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The Formula Collections of the Franciscan Observants in Hungary (ca. 1451–1554). By Antal Molnár

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The huge, folio-sized volume of Antal Molnár, with its more than 900 pages, evokes the memory of Baroque publications. The German title, in an unpretentious-looking Italian ecclesiastical series, on a Hungarian subject, will obviously not tempt the uninformed foreign reader to plunge into the work and discover the treasures it holds in store. Yet the volume is a treasure trove: a masterpiece of more than 10 years' work—it offers the reader new discoveries page after page, which do not simply add to the professional *opinio communis*, but make new propositions on fundamental issues, hidden in single declarative sentences, with the usual modesty associated with the author's style.

The volume is divided into two larger parts: the almost 200 pages of the introduction summarize all that is known about the surviving formularies of the Observant Franciscan Vicariate (then Province from 1517) in Hungary. The author examines this using the broadest possible approach: on the one hand, the introduction gives a detailed account of the current state of research on medieval letter collections (formularies), and on the other hand, it provides an overview of Western European (German, Italian, French) research on similar letter collections. Thus, this part of the volume can be read as a monograph on the recent revival of studies on formularies, following the outstanding earlier research of György Bónis. Antal Molnár approaches this field with a much broader focus than most of the Hungarian or even international scholarship, and takes into account the history of Polish pragmatic literacy, which is perhaps typologically closest to that of Hungary in terms of alphabetization and the spread of vernacular writing.

To the uninitiated reader, the aim of the volume seems to be to rewrite the history of the Franciscan order in Hungary, as if Antal Molnár's work were a contin-

uation of János Karácsonyi's *History of the Franciscan Order in Hungary*, or of frequently cited volumes of the *Egyháztörténeti emlékek a magyarországi hitújítás korából* [Sources of Church History from the Age of Hungarian Reformation]. The volume contains an almost complete edition of four Franciscan formulary books of the late Middle Ages (although Bálint Nádasdi's work from the 1550s can safely be called early modern). Even the earliest collection is also astonishingly late, as there survive no such documents from the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. The Cod. Lat. 432 of the National Széchényi Library contains three documents dated 1451–55, and 216 additional texts dating from 1481–1524. Most of the letters are related to the official activities of the contemporary superiors of the Franciscan Vicariate of the Observant Franciscan Order in Hungary, from Bertalan Zazymus Sárosi (1488) to Gábor Pécsváradi (1524), and were probably collected in the central monastery of the province, the monastery of St. John in Buda. Among them, we can read two exhortations by Osvald Laskai (No. 8, from 1507–1509, and No. 211, from 1507), whose style is clearly more preacherly than the exhortations from other provincials which survive. This manuscript was analysed by Jenő Szűcs in his highly influential, but now more critically viewed, article.[1] Szűcs pointed out that the geographic direction of the Dózsa uprising—Szikszó, Sárospatak, Gyula, Várad, Csanád, the region of Bihar—coincided with the area where the density of the Franciscan observant monasteries was more significant, and that the documents of the order contain numerous references to "apostate" monks, so that there may be a connection with a certain Observant Franciscan "revolutionary" ideology.[2] Since then, research has shown that the "Battle of Várad", which is considered to be the key battle, was probably a battle of Vác instead (lying in the opposite direction), and that the Dózsa uprising involved much smaller armies than previously thought.[3] In his introduction, Antal Molnár does not address the question of the 'crusading' ideology of the Franciscan document collection, but the collection as a whole, which he has made available, gives a noticeably different impression than if we had only seen a few documents relating to the apostate and rebellious monks (pp. 331, 335–336). Antal Molnár has the merit of having dated those documents that Szűcs has not yet been able to place chronologically (including Exhortation 211, which can therefore be attributed to Osvát Laskai!). Also, interesting additional evidence against Szűcs's thesis is found in the circular letter from Tamás Bakócz, in which the Archbishop's relationship with the Franciscans *after* the Peasants' War of 1514 is clearly outlined. In letter No. 156, dated 2 September 1514, the Archbishop forbids secular priests and parish priests to take a quarter of the alms from the Franciscans collecting alms for the Crusade, or

1 Szűcs, "The Franciscan Observance."

2 Szűcs, "The Franciscan Observance," 243–44.

3 Horváth, "Legendás várak nyomában," 236–37, 253.

to prevent confessions by the friars. If there was indeed any Franciscan revolutionary ideology to speak of, the Archbishop clearly did not perceive it, since he would not have supported them in their alms-gathering and prevented their harassment (pp. 304–305). It might have been worthwhile to include in an appendix those documents of cultural historical significance (herbarium fragments, numerical notes, medical prescriptions) which are scattered throughout the codex, so that the reader could have gained a fuller impression not only of the text of the letter formulae but also of the miscellaneous character of this manuscript.

