creates a discourse and a context for his literary work, which can support his creative conception. He creates the context of his work's readability – creates it, and not finds it ready.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the only dedication of a work on the subject of love to women in 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian literature. Women as the addressees of various works in this period appeared seldom even in the case of other

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<sup>1</sup> idem, 190 and following.

<sup>2</sup> “Az erdéli nagyságos és nemes asszonyoknak, mint jóakaró asszonyinak, holtig való szolgálatját ajánlja!”

<sup>3</sup> “Ha ez elsőbbben szerzett szolgálóleányom kedves léssen kegyelmeteknél ezért az én szolgálatomért, rövidnap más szolgálót is szerzek kegyelmetenek, ki nemcsak ékes énekkel is, és valami dolgok az én szerelmemben megtörténnek, mindazokról írt szerelmes levelekkel gyönyörködteti tikigyelmeteket.” in *Balassi Bálint összes versei és Szép magyar komédiája* (The complete works and Nice Hungarian Comedy of Bálint Balassi), edited by Béla Varjas, (Budapest, 1981), 210. Balassi's *Dedication* and *Prologue* are perhaps the most relevant examples on women's expected readings in a man's view for the discussed period. Therefore a separate place needs to be dedicated to their analyses later on.

genres. If they did, then they were members of the high nobility, and they appeared as patrons or commissioners of primarily religious works. Let me mention the Dedication of Gáspár Heltai's translation of the New Testament to Anna Nádasdy, widow of the late Voivode of Transylvania, István Mailáth, which was published in 1561; or the Dedication of the Lutheran pastor Péter Bornemisza's five-volume collection of sermons to Erzsébet Thurzó, also a member of the aristocracy.<sup>1</sup>

Dedications and prefaces are almost completely absent from the popular works of Mrs Heltai, and completely absent from her *trivia*, the works on the subject of love. Most times, neither the publisher (Mrs Heltai) nor the author gives any reason for publishing or writing his verses. Author's intentions can only be traced from more or less detailed colophons which, beside certain autobiographic references, may say a word or two about the reasons for writing: mostly either moralizing comments on the usefulness of the work, or the author's thanks and requests for God's help and forgiveness:

„Ez éneknek deákból fordítója  
Nevét versek fejébe nem titkolja,  
Nagy gondolat szívét szállotta vala,  
Istent kéri, ily szeretettől ója”<sup>2</sup>

„Gyakorta mondani szokták közpéldában,  
Az Szentírásban is vagyon említetben,  
Az jámbor emberrel élhet jól életében,  
Gonosz ember léssen sok éktelenségben.

Kristus urunk után, kit vallunk hütünkben,  
Ezeröttszázötven és két esztendőben,  
Immár hogy írának az első üdőben,  
Az Ráskai Gáspár szerzé ezt énekben”<sup>3</sup>

„Horváltúl magyarra nemrégén fordéták,  
Sebes Vág mentiben, Semppte városában,  
Rendelé egy ifjú gondolatjában,  
Az Istenhez való szerelmét mutatván.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See both in Nemeskürty, ed., *Heltai Gáspár és Bornemisza Péter művei*.

<sup>2</sup> Enyedi György, *Gisquardus és Gismunda*, stanza 310. In *A 16. század magyar nyelvű világi irodalma. Régi magyar irodalmi szöveggyűjtemény* (Secular literature in Hungarian in the 16<sup>th</sup> century), vol. 2. (Budapest: Balassi, 2000), 362. (The translator of this song from Latin does not hide its name, written in the “heads of verses” [i.e. acrostics], his heart is filled with great thoughts, and asks God to save him from such love).

<sup>3</sup> Ráskai Gáspár, *Egy szép história az vitéz Franciskóról* (A nice history on the brave Franciskó), stanzas 169–170, In idem, 318. (It is often told in examples and also mentioned in the Bible that a man with fear of God lives well during his life, but a bad man will have troubles. In the year 1552 after Christ, in whom we believe, Ráskai Gáspár wrote this song).

