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Divine Punishment and Daniel's Dream

Eschatology and Moralism in Central European History Writing in the Mid-Sixteenth Century*

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Abstract. In the field of early modern historiography, and generally in the history of Reformation, the Wittenberg view of the past is the given name of the historical thinking which became predominant in the areas influenced by Luther's and Melanchthon's teachings. The main components of this universalist world view were the belief in the imminent Apocalypse; the idea of four Empires; the organic cycles of world history; and the firm conviction that the Turkish conquest of southeastern Europe and parts of Hungary was God's rightful punishment for the innumerable sins of Christianity. It is well known that Protestant eschatology had deep medieval roots. The idea of divine punishment, however, was also reinforced by other sources in the first half of sixteenth century. This paper aims to demonstrate through the works of various German and Hungarian historians and religious thinkers of the period (Johannes Sleidanus, Samuel Budina, Ferenc Forgách and others) that this concept and its literary use was also influenced by Erasmian moralism based on the rediscovery of certain forgotten, mostly Platonic ideas, which in Christian humanism could be harmoniously combined with the prophetic messages amplified by the Turkish threat and the Reformation.

Keywords: early modern historiography, Protestant eschatology, Erasmian moralism, Johannes Sleidanus, Ferenc Forgách, Samuel Budina, Péter Bornemisza

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Introduction: Daniel's Dream and the Wittenberg view of the past

This study is not about Wittenberg Historiography:[1] rather about the effects of the Wittenberg view of the past on some historiographers working in Central Europe in the middle of sixteenth century. The Wittenberg view of the past was a multifaceted phenomenon: it had enormous influence not only on historical but also on theological and philosophical thought from the beginnings of Reformation. Its core ideas were the belief in the imminent Apocalypse; the idea of four empires; the organic, six-thousand-year world history and its two-thousand and five hundred-year cycles; and the firm conviction that the Ottoman conquest was God's rightful punishment for the innumerable sins of Christianity. The prominent role of prophet Daniel in this scheme is due to the fact that his Old Testament book contains two visions of dreams—one of Nebuchadnezzar in Chapter Two, the other his own in Chapter Seven—which in the sixteenth century were fixed in the Protestant historiography as an allegorical pattern of world history.[2] The idea of four empires and the cycles of

1 Generally and most recently: Pohlig, *Zwischen Gelehrsamkeit und konfessioneller Identitätsstiftung*; Lotito, *The Reformation of Historical Thought*.

2 Dan. 2: 32–45: This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. […] Thou art this head of gold. And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. […] And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Dan. 7: 4–8: And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings […]. And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. After this I beheld, and to another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.

history were reinvented and propagated by Melanchthon, especially through his universal history, the Carion's Chronicle.[3] The apocalyptic element, on the other hand, did not need to be rediscovered. This concept (almost without losing its original medieval feature) remained a dominant voice in Protestant discourse and popular belief throughout the sixteenth century and was intensified due to the seemingly sudden and simultaneous historical changes, such as the French-Habsburg conflict, the German Reformation, and the Ottoman conquest in Hungary. These events nurtured both the constant perception of crisis and the increasing belief in the upcoming ultimate battle between Good and Evil.[4]

As will be shown below, not even secular historiography, which had grown up with humanism embracing and reinventing the rhetorical tradition of the antiquity, could escape the universalist influence of *historia prophetica*. Naturally, not every humanist historian was affected by the Zeitgeist of eschatology. Paolo Giovio, who published the first major comprehensive contemporary history of Europe, considered Fortune and individual virtue rather than some divine plan punishing humanity to be the driving force of world history.[5] Others, like the authors presented here, experimented with a kind of middle ground, especially if it corresponded with their historiographical aims. The case of Johannes Sleidanus was very special: he published a commentary on the history of the Lutheran Reformation, which was the benchmark of the period; but he also established his reputation with his work on the four empires of Daniel.[6]

In the following, I will focus on the distinct, but ultimately mutually reinforcing parallelism that existed between humanist and theological historiography and between historiographical and theological language, in relation to the idea of divine providence. That is, on the various ideas and discourses that framed human history in terms of individual morality, and especially on the idea that individual sins can have transgenerational consequences. This moralism was rooted partly in the Bible

3 Pohlig, *Zwischen Gelehrsamkeit und konfessioneller Identitätsstiftung*; Lotito, *The Reformation of Historical Thought*; on the long-lasting effects of the cycles of history most recently: Storchová, "Fateful periods."

4 For the popular beliefs: Leppin, *Antichrist und Jüngster Tag,* 15–69; 130–68. The Wittenberg view of history in Hungary: Bene, "Ratio temporum"; Tarnai, "*A magyar nyelvet írni kezdik*"; Kathona, *Károlyi Gáspár történeti világképe*.

