

Péter Pázmány (1570–1637). Edited by Alinka Ajkay and Emil Hargittay

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Although the scholarly reception of Péter Pázmány's oeuvre is roughly contemporaneous with the establishment of modern literary studies (the first complete edition of his works was published at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), the current boom in research dates back to 1998. The international conference *Péter Pázmány and his Age* was held at the Pázmány Péter Catholic University, which opened up new avenues in the study of the author's literary history. After the conference, a loosely organised research group was formed under the leadership of Emil Hargittay, whose most important undertaking was launching a critical edition of Péter Pázmány, currently numbering twelve volumes. The next volume in the series, containing the author's magnum opus (*Isteni igazságra vezérlő kalauz – A Guide to Divine Truth*), is expected to be published in the autumn of 2025, and the complete critical edition of the oeuvre is expected to be completed by 2030. A new chapter in the research of the last quarter of a century is about to begin.

With his multifaceted activities, Pázmány was deeply involved in the international intellectual life of his time. From the point of view of Catholic Church history, his outstanding achievement was his ability to implement the reforms of the Council of Trent in Hungary—also, as a cardinal, he was actively involved in secular matters associated with anti-Turkish diplomacy. The study of Pázmány's international activities and his European connections also raises the question of the involvement of international academic research. The book of essays *Péter Pázmány (1570–1637)*, edited by Alinka Ajkay and Emil Hargittay, is intended to facilitate this process. The volume offers a comprehensive (monographic) introduction for foreign scholars interested in the period and church history. The two-hundred-and-fifty-page volume contains eleven studies of 10–15 pages each, all of which are written by major Pázmány scholars of recent decades. The studies themselves make up little more

than half of the volume: the chapters outside these are intended to help the reader find their way around the author's career, the contents of the book and the state of research today.

It is for this reason that the volume begins with a chronological table (compiled by Alinka Ajkay), in which the most important stages of the author's life are presented in detail, broken down by years. The chronology serves as a constant point of reference while reading: with its aid, we can easily put the Hungarian writer's works or events in his life in context. At the end of the book, after a bibliography of the works cited in the studies, we find a detailed selection of the most important Pázmány studies of the last decade (2011–2023) (the compilation is the work of Ibolya Maczák). The monographic approach (highlighted in the foreword) is supported by the list of names and places at the end of the volume, as well as the 30-page colour illustration supplement printed on thicker paper. In addition to portraits and sculptures of the author, it includes manuscript notes and photographs of the title pages of his printed works.

The multifaceted career of Péter Pázmány requires a multifaceted approach. The studies in the book present a specific aspect of the writer's life or oeuvre, and where possible, the international, European context of the subject is also discussed. In the first essay, Emil Hargittay immediately draws attention to this versatility. Pázmány was born in a Hungary where the majority of the population (80%) belonged to a Protestant denomination, and in this historical situation he managed to ensure that by the end of his life, after many decades, the Catholic Church was once again in full strength. As a monk, scholar, orator and politician, the writer was well-versed in the European culture of his time; his influence in Hungary is inescapable, and abroad it is not negligible.

In the following study, the historian Péter Tusor examines the author's career in the European and Habsburg context of the period. From the beginning of the century, Pázmány's most important allies were the Pope, Ferdinand II, and Melchior Klesl, Cardinal of Vienna. In Tusor's view, these alliances could by no means be described as one-sided; Pázmány played a major role in ensuring that the Habsburg internal conflicts between 1618 and 1620—which, according to the author, “posed a graver threat to the Habsburgs than significant conflicts subsequently such as the Rákóczi's War of Independence (1703–1711), the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748), and the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence in 1848/89” – did not lead to the end of the dynasty. The two most important events in Pázmány's ecclesiastic and political career were his appointment as Archbishop in 1616 and as Cardinal in 1629. Peter Tusor has previously discussed the 1616 appointment in detail in his (habilitation) thesis with a micro-historical approach, which was

published in book form in 2016.¹ The peculiarity of the appointment is that Pázmány, as a Jesuit, could not have assumed major ecclesiastical offices under the rules of the order. Therefore, he had to resort to an alternative method: he left the Jesuit order and joined a much smaller Italian order, the Order of Somasca, and thus obtained the position of Archbishop of Esztergom.

Afterwards, Emil Hargittay's study focuses on Pázmány's contacts in Transylvania through the author's correspondence and the accounts of contemporary memoirs (e.g. János Kemény). In addition to the diplomatic relations resulting from the writer's position as archbishop, he also takes into account the subjective expressions and gestures that bound Pázmány to his Transylvanian homeland, which he had been forced to leave behind. From 1616, the archbishop acted as a mediator between Vienna and Transylvania; Sándor Sík, a twentieth-century scholar, describes Pázmány's relationship with the Transylvanian princes as a 'friendly relationship'. In a letter addressed to György Rákóczi in 1630, he wrote that the Transylvanian territories played a key role in the survival of the whole country, and he also believed that a strong Transylvania could preserve the prestige of Hungary as a whole against the Habsburgs. In several of his writings, Pázmány mentions his childhood attachment to Transylvania, and as a politician, he sees it as an important bastion of the Counter-Reformation, developing the convent in Şumuleu Ciuc/Csíkсомlyó in 1625 with papal help. One of Hargittay's most interesting observations is the possible symbolic gesture of Pázmány founding a university in Nagyszombat on 12 May 1635, the exact same day on which István Báthori had founded one in Cluj/Kolozsvár, Transylvania, a little more than half a century earlier.