<sup>4</sup> The Anonymous of Semppte, *Az Béla királyról való és az Bankó leányáról szép história* (A nice history about King Béla and the daughter of Bankó), stanza 37, In idem, 323. (It was

Despite the lack of evidence, the fact remains that Mrs Heltai published many works of popular literature, several of them being such “trivial” writings – on love and other immoral things – that teachers, preachers, and fathers so fiercely criticized as girl’s readings. Novels and romances, genres so common in Renaissance Europe, had their local equivalent in 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungary in a genre poetically different from the original ones, the *históriás ének*. One thematic group of this genre is the so-called *széphistória*, literally meaning ‘nice history’, a term not very adequate (as I have argued on pages 1-2 of this paper), but which defines a secular, narrative history in verse, having some amorous or adventurous topic. 15 of Mrs Heltai’s 47 publications (two of them published in a single volume) are writings with such subjects: among these, stories from Greek mythology, Boccaccio tales, marriage songs, etc.<sup>1</sup> None of them have any dedication, or any reference to women.

The image of women perceivable in these texts is nothing different from the customary image of women of the century, nor is the tone of these works – in their vast majority – different from the moralizing and scornful tone of these work’s critics. This seemingly paradoxical fact is however the greatest difference between the authors and audience of such texts in the West and in Hungary: there, nobody seems to approve of such readings except the girls as readers, and the authors of the texts. Here, not much is known about girls (or women) as possible readers of such texts, but **not even the authors seem to approve of their own texts**, or at least of the ideology underlying their texts. Yet, they did write them, yet, they were published, and they were definitely read...

\*

It will probably never be possible to prove with an adequate number and quality of sources that Mrs Heltai actually intended to satisfy the spiritual needs of an explicitly female audience. I do not mean to say either, that she had in mind exclusively this type of audience when printing her entertaining, cheap, and very much sought books. What I mean to say is the fact that she printed for a different audience, with a different standard of requirements than Heltai’s, an audience that included women (literate or illiterate) *par excellence*. Yet, there are few sources about Transylvanian women, their taste or culture, their reading habits, and the amount of these sources does not allow for far-reaching conclusions. That there was a type of learning different from the male one, a different literate culture, which was vernacular, worldly, less erudite, and commonly called “popular”, we know from the works of more fortunate Western historians, literary and cultural historians, who had at their disposal a much larger amount of evidence.<sup>2</sup>

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translated from Croatian to Hungarian not long ago, in the town of Sempte on the Vág river, by a young man who showed thus his love to God).

<sup>1</sup> Numbers 5, 7, 11, 15, 16, 20, 22, 26, 28, 29, 30 (two in one volume), 34, 35, 36 of the Catalogue.

<sup>2</sup> So many titles could be listed here, that it is almost useless to mention but a few. Yet, I will mention two: Guglielmo Cavallo, and Roger Chartier, eds., *A History of Reading in the West*,

On the other hand, Western analogies will never be verifiable enough for the Hungarian situation. It will never be possible to tell whether girls had the same kind, or degree of education – in fact, we can assume an even lower standard, and even less frequency of girls’ learning, and therefore a lower literacy rate. But there is no reason why we should not assume that girls were treated more or less the same way: with the same intentions and preferences.

Moreover, while being clear as it is that Mrs Heltai was an ambitious businesswoman, a fact not customary and negligible in itself, she was at the same time a woman, with a woman’s education, preferences, and taste. As a result, adding up the bits and pieces of data and assumptions, it is still clear that Mrs Heltai had indeed an important role in 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian publishing – as an *entrepreneur* and as a woman –, which is only partly reflected in contemporary scholarship.

Mrs Heltai’s printing practice may reveal yet another literary historical process as to the role of the *históriás ének* in the cultural history of 16<sup>th</sup> century Transylvania. Namely, the fact that the decrease of the aesthetic and erudition standards of literary works had a decisive and direct role in increasing the number of readers in general; for all intents and purposes, it was this process that grounded the later development of the unproblematic acceptance of popular literature, and in this process the leading role belonged to the *históriás ének*, of which, in this century, “twelve were a dozen”.

