

Reformer vagy lázadó? Bethlen Miklós és kora. Humaniorák.
[Reformer or Rebel? Miklós Bethlen and his Age.] Edited by Ildikó
Horn and Gyula Laczházi.

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Miklós Bethlen (1642–1716), the last chancellor of the Principality of Transylvania in office before its complete integration into the Habsburg Empire, played a major role in the implementation of the *Diploma Leopoldinum*, a charter which would have assured that the constitutional traditions of Transylvania stay respected by the Catholic monarch after the Ottoman era, only to see his hopes betrayed. After being charged with high treason, Bethlen was kept in custody until he died in Vienna, where he finished one of the most valuable autobiographies written in Hungarian in the early modern period. These memoirs, often read in parallel with his autobiographical prayerbook, have been discussed from various angles. While historians, for instance, have appreciated the many details of political history in the autobiography, they have also stated that factual research can easily undermine the credibility of his account of historical events, but they have also been interested by the mechanisms of self-justification in Bethlen's text. Those who are intrigued by historical anthropology can rejoice about the abundant aspects of the author's self-representation, including his health, diet, humoral-pathologically interpreted passions, and even the detailed description of his libido and sexual struggles. Furthermore, Bethlen as a main protector of the Calvinist Church in Transylvania was also well-versed in the religious and philosophical matters of his time; not only did he provide numerous details of his education in the homeland and abroad, but he also provided a philosophical introduction to his autobiography. All these details reveal to researchers the large variety of intellectual influences that shaped him during his journey in the Netherlands and in England: Puritanism, Cartesianism, and Cocceianism.

Entitled *Reformer vagy lázadó? Bethlen Miklós és kora* [Reformer or Rebel? Miklós Bethlen and his Age], the volume, edited by Ildikó Horn and Gyula Laczházi introduces the reader to numerous interpretations. It regroups the written versions of the papers presented at a 2016 conference of the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest held on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of Bethlen's death. However, the book is more than a conference proceeding: it is close to being a companion for Bethlen's political and literary activity, providing both a general overview of the statesman in his various capacities, and a multitude of more specific aspects of the Bethlen scholarship. Following the editors' foreword, the book opens with an exhaustive study of the chancellor's political career. Written by the recently deceased József Jankovics and László Szörényi, this article resumes the series of political pamphlets and propositions which, in the interest of Transylvania, Bethlen addressed to the monarch. The main novelty of their research consists in a better understanding of Bethlen's religious evolution, which might have contributed to his incarceration. The authors argue that Bethlen arrived from orthodox Calvinism through puritanism at a certain kind of *prima religio*, an idea less discussed in the context of Bethlen's religious beliefs. According to Jankovics and Szörényi, Bethlen's ideal would have been a supra-confessional unity of Christian denominations, and while demonstrating that Bethlen inspired himself by the works Grotius and the Helmstedt theologian Georg Callixtus about the topic, they also explain how Bethlen's religious policies echoed the Austrian-Hungarian efforts to reunite Catholic and Protestant Churches after the end of the Ottoman domination and the transition of Transylvania to Habsburg authority. The article also introduces the first modern edition of Bethlen's pamphlet entitled *Jam jam exigentis Transylvaniae gemitus* [The Sigh of Transylvania a Moment before Exhaling its Soul].

Some authors of the volume are, like Jankovics, well-known in the Bethlen literature, while others are new to this field of research, either because of their age, or because they are specialised in other matters. Either way, they open new perspectives for interpreting Bethlen's oeuvre, whereas the more familiar Bethlen scholars, even if they do not surprise the reader, resume and continue their inquiries in a way that makes the volume an indispensable handbook for future research about Bethlen, the Transylvanian politics of his age, and early modern ego-documents.