5 Zimmermann, Paolo Giovio. For the political (including Machiavellian) concepts of Virtue and Fortune in renaissance humanism: Hankins, *Virtue Politics*.

6 Kess, *Johann Sleidan and the Protestant vision of history*; Kelley, "Johann Sleidan and the origins"; Pohlig, *Zwischen Gelehrsamkeit und konfessioneller Identitätsstiftung,* 161–75. In fact, as Pohlig (on p. 165) rightly observes based on Sleidanus' introduction to the *Commentarii*, both represented the same eschatological concept. "Für ihn ist offenkundig, daß seine Gegenwart eine heilsgeschichtlich ausgezeichnete Zeit ist und daß Gott selbst den Geschichtsprozeß lenkt."

and partly in antiquity, working in perfect harmony with the prophetic approach that was emerging in the early modern period.

Two things need to be mentioned before turning to the authors and the text excerpts that demonstrate their moralising attitude. The first is the popularity and widespread use of prophetic language in the Middle Ages, based on Joachimist milleniarism, which very early linked the idea of church reform to the emergence of external threat, i.e. the Ottoman Empire and its increasingly violent conquests.[7] This expressed partly a moral attitude in itself (the Turk as God's punishment for a series of individual sins) and partly an explicit expectation of the apocalypse, which rapidly swept through public opinion and occasionally escalated to the point of total despair and paralysis.[8] The other factor contributing to the spread of moralistic attitudes in sixteenth century historiography was the terminological imprecision of history writing itself, combined with a strong and ultimately Ciceronian desire of the authors to influence the present and posterity alike through moralising examples of the past.[9]

These are roughly the conceptual patterns I am trying to place the authors discussed in this article in, while tracing the eschatological and non-eschatological sources of their moralism. The starting point will be Johannes Sleidanus, whose treatise on the four empires was extracted by Samuel Budina, a young Slovenian humanist, in his short description of the siege of Szigetvár published in 1568. I will then turn to the references of divine vengeance in the *Commentarii* of the Hungarian historiographer Ferenc Forgách. The final section aims to demonstrate that the use of this concept (i.e. divine vengeance) in historiography was likely influenced by an Erasmian rediscovery of certain, mostly Platonist ideas. Despite these ideas being forgotten in the Middle Ages, they could be harmoniously fused in Christian humanism with the prophetic voices amplified by Turkish threat and the Reformation.

Sleidanus and Budina: the Last Judgement and the Holy Roman Empire

Johannes Sleidanus (1506–1556) was born in Luxembourg and later settled down in Strassbourg. After 1545, he was commissioned by the Schmalkalden League to write his *Commentarii*, a summarising history of the German Reformation.[10] This work

7 Fodor, "The view of the Turk in Hungary."

8 Ehmann, *Luther, Türken und Islam*, 292–402.

9 Koselleck, "Historia magistra vitae."

10 Sleidanus, *De statu religionis et reipublicae*. Cp. Pohlig, *Zwischen Gelehrsamkeit und konfessioneller Identitätsstiftung,* 161–75.

served essentially as the official Protestant history of the sixteenth century. Sleidanus' name is also connected with Philippe de Commynes (1447–1511), the most influential early modern political memoir writer, whose work he translated into Latin.[11] This translation and his own *Commentarii* make him one of the most progressive exponents of early modern political historiography,[12] while his treatise on the four empires shows a perfectly prophetic vision of history, in which he testifies his strong faith in the approaching apocalypse.[13]

Samuel Budina's (c.1540–1571) *History of the Fall of Szigetvár* was published in 1568, as a Latin translation of an eyewitness' account written originally in Croatian.[14] The Latin text is surrounded by a number of paratexts (liminary elegies, dedication, eulogies, funeral epigrams), of which I will now focus on the dedication written to Hans Khisl von Kaltenbrunn. In one paragraph, Budina quotes the seventh chapter of Daniel and like Melanchthon, he identifies the last growing horn of the fourth beast, appearing in Daniel's dream, with the Ottoman Empire.[15] Following this, however, he first calls all Christians to return to God's true faith; then he turns to the second chapter of Daniel, i.e. to the interpretation of the „great image" in Nebuchadnezzar's dream:

> "I have no doubt that, if all this comes to be true [i.e. the return to the true Christian morals and faith], the extermination and expulsion of the Turks, the ruthless enemies of human race, will be directed by God Himself, for it is He who makes everything tremble with His nod. And I certainly hope that in this way we will triumph over them with ease and that our homes will be safe from them.
>
> In my opinion, this is not much contrary to Daniel's prophecy either. Because, giving the three horns to the Turks, which, as we have described, are theirs for long ago, he is also proving that their power is now in its zenith. And though their territory at present is very close and contiguously linked to Germany, yet, as their country must remain within secure bounds, and must in no case be united with the Roman Empire, we may trust that God will soon tighten the grip which he has relaxed, and for the sake of his Son will spare and protect us.