**THE CATALOGUE**  
**Of the books published in Cluj, 1575–1582**

#	Year of publication RMNy #	Short title	Copies	Comments (includes only marginal notes earlier than 18 <sup>th</sup> century)
	<b>1574.</b>			
1	RMNy 351	Heltai Gáspár: <i>Cancionale</i> (publication finished by Mrs Heltai).	Kvár, Akad.  Kvár, Akad. (fragments) Kvár, EK.  MVh, Teleki	Notes, probably 17 <sup>th</sup> century. <sup>1</sup>  Missing parts completed by handwritten completions; Many notes, 17 <sup>th</sup> cent.

(Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press), 1999, and Natalie Zemon Davis, “A könyvnyomtatás és a nép”.

<sup>1</sup> „Szep ut az igossag/Hasznos a Jamborsag/e kettonek vejen/Vagjon a Meny ország”

	<b>1575.</b>			
2	RMNy 360	Heltai Gáspár: <i>Chronica az Magyaroknac dolgairol</i> (publication finished by Mrs Heltai)	Kvár, EK.  Kvár, EK.  MVh, Teleki	“clean”, only some underlining Dates: 1695; 1688; marginal notes cut off when binding. Dates: 1634: Szegedi Sigm[ond]; 1648: Joannes Debreczini camerarius; 1658.
	<b>1576.</b>			
3	RMNy 368	Valkai András, <i>Az Magyar Királyoknac eredetekrol</i>	Kvár, EK.  Bp., Akad.	<i>Ex libris</i> Count Imre Mikó; notes from 18 <sup>th</sup> cent. “clean”
	<b>1577.</b>			
4	RMNy 383	Bogáti Fazekas Miklós, <i>Három jeles főhadnagyoknak vetélkedések</i>	Bp., Akad.	Bottom of title page: 1716. Incomplete; “clean”
5	RMNy 385	Bogáti Fazekas Miklós, <i>Szep historia az Tökélletes Aszszony állatokról</i>	Bp., Akad.  MVh, Teleki	Handwritten imitation of script (the word <i>argumentum</i> and letter g) probably 17 <sup>th</sup> cent.; “clean”. “Clean”; bound together with three more <i>széphistória</i>
6	RMNy 384	Bogáti Fazekas Miklós, <i>Ötödik része Mátyás király dolgainak...</i>	Kvár, EK.	<i>Ex Libris</i> Count Imre Mikó; originally, bound together with Göröcsöni, <i>Ötödik része... (#9)</i> ; “clean”.
7	RMNy 388	Hunyadi Ferencz, <i>Trója históriája</i>	Bp., Akad.	Handwritten completions; very bad condition; was restored.
8	RMNy 386	[Bogáti Fazekas Miklós] <i>Eszter dolga</i>	Bp., Akad.	No title page; “clean”
9	RMNy 387	Göröcsöni Ambrus, <i>Mátyás király dolgai</i>	Kvár, EK.  Bp., Akad.	<i>Ex Libris</i> – Count Imre Mikó, “clean”; bound together with Bogáti, <i>Mátyás király... (#6)</i> ; “clean”
10	RMNy 389	<i>Salamon és Markalf</i>	Bp., Akad.	Incomplete; “clean”