Amongst the most reputed Bethlen scholars that contributed to this volume, the absence of Zsombor Tóth, the specialist on Bethlen's puritanic influences, is unfortunate. However, he has recently edited another conference proceeding about Bethlen, placing his works into the context of early modern prison literature (Anita Fajt, Emőke Rita Szilágyi, and Zsombor Tóth (eds), *Börtön, exilium és szenvedés: Bethlen Miklós élettörténetének kora újkori kontextusai* [Prison, Exile, and Suffering: Early Modern Contexts of Miklós Bethlen's Biography] [Budapest: Reciti, 2017]). On the other hand, Gyula Laczházi, one of the editors of the book, is also present with a study about Bethlen's conception on human passions (*passiones animi*). Laczházi

has worked on the topic before, analysing the author's physiognomic and medical self-description; this time, he discusses it from a different point of view, i.e., from the angle of Bethlen's puritanic comprehension of conscience and his distinction between worldly fame and Christian honour, two sides of the same personality that often contradict one another. Bethlen, Laczházi argues, must resolve this contradiction in order to represent himself as a statesman working for the common good.

In his paper, Levente Nagy questions the relationship between fiction and reality in Bethlen's communication with God. Exploring the theological imagination of the author, Nagy wonders whether Bethlen's God can be influenced by the believers in a way that they can rest assured about the salvation of their soul. The study is a useful contribution about Bethlen's dilemmas between the Calvinist dogma on predestination and Cocceius's covenant theology, even if it fails to convince the reader that fiction or reality are adequate terms to discuss religious beliefs. József Simon, who has the most solid background in the history of philosophy amongst the Bethlen scholars, discusses the problem of "nothing", formerly analysed by Laczházi in the philosophical introduction to Bethlen's autobiography. "Nothing" is an important concept in Bethlen's religious anthropology where man is "nothing" in comparison to God as an absolute being. In his article, Simon argues that Bethlen was torn between two different concepts of "nothing": that of the Epicurean's atomism advocated by Pierre Gassendi, who thought that the division of matter and space was limited by the size of an ultimately small unit, i.e., the atom, and that of the Cartesianism which claimed that the infinite division of matter and space was rationally conceivable. Unlike these studies that approach their topic through intellectual history, our last Bethlen scholar, Margit S. Sárdi, a specialist on Transylvanian autobiographies, discusses Bethlen as a storyteller. Using a structural analysis of the anecdotes provided in his autobiography, S. Sárdi demonstrates that Bethlen sacrifices the mechanism of a well-told story if he wants to draw the reader's attention to his ego, transforming a narrative unit into an *exemplum* of personal virtue.

Some of the authors who have recently joined the Bethlen philology deal with his political career and network. Sándor Gebei, an expert on the Transylvanian politics of foreign affairs (especially the Polish and Russian relations) and the insurrection of Ferenc Rákóczi II, which deeply marked the end of Bethlen's public activity, casts a new light on his political clairvoyance. In comparison to Jankovics and Szörényi's opinion, his judgment tends to be mitigated and negative. Nóra G. Etényi, a historian of the early modern press and the Western-European representation of Hungary, proposes a thorough overview of Bethlen's foreign reputation as it appeared in newspapers and pamphlets. Zsófia Szirtes, whose research is focused on the beginning of the Habsburg rule in Transylvania, examines the same period by using a very particular perspective: that of Bethlen's archenemy, General Rabutin, the supreme commander of the imperial armies in Transylvania, who wrote about

Bethlen in his reports with lots of suspicion. Zsuzsánna Balogh's study investigates Bethlen's role in Dénes Bánffy's execution in 1674: Bánffy, a most powerful Transylvanian lord was sentenced to death for high treason, and Bethlen was one of the magnates who conspired against him. This participation must have felt uncomfortable in his later years, not only because of remorse or moral reasons, but also because the first governor of Habsburg-ruled Transylvania was the executed Bánffy's son. Balogh offers a meticulous analysis of Bethlen's self-justification and penitence. Angelika T. Orgona is present with two studies in the volume: the first discusses the rituals and the representation of the princely council of Transylvania, whereas the other compares Bethlen's memoirs with Gáspár Kornis's autobiographical text: both documents are interesting sources for the above-described movement against Bánffy. Representation is the topic of another paper: Ákos Sánta investigates hunting as an aristocratic habit of the princely court in Bethlen's century as well. Whereas the author thoroughly and extensively discusses the social, zoological, and material aspects of the topic, he does not discuss in detail Bethlen's account of the famous party of boar hunting, during which Miklós Zrínyi, the influential politician, soldier, and Baroque poet died (1664): Bethlen witnessed his death, and his memoirs provided the most reliable description of the event.