11 Cominaeus, *De rebus gestis Ludovici […] commentarii*. For the translations in historiography: Burke, "Translating histories."

12 "One of the greatest of all modern historians." Kelley, "Johann Sleidan and the origins," 573.

13 Sleidanus, *De quattuor summis imperiis libri tres*.

14 Budina, *Historia Sigethi*; Budina, *Historii von Eroberung.*

15 Pohlig, *Zwischen Gelehrsamkeit und konfessioneller Identitätsstiftung.*

> It is true that all that is left of the Roman Empire are his toes, the mass of his body has almost disappeared and shrunk to a very small size; but as his feet are made of iron, according to the prophecy, his basis will hold firm and will not be broken any further. His name, therefore, and what is left of it, will survive until the Machine is broken down, and Christ will bring an end to all mankind with his return; He shall take up the calamities from them, lead them to a safe and quiet place, *and shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*[16] Lastly, after warning us of the catastrophe, the prophet exhorts us not to be discouraged, and even seeks to strengthen everyone, and therefore he places the resurrection of the dead immediately after the calamities; so, we must implore God again and again with our constant pray that we may look forward to this redemption with joy."[17]

German consciousness, in the form of Germany being framed as the unbreakable iron foot and toes of the Last Empire, sounds from these words. Moreover, a strong belief is present that the fall of the Fourth Empire—and with it the end of the world—is postponed indefinitely, and that even the Ottoman rule can be broken under God's guidance. In other words, the traditional Lutheran-Melanchthonian interpretation of Daniel's prophecy is reversed: the Turk has reached the zenith of his rule, he will not conquer any further, and the Holy Roman Empire will survive until the end of time, i. e. until the Second Coming of Christ. Budina was not, of course, working from his own desk, but simply recited a lesson he had presumably read during his studies at Tübingen,[18] which happened to be Sleidanus' commentary on the four empires. Juxtaposing the two passages, it is clear, that he essentially extracts Sleidanus:

16 Is 25:8; Rev 7:17; 21:4.

17 Budina, *Historia Sigethi*, 7–8: Quae utinam si fierent, nihil addubitarem, Turcas crudelissimas humani generis hostes, Deo ipso duce, cuius nutu omnia contremiscunt, brevi caesos, lateque fugatos iri. Et hac ratione de ipsis nos facillime posthac triumphaturos, inque nostris sedibus tuto permansuros esse, plane considerem. Nec mihi multum ab hac mea sententia Danielis vaticinium, si rectius introspiciatur, dissentire videtur; quo, dum Turcis tria saltem cornua, quae iamdudum, ut dixi, obtinent, concedit, eorum vim atque potentiam in summo nunc gradu consistere demonstrat. Et quanquam hoc tempore suam ipsi ditionem ferme coniunctam habent atque finitimam Germaniae; tamen, quoniam certos intra limites illorum regio permanere debet, et Romanae potentiae minime conferri poterit, credendum est, Deum habenas, quas hucusque Tyranno laxavit, brevi inhibiturum, nosque clementer propter meritum filii sui protecturum. Romanum quidem imperium iam in digitos desiit… (the continuation see in the table below).

18 Elze, *Die Universität Tübingen und die Studenten aus Krain*, 65.

Sleidanus, *De quattuor summis imperiis*, 177v–178r

Pedes autem illius ac digiti pedum partim sunt ferrei, partim fictiles e testa. Sicut humani corporis pes finditur in digitos, ita **Romanum imperium**, ubi constiterit aliquandiu firmum et innixum cruribus ferreis, ac totum terrarum orbem ambitu suo complexum fuerit, **desinet in digitos, et corporis illa moles dissolvetur**. Hoc ipsum etiam constat accidisse, nec opus est explicatione: quid enim magis hodie dissolutum est, quam imperii illius amplissimi corpus? Et quanquam ita se res habet, tamen, **quia planta pedis est ferrea, ut inquit, manebit firmamentum eius, neque prorsus constringi poterit, sed reliquiae**, **nomen** atque dignitas **durabunt, donec Christus adventu suo rebus omnibus humanis finem imponet.** Quin ad summam tenuitatem redactum sit, dubitari non potest, ac luce meridiana clarius est. Arbor illa procera concidit, sed haeret ad huc atque constitit illius radix non quidem succulenta, sic ut propagari possit atque augescere, verum exucca prorsus et arida, sed tamen hanc radicem ac plantam ferreae naturae, nulla vis humana funditus revellet, sed haerebit infixa solo, quoad ista rerum omnium fabrica destruetur.