As Antal Molnár explains in his foreword, compared to the medieval formularies, the collections of Franciscan pragmatic literacy contain a significantly smaller percentage of texts taken from other collections of model letters, e.g. popular handbooks of *artes dictandi*, and the proportion of textual matches between the surviving collections is also small (p. 52). There are some parallels (especially between Collections I and III: pp. 217–218, 575; pp. 224, 603), but these are much smaller in number than one would expect. In this context, it is particularly significant that the earliest collection already contains some quotations, and mainly from letters by humanist authors. These stylistically important samples are often highlighted by the compiler of the formularies with the title 'Elegancie'. Two of the most important authors in this respect are Enea Silvio Piccolomini and Franciscus Niger: twelve model letters are copied from Piccolomini, six from Niger, and one letter from Albrecht von Eyb's *Margarita poetica*. The appearance of neither source is surprising: Piccolomini's correspondence was already in print (and of course his close relationship with János Zrednai and later with Mátyás Hunyadi was well known), Franciscus Niger's *Modus epistolandi* was first published around 1487 (Nürnberg, Creussner, 1487?, GW M24930), and thereafter 36 early editions appeared only until 1500. Furthermore, Niger, by his own admission, also taught in Hungary (in Vác, under Bishop Miklós Báthory), and his booklet of model letters was widely used in Central European university teaching. We may add one more letter (I, 177, p. 312) to the list of borrowings from Enea Silvio Piccolomini, which is taken from the conclusion of Piccolomini's letter of 25 June 1444.[4] The sources identified by Antal Molnár can be supplemented by a collection of letters, the *Novum epistolarium* of Gian Maria Filelfo, from which the letter addresses I 178 (conciliatory letter), I 179 (love letter), and I 180 (reporting news) are taken.[5]

The Franciscan compiler, just like the original author, of course, notes the words "amatoria honesta" above these letters, lest the reader should think of anything immoral. It is striking that the Franciscan library in Gyöngyös also has this volume of Gian Maria Filelfo (Bologna, 1489, GW M33078) next to the handbook

4 Wolkan, ed., *Der Briefwechsel,* vol. I/1, 343.

5 Cp. Filelfo, *Epistolare elegantissimum*, 40, 44, 45; GW M 33071.

of Franciscus Niger (shelfmark: Inc. 69, coll. 3). These adaptations also point to the fact that in the rhetorical literacy of the late-medieval mendicant community in Hungary, no conflict was perceived between the scholastic tradition and humanist literary aspirations: humanist Latinism was easily transferred to pragmatic literacy, since it was not associated with any ideological charge.

The second codex (OSZK, Oct. Lat. 775.) testifies that between 1532–35 an attempt was made to produce a unified collection of formularies for the Hungarian Franciscan province. This is the largest collection of letters, with a total of 508 text units. The documents, collected from several sources, are trans-dated, anonymised, or certainly given fictitious place names in Hungary (p. 69), a tendency that reflects a certain editorial awareness. An example is the invitation to the custos of Ozora for the provincial chapter held in Atya (now: *Šarengrad*, Croatia) in Codex I (such chapters were held there in 1495, 1499, and 1511), which is included without references to a place in Codex II and dated to 1534 (pp. 230, 493). In this codex, the documents, which are copied together and to a large extent anonymized or fictionalized, are listed in chronological order, dating between 1532 and 1535, so that Molnár is right to conclude that the compilation of the codex must have taken place at this time (p. 70). The arrangement of the codex also indicates a conscious composition, in that the letters and types of documents which the compiler considered to be of the same genre are listed side by side and divided into 22 separate chapter headings (pp. 67–68). Antal Molnár also convincingly identifies the possible identity of the compiler: the non-anonymized place names of the documents are largely linked to the Southern part of Transdanubia and the region of Partium, and Ozora stands out with 18 mentions, and Kusaly and Bánya with 5 and 7, respectively. The most significant of the identifiable recipients of the letters is Miklós Balatinci, to whom eleven letters are addressed, and who is the author of one fragment and one letter. Since Balatinci was custos of Ozora from 1531–33, guardian of Ozora between 1533–35, and custos of Bánya from 1535, we can agree with Antal Molnár that Miklós Balatinci is the most likely candidate for the compiler (p. 72).