Enikő Rűsz-Fogarasi, a historian of urban institutions in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár), explores Bethlen's relationship with the town. Bence Vida uses the methods of network analysis to identify relevant modifications in Bethlen's correspondence and in his exchange of news with informants. Other studies about Bethlen's networks emphasise the importance of confessional factors in the Transylvanian statesman's clientele. While Judit Balogh interprets the Bethlen family's marital politics and network building in the Székely Land as a Calvinist power concentration in the proximity of Catholic centres, two other studies in the volume focus on Bethlen's reaction to the Habsburg efforts to reconvert Transylvania to Catholicism. Béla Vilmos Mihalik reveals the first cautious steps toward re-establishing a Catholic bishop in the principality, while Kornél Nagy discusses Bethlen's behaviour when the chancellor had to face the reunification of the Armenian Church of Transylvania with the Holy See. The latter paper perfectly completes Jankovics and Szörényi's study that points out Bethlen's Pan-Christian convictions: whereas, theoretically, Bethlen would have been satisfied with an approach between denominations, he could not watch Habsburg attempts at strengthening the Catholic Church in Transylvania without fearing for the position of Protestantism.

Like these historians, researchers of literary history and early modern culture recommend various new angles to the interpretation of Bethlen's text. Géza Orlovsky takes stock of strategies, both naïve and professional, for reading Bethlen. What he accomplishes in his article is a history of Bethlen's reception as read by the

author's targeted public, or as part of the history of Hungarian literature, and as an experience for modern readers and writers. Continuing Laczházi's inquiries into historical anthropology, but from a different theoretical perspective, Piroska Balogh searches for Bethlen's poetics of space and body in relevant extracts where the author represents special and temporal relations through somatic impressions. Poetry of space has a role also in a study by Márton Szentpéteri, who investigates material culture in Bethlen's text by referring to design theory. This means that Szentpéteri considers objects to be active agents which interact with human life. It is hard to acknowledge why this theory might reveal more than a traditional history of applied arts, yet Szentpéteri's erudite demonstration seems plausible: Bethlen, who studied architecture in the Low Countries, and supervised in person the construction of his castle on his family estate of Bethlenszentmiklós (Sânmiclăus), was aware of the encyclopaedical wealth of this art, Szentpéteri argues, and by building his new castle, he created, in a symbolic way, a sort of replica of Salomon's Temple. Finally, two papers that link Bethlen's activity to less explored intellectual phenomena should be reviewed: Mihály Balázs, an authority on early modern religious dissidence, points out a possible Unitarian influence in Bethlen's vision of Hungarian history, while Farkas Gábor Kiss reflects on an unedited source revealing interesting details about Bethlen's education: the manuscript entitled *Philosophia naturalis* by János Apáczai Csere, Bethlen's teacher in Cluj, a Hungarian pioneer of Cartesianism. Hopefully, the text will soon be edited by Kiss and Júlia Hagymási, although a footnote on page 280 of the present volume mistakenly refers to it as a published edition.

In the light of the importance of the book, its typography has relatively many confusing errors; moreover, the footnotes consistently display the title of Virgil's *Georgica* as *Georgicon*. That apart, the editors did an exemplary job in offering a comprehensive image of Bethlen's life and oeuvre despite the disparate topics, which are bound to feature in a collective volume. Its ramifying results will be useful for many disciplines. And if we consider how this volume changes our opinion of Bethlen in more general terms, the versatility and the often-contradictory character of his political and religious views immediately come to mind. On the one hand, internationally, he is a most informed politician; on the other hand, it seems that his political realism fails him at a crucial moment of his career, and he turns out to be unable to gauge power relations of his time. He also considers himself a tolerant Christian believer who does not confuse religious faith with rigid dogmatism and external rites, but when it comes to the interests of his beloved Calvinist Church, he is ready to fight back.