[…] et durabit hic illorum furor ad finem usque mundi, sicut Daniel clare testatur. Atque haec est eius vaticinium causa praecipua, quo videlicet **de** postremo temporis **aerumnis atque miseriis** praemoniti et certiores facti, **non despondeamus animum**, sed liberationem expectemus, per adventum Christi servatoris nostri, ***qui statum has afflictiones, ut inquit, excipiet***, **ac in firmam et tranquillam stationem suos transportabit, et lachrymas ab oculis eorum absterget.**

Budina, *Historia Sigethi*, 8

Romanum quidem **Imperium iam in digitos desiit, eiusque corporis moles pene dissoluta est**, atque ita diminuta, ut ad summam tenuitatem redactum sit, **sed planta pedis est ferrea**, iuxta prophetae oraculum, **manebit firmamentum eius, nec prorsus constringetur, et reliquiae nomenque eius durabunt, donec** haec machina destruetur, et **Christus adventu suo omnibus rebus humanis finem imponet**; ***atque afflictiones, ut inquit, excipiet***, **ac in firmam et tranquillam stationem suos transportabit, lachrymasque ab oculis eorum absterget**. Tandem **de his miseriis admonitos** Vates **ne animum despondeamu**s hortatur atque ut eo magis omnes confirmet, statim ab istis aerumnis mortuorum resurrectionem ponit, quam ut laetam experiamur atque salutarem, Deus assiduis precibus esset atque etiam est orandus.

It is also clear, however, that Budina not only summarizes, but also gives a different interpretation to Sleidanus' treatise, who, e.g. in the last lines of *De quattuor summis imperiis*, seems to be less uncertain about the imminent arrival of the Big End:

> "Christ himself is a witness to how much we must give credit to Daniel, quoting him in his sermon and commending him to the attention of his audience.[19] And since our present age is beset with calamities, we ought to study this prophet with fervent devotion, because he speaks to us, who are born in the last cycle of the world. Therefore, we have to look deeply into us, so that we may be able to defend ourselves by the trench and the bulwark of true and genuine comfort against the calamities of our age, against the threatening tempest and storm."[20]

In contrast, Budina's introduction simply calls for repentance and moral conversion. This trope, as we will see in the final section, was widely used in the language of Erasmian, or Christian humanism:

> "[…] having confessed our sins, let us come to Apollo himself and to God, let us ask him with trusting spirit for remedy and let us live on earth a life worthy of Christians!"[21]

Furthermore—according Budina—this conversion will have a certain result: the defeat of the Turks. The divergence from Sleidanus could indicate that it was perhaps anachronistic and inappropriate to frighten the reader with the last judgement in a contemporary history written and published in 1568. After all, with the death of Suleyman during the siege of Szigetvár (1566), the great period of Ottoman conquest was brought to an end in Central Europe, and with the Treaty of Adrianople (1568), a relatively peaceful period has begun in the military frontier of Hungary, maintaining the status quo until 1591. But even if eschatology was no longer relevant, in one of the longest Neo-Latin historiographical text of the period, which was also written after 1566, a different, but stronger moralising core can be detected.

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19 Mt 13:31.

20 Sleidanus, *De quattuor summis imperiis*, 181r–v: "Quantum vero Danieli sit tribuendum, testatur ipse Christus, qui locum ex eo desumptum pro concione refert et auditoribus commendat. Cum ergo sint adflictissima haec nostra tempora, studiose cognoscendus est hic vates, qui nobis in hoc mundi postremo curriculo positis concionatur, ac diligenter introspiciendus, ut et in his praesentibus malis et adversum imminentes fluctus atque tempestates vera nos et certa consolatione tanquam vallo quodam et aggere praemuniamus."

21 Budina, *Historia Sigethi*, 8: "[…] peccatis deploratis salutarem ipsum Apollinem et Deum accedamus, ab ipso remedium summa animi fiducia petamus, dignamque Christianis vitam in hac terra degamus."

The certainty of the final judgment, however, here is replaced by the concept of divine vengeance or divine providence that would sooner or later inevitably strike upon the sinners.