The third codex (566–647) is from the Franciscan library of Gyöngyös (Cod. med. 3.), which, according to Molnár, is the most important collection of all the formularies. This hitherto little-mentioned volume contains convincing evidence that it is one of the most important sources of the history of the Franciscan order in Hungary for the seven decades between 1450 and 1523. Molnár's analysis makes it certain that the volume was compiled between 1517 and 1523 in the convent of St. John in Buda, the centre of the order's province (p. 76; the dating could be supplemented by an analysis of the watermarks). Of all the sources, this is where the greatest philological work was needed to identify the textual units of the Gyöngyös codex. The Herculean work (pp. 77–80) led to the disentanglement of the main text

units of the codex, which was compiled around 1517 and is mainly composed of explanations of the Franciscan rule, the constitution of the Hungarian province, and a collection of Franciscan legal sources. Molnár links the compilation with the activities of French Franciscan Bonifacio da Ceva, whose Hungarian connections are otherwise known with János Gosztonyi, bishop of Győr. Molnár's merit here is to draw attention to da Ceva's biography, hitherto neglected in Hungarian scholarship, according to which the French Franciscan served as a page in King Matthias' army and killed several Ottomans in his youth—which may explain the favourable reception he later offered to Bishop Gosztonyi and Balázs Várdai in Paris. The philological differentiation of the manoeuvring between the Coletian and the Observant Franciscan tendencies (pp. 86–87) in the manuscript is a real feat, as is the philological criticism of the version of the Hungarian Franciscan chronicle in the manuscript (pp. 93–94). Molnár demonstrates that the text here is not a version of the chronicle known from the fifteenth century (usually attributed to Balázs Szalkai and his successors), but an independent compilation with the inclusion of several sources, which integrates the events of the Hungarian province into the international history of the order, and omits the parts that are only comprehensible to the Hungarian reader (e.g., the etymology of names, and the mention of the "Cseri brethren"). The author-compiler of this new chronicle also differs from the author of the version published by Ferenc Toldy in style, education, and legal knowledge, and represents a different ecclesiastical-political tendency: for example, he emphasizes the role of Osvát Laskai in the fact that around 1500 the Observants considered the reunion with the Conventual Franciscans to be detrimental to their order (p. 101). This author-compiler rewrote the history of the earlier events using a different Latin style, and then composed an independent history of the Franciscans in Hungary from 1501 to 1521; consequently, this version may have been written soon after this time, and later supplemented by another Observant friar until 1533 (p. 103). The collection of letters in the Codex of Gyöngyös is only a supplement to the letters published in the printed collections of Franciscan rules (*Firmamenta*, *Monumenta ordinis*; *Speculum minorum*) which are bound to it, but it still contains 140 texts, of which 133 are published in the volume, except for a few exhortations. Among these texts, some are rhetorical masterpieces, such as the consolatory letter No. 114. All but two of the dated letters date from between 1501 and 1514 and come from the Order's top leaders in Hungary and Italy, which makes it clear that the Gyöngyös volume was the personal reference aid of the Observant vicar in Hungary (pp. 106–7), and leads Molnár to the discovery, that the compiler of the volume was Albert Dereszlényi, vicar and later provincial of the Hungarian observants (p. 108). This is supported by the comparison of the writing of the codex's scribe with three handwritten charters by Dereszlényi (p. 109). We may agree with Molnár that this

codex is the most significant discovery of the volume, since he identifies an independently compiled auxiliary book for the governance of the Hungarian observant province in this manuscript, which has been completely ignored until now.

The fourth codex (Ms. Oct. Lat. 1220) is in the National Széchényi Library and is an *omniarium* of the Franciscan monk Bálint Nádasdi from the mid-sixteenth century. In this case, Molnár has—rightly in my opinion—published only those letters that are substantially different from, or independent of, the printed model letter collections of international humanist literature, such as those of Franciscus Pescennius Niger or Erasmus. His analysis confirms that Bálint Nádasdi was an intellectually independent and highly educated compiler, whose work provides a unique insight into the Franciscan milieu in Hungary in the 1550s and 60s, as he was very conscious of applying the lessons of his Paris education and the readings from the more than 30 volumes of his library to his own Franciscan environment. Molnár's research confirms that the intellectual richness of Nádasdi's culture renders unfounded the summary negative judgements of earlier literature on Franciscan culture after Mohács.[6] Thanks to this, the contours and significance of Bálint Nádasdi's work as an ecclesiastical and literary organizer are now more clearly visible, and it is therefore clear that it would be worthwhile to continue the work by publishing his manuscript sermons.

Despite the significant number of texts published here for the first time, there seem to be hardly any typos left in the editions. Perhaps it would have been useful to highlight the uncommon spellings with [!] or [sic!], because in some cases it is difficult to decide whether a certain word is written using an idiosyncratic spelling or is misspelled: *ocultam* (p. 258), Bernat (p. 302), *pretensse* (p. 305), *nunctium* (p. 311), *statustisque* (p. 579), *medacium* (p. 639). Overall, Antal Molnár's work provides a new foundation for the history of the Franciscan order in Hungary in the period 1450–1560: he has identified the editors of two collections of model letters (Miklós Balatinci and Albert Dereszlényi) and also provides important lessons from the perspective of literary history for defining the relationship between humanist and monastic culture. It is no longer possible to approach Osvát Laskai's oeuvre without Molnár's work, and the new results on the ideology and literary echoes of the Dózsa Rebellion (1514) can hardly be overlooked in the future.

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6 Cp. Molnár, "Egy válság anatómiája," 221.

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