11	RMNy 390	Szackmári Fabricius István, <i>Historia de amatoriis affectionibus</i>	Kvár, EK.  Bp., Akad.  MVh, Teleki	<i>Ex Libris</i> -Count Imre Mikó; Some lines underlined <sup>1</sup> ; “clean” On the binding: <i>De amore impudico</i> . “clean”, but in a bad condition. “clean”
12	RMNy 391	(Tinódi, János <i>király testamentoma</i> )	<i>lost</i>	
	<b>1578.</b>			
13	RMNy 413	Melius Péter, Herbárium (heltainé)	Kvár, EK.  Bp., Akad.	18 <sup>th</sup> cent. binding; possessor Fr. Benkő 179(8/5?); and inscription <sup>2</sup> Possessors: 1672; 1727. Handwritten completions at the end, several different hands, maybe even 16 <sup>th</sup> cent. Text quite clean, marginalia cut off at binding.
14	RMNy 414	Misocacus, Vilhelm. <i>Prognosticon, az wy Cometa felol valo Iovendoles</i>	Bp., Akad.	“Clean”; .
15	RMNy 416	<i>Telamon históriája</i>	Bp., Akad. Facsimile	(after the only copy of the British Museum), “clean”.
16	RMNy 415	Szegedi Veres Gáspár, <i>Titus és Gisippus</i>	Bp., Akad.	“clean”, good condition
	<b>1579.</b>			
17	RMNy 437	Kozárvári Mátyás <sup>3</sup> , <i>A régi magyaroknak első bejövésekről</i>	Kvár, EK.	<i>Ex Libris</i> -Count Imre Mikó; some marginal notes <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Czoda madar azért az leany madar/Gyakran iegyese nagy romlast hadar/Szebnel szebbet latván arra vigyarog/Szemét arra vetvén igen hunyorog.

<sup>2</sup> Benkő József, Közép Ajtai Papé. t.k. Ez igen ritka könyv. Igen meg kell betsülneni, főképpen régiségéért.

<sup>3</sup> Instead of “Gosárvári”. See: Pál Ács, “Attila-kultusz a Báthory-korban” (The cult of Attila in Báthory’s time), in Pál Ács, *Az idő ósága* (The oldness of time), (Budapest: Osiris, 2002), 285.



18	RMNy 438	Ilosvai Péter, <i>Szent Pál apostol életéről</i>	Bp., Akad.	“Clean”; margins cut off at binding, on one occasion margin kept for sake of notes. <sup>2</sup> At the end, date 1 5 ? 6 (must be 8/9). Good condition.
19	RMNy 439	Kákonyi Péter, <i>Historia Sámsonról</i>	(Bp. Oszk.)	(have not seen)
20	RMNy 440	Ráskai Gáspár, <i>Vitéz Franciskó</i>	(Bp. Oszk. Phot.)	(have not seen)
21	RMNy 436	Decsi Gáspár, <i>Dávid király és Uriás</i>	Bp., Akad.	Verses printed continuously, as in prose; “clean”, good condition
	<b>1580.</b>			
22	RMNy 458	Besenyei Jakab, <i>Házasságról való szép ének</i>	(Bp. Oszk.)	(have not seen)
23	RMNy 459	Bogáti Fazakas Miklós, <i>Castriot György históriája</i>	<i>lost</i>	
24	RMNy 460	Bogáti Fazakas Miklós, <i>Ötödik része Mátyás király dolgainak</i>	Kvár, EK  Bp. Akad.	Bound together with Göröcsöni, <i>Mátyás király...</i> (#30); incomplete. Bound together with Göröcsöni (#30) and Szegedi (#24); “clean”.
25	RMNy 465	Szegedi András, <i>Historia a zsidók romlásáról.</i>	Bp. Akad.	Bound together with Bogáti (#23) and Göröcsöni (#30). Date: 1661. “clean”.
26	RMNy 462	Istvánfi Pál, <i>Volter és Grizeldisz</i>	Bp., Akad.	“Clean”; margins cut off.
27	RMNy 463	Nagybáncsai Mátyás, <i>História Józsefről</i>	Bp., Akad.	“Clean”
28	RMNy 464	Pécsi János, <i>Oeconomia coniugalis</i>	Bp., Akad.	One page missing, completed in handwriting, 16 <sup>th</sup> cent. “clean”.

<sup>1</sup> About the *székelys* (sekler): Ezek mind hazugság(ok) (S?) az egész könyv is .... (?)