Viktor Kanász presents the ecclesiastical career of Pázmány in its international Jesuit and Counter-Reformation context. He begins by outlining the writer's Jesuit upbringing, from Cluj through Kraków to Rome, where he began teaching in Graz after completing his theological studies. His work in the Order was not without conflict: his rhetorical talent soon made him popular and, therefore, the envy of many within the Order, but he always managed to defend himself against attacks. His oratorical skills also had a great influence in establishing the Tridentine insights of the Catholic Revival: the Church first settled Bosnian Franciscans and Italian monks in Hungary for missionary purposes, but Pázmány quickly realised that without vernacular conversion, it would be impossible to restore the Catholic Church to its former glory. The most important of his school-founding activities was undoubtedly

1 Tusor, Péter. *Pázmány, a jezsuita érsek – Kinevezésének története, 1615–1616 (Mikropolitikai tanulmány)* [Pázmány, the Jesuit prelate: His appointment as primate of Hungary, 1615–1616. A micropolitik study]. *Collectanea Vaticana Hungariae* 1.13. Budapest–Roma: Gondolat–MTA–PPKE “Lendület” Egyháztörténeti Kutatócsoport, 2016.

the founding of the University of Nagyszombat (Trnava) in 1635. (The successors of the university, Eötvös Lóránt University and Péter Pázmány Catholic University, are still in operation today.) In line with the Council of Trent, Pázmány also contributed to the development of the Catholic Church's infrastructure, founding many churches, supporting the Franciscan and Jesuit orders, restoring his titular church in Rome and supporting the printing press (he helped publish the Catholic translation of the György Káldi's Bible in 1626).

In his study, Ferenc Szabó explores the theological work of Péter Pázmány, first outlining the internationally widespread intellectual and pedagogical trends of the writer's time, namely scholasticism and Renaissance humanist education. Pázmány had started teaching in Graz in 1603 when he wrote his first works, which already show the desire for a systematic order that would accompany his later writings. At this time, he was primarily concerned with the theology of St Thomas Aquinas, commenting on and criticising his major work, the *Summa Theologiae*, while also constantly reflecting on the major theological thinkers of his day. Szabó, through his examination of his treatises *De fide* and *De verbo incarnato*, also addresses the theological approach of the Hungarian ecclesiologist from a historical-critical perspective, as well as draws a parallel between the theological thinking of Pázmány and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

Rita Bajáki's essay is the first in the volume to deal specifically with Pázmány as a writer—one who not only addressed his students from the university cathedra but who, in his pastoral work, was able to address a much wider social stratum, the members of the Hungarian Catholic Church. The crisis within the Church following the defeat at Mohács (1526) was also reflected in the printing of Catholic books: of the roughly five hundred books published in the 16th century, four hundred were Protestant. In addition, until 1606, when Pázmány's *Imádságos könyv* [Prayer Book] was published, a total of eighteen prayer books were published, of which only three were Catholic, including Pázmány's book. The work commissioned by Anna Kápi later enjoyed enormous popularity, appearing in thirty editions until the nineteenth century, but the popularity of the *Imádságos könyv* must have been even greater if one counts the versions that were published anonymously and the various rewritings, even by Protestant authors. Bajáki sees the novelty of the book and the source of its popularity in the fact that the publication contains not only prayers in self-explanatory chapters but also typographically well-separated explanations. These texts, unlike the disputations, are not intended to defend the faith, nor are they polemical in tone; rather, they are written with the aim of strengthening the faith in the reader's heart as much as possible. Of similar importance is Thomas à Kempis's translation into Hungarian of the *De Imitatione Christi*, a book that was extremely popular in Europe at the time. This—unlike the *Imádságos könyv*—does not contain

any commentary, thus encouraging independent spiritual reflection by Christian readers who are already somewhat more experienced in the faith.

One of the co-editors of the volume, Alinka Ajkay, introduces Pázmány as the author of religious controversies. It was typical of Pázmány's method of working that he incorporated his earlier treatises into his main work, the *Kalauz*. The writer's most famous opponent was Péter Alvinci, whose complete text of the debate between the two has not survived, but we can still reconstruct his arguments from the quotations in Pázmány's writings. It is typical of Pázmány's writing technique that he always follows the structure of his opponent's argument point by point and then creates his own response in a commentary-like, personal, often mocking and witty tone. Ajkay emphasises the way in which he sends a message to Calvin, who was not alive at that time: in his *Az nagy Calvinus Jánosnak Hiszekegy Istene* [The Great John Calvin's Creed], he transforms the text of the Credo into a polemic denouncing Protestantism. The impact of Pázmány's *Kalauz* was considerable on the international scene: his book was translated into Latin by the Protestant debaters of Transdanubia so that the Lutheran Fridericus Balduinus of Wittenberg could read it and respond to it.