Forgách, Hungary and the *divina ira*

Ferenc Forgách (1535–1577) was a politician and Catholic prelate who held important positions at the court of Vienna for ten years and then at the court of Transylvania for another decade.[22] In addition to inviting Giovanni Michele Bruto to Transylvania and thus initiating the creation of the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri*[23] (the biggest endeavour of Neo-Latin historiography in early modern Hungary), he himself also wrote an annalistic history of the period, summarising the events in Hungary and Europe between 1551 and 1572. The *Commentarii*, however, was first printed only in 1788.[24] One reason of the delayed publication was certainly the deeply dark tone and *chronique scandaleuse* nature of the work. Forgách very often tells the worst and most evil stories about the main characters of the time, both Hungarians and non-Hungarians, with the clear intention of dissuading the readers from bad moral examples.[25] According to him, the contemporary history of Hungary should serve as a warning to all. Forgách believed that through this, the moral causes of the destruction due to divine punishment could—and must—be recognised in time. This is clearly described by the author himself in the following extract, which can be regarded as his individual *ars historica* as well:

> "I truly worry that I will not achieve even a tiny portion of what the historians of every age and of every nation have achieved. They did not have to write things so sad and miserable that they could not alternate them with their cheerful and delightful style, and with this variety they could hold the attention of their readers. Now, we have the opposite in everything: we hardly write stories at all, but rather lament the vicissitudes that befall us [Hungarians] in a monotonous process of fate. But one thing seems very important to me: all must be advised to pay attention to the causes, both from the ancient annals of our people and indeed from the range of our

22 Szabó, "Zeitgeschichte und Öffentlichkeit"; Petneházi, "Forgách Ferenc és Don Carlos."

23 Petneházi, "How to write history."

24 *Francisci Forgachii Rerum Hungaricarum sui temporis Commentarii*; later edition: *Ghymesi Forgách Ferenc Magyar Históriája*. For the literary and political context and generally about early modern Neo-Latin historiography in Hungary with further literature see Petneházi, "How to write history."

25 Petneházi, "Forgách Ferenc és Don Carlos."

> writers, and from our own example, so that they may recognize themselves in them and wish to take counsel from them."[26]

In order to achieve his goal, Forgách was not shy in his means; firstly, he collected the most scandalous stories about the Hungarian and European elite, often spread as rumours, and presented them as facts; and secondly, he waved the flaming sword of divine vengeance before the reader's eyes, the certain punishment for the evil-doers. Illustrating his moralist concept, the following text-places are the most important to quote:

> "It is certainly true that tyrants meet a tragic end, because the lives of all those who were guilty of the death of King Matthias, and who tore the country into factions, were one continuous tragedy straight from the death of the king, insomuch that divine anger and divine vengeance have destroyed and erased the whole lineage, and even the name of them."[27]

> "And those who, neglecting the teachings and institutions of Matthias, by their partisanship carried in the country the rule of foreign princes: their power, wealth, property and families have been completely ruined in a short time, not by enemies and arms, but by the wonderful justice of benevolent God, so that none of their families are now living."[28]

> "Why, then, should we wonder that the good Lord has given the power of the world to the enemy [the Ottomans], when the countries of the Christians have been and still are governed, by such men and their kind?

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26 *Ghymesi Forgách Ferenc Magyar Históriája*, 32: "Enimvero vereor, ne ullam vel minimam partem assequar eorum, quae omnes omnium aetatum omniumque gentium scriptores assecuti sunt, ut nihil tam triste tam miserabile ad scribendum habuerint, quod non laeto ac jucundo quandoque stilo commutare potuerint; qua varietate ipsos etiam lectores in lectione retinere possent. At nobis omnia contraria eveniunt, qui uno ac perpetuo fato nostras calamitates lugere potius quam historiam scribere videmur. Quod unum tamen mihi vel maxime notandum videtur: et monendi omnes ut causas advertant, cum ex priscis annalibus nostrae gentis, tum vero ex serie nostrorum scriptorum, nostroque exemplo sibi omnes norint, velintque consulere."

27 *Ghymesi Forgách Ferenc Magyar Históriája*, 473: "Certe, si vera sunt, quae dicuntur, tyrannorum tragicos esse exitus, ab excessu statim Mathiae, eorum omnium, qui mortis regiae conscii fuerunt, et qui in factiones regnum diduxerunt, una et continua fuit tragoedia, ut etiam genus, nomenque universum illorum ad nostram hanc tempestatem, divina ira, divina vindicta penitus extinctum deletumque sit."

28 *Ghymesi Forgách Ferenc Magyar Históriája*, 424: "Eorum sane omnium, qui tandem posthabitis Mathiae praeceptis atque institutis, per factiones externorum principum dominationem induxerunt, potentia, opes, fortunae ac familiae brevi penitus exstinctae sunt, non per hostem, neque armis, sed mirabili dei opt. max. judicio; adeo ut ex omnium illorum familiis hodie supersit nemo."