<sup>2</sup> “Keresnem emb/ert mert mond(?) eretneknek nosza (noha?) nem szolgál haromsag J...”

29	RMNy 467	Valkai András, <i>Andoinus és Rosimunda</i>	Kvár, EK. Bp., Akad.	Ex Libris-Count Imre Mikó, “clean”. “clean”.
30	RMNy 468	Valkai A. és Nagybáncsai M., <i>Két szép história</i>	Kvár, EK. Bp., Akad.	Date at the beginning: MDCCI; “clean” “clean”, good condition.
	<b>1581.</b>			
31	RMNy 490	Görcsöni Ambrus, <i>Mátyás király dolgai</i>	Kvár, EK. Bp., Akad.	Bound together with Bogáti (#23); some notes <sup>1</sup> Bound together with Bogáti (#23) and Szegedi (#24); “clean”.
32	RMNy 492	Salánki György, <i>Histoira cladis turcicae ad nadudvar</i>	(Bp. Oszk.)	(have not seen)
33	RMNy 493	Sztárai Miklós, <i>Vizözönnnek históriájáról</i>	(Bp. Oszk.)	(have not seen)
34	RMNy 494	Vajdakamarási Lőrincz, <i>Iáson király históriája</i>	Bp., Akad.	“clean”, good condition.
	<b>1582.</b>			
35	RMNy 514	Enyedi György, <i>Historia elegantissima (Gismunda és Gisquardus)</i>	Bp., Akad.	“clean”, good condition.
36	RMNy 461	<i>Fortunatus históriája (1577–1583, Mrs Heltai)</i>	(Bp. Oszk.)	(have not seen)
<b>Other publications</b>				
37	RMNy 361	Franz, Velten, <i>Carmen historicum (Latin, 1575)</i>	<i>lost</i>	

<sup>1</sup> “Ezen historiát Nagyba(n)czai Mátyás másképpen írja (Vid..... His/toriam proxime procedentem) De afelől nem ellenkezik véle mint...”

38	RMNy 411	Dávid Ferenc, <i>Libellum parvus...</i> (Anti-Trinitarian dispute, 1578)	<i>lost</i>	
39	RMNy 412	Thomas Linacre, Latin grammar, 1578.	<i>lost</i>	
40	RMNy 457	Basilius, On the adoration of Christ. Hungarian, 1580.	<i>lost</i>	
41	RMNy 466	Titelman, Franciscus. <i>Compendium dialecticae...</i> , Latin, 1580.	Kvár, Akad.	
42	RMNy 469	Vitrelinus, Alexander. <i>Iudicium ecclesiarum</i> , (Anti-Trinitarian dispute, 1580.)	Kvár, Akad.	
43	RMNy 488	<i>M. T. Ciceronis Epistolarum libri tres, a Ioanne Sturmio puerili educationi confecti.</i> 1581.	Csíkszereda, Mus.	
44	RMNY 589	Donatus, <i>Aelii Donati viri clarissimi De octo partibus orationis methodus...</i> , 1581.	Kvár, Akad.	

45	RMNy 491	Gyulai Pál, <i>Commentarius rerum a Stephano rege adversus magnum Moschorum,</i> Hungarian, 1581.	MVh, Teleki.	
46	RMNy 439A	Károlyi Péter, <i>Elementa Graecae grammatices</i>	(presupposed)	
47	RMNy 392	Valkai András, <i>Bánk bán históriája</i>	(presupposed)	

**Abbreviations:**

Kvár, EK. Romania.	“Lucian Blaga” Central University Library, Cluj-Napoca,
Kvár, Akad.	Academy Library, Branch of Cluj-Napoca, Romania.
MVh, Teleki	“Teleki Téka” Library, Târgu Mureş, Romania.
Bp. Akad.	Academy Library, Budapest, Hungary.
Bp. Oszk.	“Széchényi” National Library, Budapest, Hungary.
Csíkszereda, Mus.	Museum Library, Miercurea Ciuc, Romania.