The *Kalauz*, already mentioned several times in this review, is a key work in Pázmány's oeuvre. In his study, Emil Hargittay points out that the *Kalauz* can be interpreted as a synthetic work in the oeuvre, since it includes all non-prayer books in some way. In his study, Hargittay analyses the structure of the more than 1,000-page volume, which went through three editions in the author's lifetime. Earlier, Sándor Sík compared it to the structure of a Baroque cathedral. The book originally contained fourteen parts, and from the second edition onwards, fifteen; the content of the texts is roughly one-third 'purely' theological and two-thirds polymorphous. It is clear from the editorial (compilation) procedure of the *Kalauz* that Pázmány practically created no standalone pieces of writing; each of his polymathic texts could be worked into one or another edition of the *Kalauz* in some way.

Orsolya Báthory deals with the Latin-language oeuvre of Péter Pázmány, the first phase of which can be dated back to the writer's years teaching in Graz. At that time, he made a number of sketches for use as teaching aids: in addition to the Aristotelian education in logic-physics-metaphysics, they also dealt with Thomistic theology. Among these works is Pázmány's only independent piece on political theory, which he wrote in connection with the Venetian interdict. Pázmány also wrote in Latin throughout his life – no coincidence, since Latin was the lingua franca of the official diplomacy of the time. He wrote about a religious controversy (*Diatriba*), a petition in defence of the Jesuits (*Libellus apologeticus*...—on the peace of Vienna), and a pamphlet-like polemic (*Peniculus Papporum, Logi alogi*). He also wrote letters to the Pope in Latin and, at the end of his life, ecclesiastical treatises under a pseudonym.

In his study, István Bitskey describes Pázmány's *Sermons*, his last major undertaking, in which he sought to pass on the lessons of more than thirty years of pastoral practice to the ecclesiastical officials who followed him. Bitskey examines the texts through the triad of *pietas-eloquentia-eruditio*, thus assessing the social role of the sermons in their time. In addition to the theological notion of truth, the contemporary situation of the Catholic Church also played an important role in Pázmány's texts; he often reflected on the Tridentine reforms and the tasks to be undertaken within the ecclesiastical institution. Pázmány's popularity as an orator was due to his ability to address all sections of society. From the point of view of erudition, quoting old authors was an essential part of Pázmány's technique of composition. The authorities were primarily the Church Fathers, especially St Augustine; and of course, there were frequent quotations from Scripture, but we also find quotations from pagan authors (Seneca, Aristotle), St Ignatius of Loyola and occasionally from contemporary humanists. The humanising role of eloquence, or eloquent language, is perhaps best illustrated by the following quotation from Pázmány:

“Language, if it instructs, frees from ignorance; if it sings, delights; if it rebukes, improves; if it encourages, chastises; if it encourages, comforts; if it threatens, arrests. It is to language that we owe the wild and unwise ways of men that they have gone to cities and learned to live human lives. It is because of language that the wise sciences have spread.”

Bitskey points out that the rise of vernacular sermons in this form is by no means an isolated phenomenon of the time: the innovations of the Council of Trent spread significantly in several European countries.

The final study, by the editors of the volume, uses linguistic-stylistic analysis to explain why his contemporaries called the cardinal the “Hungarian Cicero”. One of Pázmány's great virtues was his ability to introduce figurative linguistic elements into his colloquial phrases, thus avoiding simple didacticism (sometimes a weakness of his opponents). His linguistic ingenuity can best be seen in the analysis of the Kempis translation: compared to the Latin original, the Hungarian text shows creative differences in certain places. It is also no coincidence that in the centuries following Pázmány, there were several collections of the writer's proverb-like language use. This study, which takes a stylistic-linguistic approach, has understandably been placed at the end of the volume since it summarises the phenomena discussed so far in the volume—the disparaging use of words in debates, the technique of compilation, the importance of the *Kalauz* editions, etc.

As for the structure of the book, the studies are not divided into separate sections, and there is no clear structure—as one would expect from a large monograph—to help determine how one should draw the ‘bigger picture’ of Pázmány's

activities. From the brief summaries of this review, however, it is hopefully clear that the order of the studies is far from random: starting from the larger historical context (the Habsburgs, the Thirty Years' War, Transylvania), we move through Pázmány's role as a Jesuit and theologian to the specific works, and finally through the smallest linguistic units, the vocabulary and linguistic inventions he used, to look at the career of the seventeenth-century Hungarian cardinal. Although it is debatable how advisable it is to read the volume in order, the studies give the impression of carefully arranged mosaic pieces placed side by side, resembling the structure of a conference proceedings more than that of a comprehensive monograph. When reading the texts consecutively, redundancy is frequent; for instance, several introductions reiterate the same basic biographical information already provided in the first introductory study. However, it may not be reasonable to expect a volume of barely 250 pages to meet the expectations typically associated with an extensive monograph. If we set aside the unfair expectation of a grand academic synthesis, the result is still a remarkably versatile and comprehensive English-language introduction to Pázmány's work. It provides insight into the oeuvre of an author who undoubtedly deserves international scholarly attention.