> For what better can we say of the French, the Spanish, the Germans, the English? And if it is an impious sin to believe that everything on the earth is governed by chance and fortune, then the piety of God and truth surely dictate to us, that divine majesty, divine anger, divine vengeance are directed against these terrible sins. Whoever lives, therefore, may remember his descendants: fear the immortal gods, and be mindful; and may the descendants learn from the example of their ancestors and be wise."[29]

Certe pium et verissimum numen divinum, divinam iram, divinam vindictam in atrocissima delicta desaevire—he writes in the last excerpt quoted, and when speaking of the death of Matthias Corvinus (see the second excerpt) he adds, that divine justice (*judicium Dei*) has also exterminated all those who were guilty of the death of the last great Hungarian king, or those who stole his treasury and drove the country to ruin. Forgách is thus inclined to accept the conspiracy theory, popular at the time, that Matthias was the victim of an assassination. He also engages an equally popular idea, already widespread throughout early modern Europe, regarding the transmission of sins and the transgenerational operation of divine punishment. These concepts and ideas were also present in both Calvinist and Lutheran authors of the period, of whom two contextualising examples can be found in the works of Balázs Fabricius Szikszai (c. 1530–1576) and Péter Bornemisza (1535–1584).

The Calvinist preacher of Sárospatak, Balázs Fabricius Szikszai, studied at the University of Wittenberg.[30] In the 1560s, he was in Transylvania for a short period as rector of the school in Kolozsvár (Cluj, RO) where he wrote a foreword for the 1565 edition of Bonfini's *Decades* published by the Heltai press, which contained the previously unpublished parts of the monumental work on the reign of King Matthias.[31] The preface is one of the first *ars historica* texts in sixteenth-century Hungary. In it, Szikszai uses the same terms as Forgách does in his *Commentarii*, however, with a much intensified preaching zeal:

> "The vindictive God […] has always imposed the most severe punishment on the subversive men; as the history of all times has vividly demonstrated

29 *Ghymesi Forgách Ferenc Magyar Históriája*, 179–80: "Quodsi ergo cum regna Christianorum ab his et similibus administrata sint, et modo quoque administrentur (quid enim de Gallis, de Hispanis, de Germanis, de Britannis melius dicere possumus?), Deus Optimus Maximus imperium orbis terrarum hosti dederit, mirabimur? Quodsi casu et fortuna res mundanas geri impium atque flagitium est credere: certe pium et verissimum numen divinum, divinam iram, divinam vindictam in atrocissima delicta desaevire. Ergo vivi posteritati consulant suae, deosque immortales metuendo resipiscant: posteri vero majorum exemplo discant atque sapiant."

30 Szabó, *Natio Ungarica,* 304–308.

31 Bonfinius, *Historia inclyti Matthiae*.

> with examples of terrible punishments inflicted on those who subverted the social and political order.[32] […] When God is angry, he usually lavishes his fierce and entirely deserved anger on sinful nations, but especially on idolatrians, tyrants, and libertines. And whenever these sins have been prevalent in a nation, we can read that it has been the occasion of a great change or subversion of empires. [...] Since, just as the true reverence of God, righteousness and modesty maintain the kingdom and strengthen the thrones of kings, so the vices of the opposite kind tend to bring ruin to the empires undeniably. And, not to look far for examples, it is indisputable that the same factors have been the cause of the sad decay and lamentable ruin of our wretched country."[33]

The other example is that of Péter Bornemisza (1535–1584). The Lutheran preacher, who was from the same generation as Forgách, is one of the most important figures in the history of sixteenth century Hungarian literature. For his contemporaries, however, he was a real troublemaker: in his infamous *On the Temptations of the Devil,* the fourth volume of his five-volume Hungarian sermon-collection published in 1578, he collected the stories of Satanic temptation and human sin from different exemplum collections popular in Lutheran literature while incorporating to the text numerous Hungarian cases he had seen or heard himself as well.[34] Regardless of age, gender, or rank, the work contains an equal but far greater catalogue of crimes than could be registered in Ferenc Forgách's unpublished Latin-language history. Among Bornemisza's stories written in Hungarian, Latin interconnecting texts can be found. In these, well-known passages are echoed about divine punishment:

> "Such stories will serve to forewarn us of the preparation of terrible calamities and changes, since it is a general rule that terrible punishment follows terrible crime during this life. We are telling, therefore, stories which

32 The meaning of „ordo politicus" could be applied here to the whole of secular society.

33 Bonfinius, *Historia inclyti Matthiae*, 2; 4: "Deus […] vindex […] turbatores puniit semper severissime, sicut omnium aetatum historiae, poenarum atrocissimarum in violatores politici ordinis exempla proponentes, luculentum ferunt testimonium. […] Deus irritatus, tandem furorem irae suae iustissimum solet in gentes peccatrices effundere: sed praecipue Idolatriae, Tyrannidae et Libidines: quae ipsa vitia quoties in aliqua gente dominari coeperunt, magnis mutationibus aut eversionibus imperiorum certissimam occasionem dedisse legimus. […] sicut enim verus Dei cultus, iustitia et verecundia stabilit regna et thronos regum confirmat: ita contraria vitia non dubiam ruinam imperiis solent attrahere. Ac ne longa exempla petantur: nostrae etiam patriae calamitosissimae has easdem causas tristissimam istam dissipationem ac excidium deplorandum peperisse non est dubium.

34 Bornemisza, *Ördögi kísértetek*.

> will be of tyrannical cruelty, of rebellion, of shameful lust and robbery, and which in our eyes will be the proofs of divine providence and justice."[35]

Apart from this passage, neither Bornemisza nor Forgách show any trace of what is so prominent in Fabricus Szikszai: the collective punishment of the community in exchange for individual sins. Instead, they write only about individual cases. Forgách always names the persons involved, whilst Bornemisza in some cases avoids naming. One thing, however, is certain: divine providence always strikes upon the guilty individuals with a just punishment. From this point of view, Forgách's perhaps most famous "blasphemy" is perfectly understandable: his deheroizing, totally negative necrologue on Miklós Zrínyi. Zrínyi stormed out of the castle of Szigetvár with his remaining troops in a suicidal attack to the Turks in 1566, and was celebrated as a true martyr of the Patria and Christendom for this heroic action.[36] According to Forgách, however, the "blemished life" of the violent lord fully deserved an equally violent death. Thus, there was nothing heroic or uplifting about his final and brave gesture, even if it was celebrated by his contemporaries and posterity alike.[37]

A further interesting aspect is the inheritance of sins. This theory can only be observed in Forgách's work when he acknowledges the extinction of the aristocratic families, whose members had been among the killers of Matthias or among those who drove the country to ruin, as a testimony of the impact of divine vengeance. Manlius' famous exemplum-collection, which was also one of the main sources for Bornemisza's work, serves as evidence that this might not have been a completely unknown theory in the period.[38] Here, one of the short stories tells the following:

> "I heard a wise and excellent man, not of low rank, but living an untamed life, crying out when his son was the victim of a fire: *O my wretched one, God punishes my sins in my fetus!* Later he hid in a private house to seduce a wife, but the husband killed him."[39]

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35 Bornemisza, *Ördögi kísértetek,* 161: "Proderunt tales historiae ad praemonitionem in cavendis causis horribilium mutationum et calamitatum, cum regula universalis sit: atrocia delicta puniuntur atrocibus poenis in hac vita. Recitabimur igitur historias de peccatis et poenis blasphemiarum, periuriorum: tyrannicae crudelitatis, seditionum, flagitiosarum libidinum et rapinarum: quae coram nobis sint testimonia providentiae et iuditii divini."

36 Bene and Kühlmann and Tüskés, *Militia et Litterae*; Fodor, *The Battle for Central Europe*.

37 *Ghymesi Forgách Ferenc Magyar Históriája*, 326–7.

38 Bornemisza, *Ördögi kísértetek,* 233–40.

39 Manlius, *Locorum communium collectanea*, 321: "Audivi sapientem et excellentem virum, summo genere natum, sed qui non modeste vivebat, cum periisset ei filius incendio dicentem: O me miserum, mea peccata punit Deus in semine. Postea cum se occultasset in aliena domo, ut illius viri coniugem vitiaret, ipse interfectus est."

Thus, the idea of transgenerational inheritance of punishment is detectable in the Protestant literature of the period, as we find it in Manlius' exemplum-collection. However, deeper and more far-reaching connections can be found looking around Christian humanism and Erasmianism. In the last section, these connections will be explored and discussed in more depth.

The *sera numinis vindicta* and the *resipiscite*

Plutarch's late Platonist philosophy and its Renaissance afterlife have been discussed extensively in the scholarship. In particular, the dissemination of his eclectic *Moralia* collection by Erasmus has received much scholarly attention.[40] Plutarch was very popular and much quoted in humanist literature, e.g. Budina's dedicatory letter includes two citations from him. One of the pieces in the *Moralia* is entitled *On the delays of the divine vengeance*.[41] This dialogue was widely used in sixteenth-century editions: its Latin translation was made by Erasmus' friend Willibald Pirckheimer (1470–1530).[42] Plutarch presents arguments for and against divine providence, mainly based on ancient mythological and historical examples, in which the obvious crime was not followed by immediate vengeance by the deity, but—if at all—fell upon only the often innocent children or grandchildren of the wrongdoers. Was that unjust?—this is the question asked by the dialogue's participants.

The solution, which restores the reader's faith in divine providence and justice, is given by Plutarch in a Platonist dream scene. In this scene, the soul, released from its body and ascending to the heavenly spheres, passes through the various stages of the rebirth of souls, witnessing the suffering of its sinful parent. Pirckheimer dedicated the Latin translation to his sister Charitas, who was the abbess of the poor Clares in Nuremberg. In this text he briefly touches on the difference between the right and the wrong life. It is worth quoting him verbatim because he gives a great example of how Christian and ancient moralism could be united so harmoniously in Christian humanism:

> "The Stoic philosophers wisely said: to live is a gift of God, and to live well is a gift of philosophy. No wonder, because God has given man nothing more precious or greater than this. If, then, dear sister, we are armed with this knowledge, we shall endure every disadvantage, calamity, and suffer, and above all we shall bear with strong spirit the injustice of the evildoers

40 Recently, with further literature: Ledo, "Erasmus' Translations of Plutarch's *Moralia*."

41 Moralia 548A–568A. *De sera numinis vindicta*.

42 Pirckheimer, *De his, qui tarde a numine corripiuntur*. To his life cf. Holzberg, *Willibald Pirckheimer*.

> (understand well and remember what I say), for the evildoer cannot escape God's judgment, neither in life nor in death. Because Juppiter, as the poets write, will sooner or later wake up and recompense his delay with the weight of punishment."[43]

To understand the fusion of eschatology and moralism in the language of 16th century historiography, one point remains to be clarified: we have to illustrate how divine anger, the Turkish threat and the moral imperative were linked in the language of Christian humanism and how this was transmitted into the language of the Lutheran Reformation. A slightly modified version of the call to repentance, thanks to Erasmus, was Mt 3:2 and Mt 4:17: *Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* The Greek original of the exhortation was translated by St Jerome in the Vulgate as *poenitentiam agite*: this formula is used in the first paragraph of Luther's 95 theses as well. Erasmus, however, in his translation used the figure *resipiscite* (i.e. "come to your senses," or "be mindful") to show that the point is not the public act of repentance but the inner and moral conversion. Perfectly in line with the way he emphasised in his various writings the need of an inner, spiritual conversion of the whole Christian society, because according to him, the Turkish threat, the wars within Christianity, the corruption of the Church were all manifestations of God's anger, as he wrote with such suggestive force in the *Sileni of Alcibiades*:

> "The Lord will reward the patience of His people, who endure such masters from a love of peace, but I fear that for this very reason those masters will find God a harsher judge. All this turmoil in the world, what other message has it for us, loud and clear, except that God is angry with us all? And what remains except for all of us, alike the greatest and the least, both sacred and secular, with humble hearts to take refuge in the Lord's mercy? How much wiser this would be than for each of us, not recognizing his own fault, to put the blame on others, thus provoking still more the anger of the Deity, and not healing but making still more severe the wounds we have ourselves inflicted on one another!"[44]

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43 Pirckheimer, *De his, qui tarde a numine corripiuntur*, 156r: "Prudenter igitur Stoici dei munus asserunt, quod vivimus; philosophiae autem, quod bene vivimus. Nec mirum, quum nil maius aut praestantius a deo hominibus datum sit. [...] Ea igitur, suavissima soror instructi et armati, incommoda cuncta, dolores, calamitates ac labores fortiter toleremus, maxime vero improborum iniurias magnanimiter feramus (recte enim quid dicam tenes ac intelligis), siquidem nequeunt scelerati iudicium dei, nec vivi nec mortui effugere: Iuppiter enim, ut poetae referunt, tandem expergiscitur, tarditatemque supplicii poenae gravitate compensat."

44 CWE 34, 281 (transl. by R.A.B. Mynors). Cf. ASD II–5, 190: "Coronabit dominus populi tolerantiam, qui tales amore quietis perpetitur, at vereor ne hoc duriorem experturi sint iudicem deum. Hi rerum tumultus quid aliud nobis clamant, quam omnibus iratum deum? Quid autem

In 1544 a whole dialogue on the reconciliation of God's anger was written and published by Antonius Corvinus, or Anton Rabe (1501–1554) who in the 1520's was among the first students of both Luther and Melanchthon. The purely Erasmian style, didactic and moralising dialogue is a conversation between Corvinus and Scarabeus on the eve of the Schmalkalden War, on the causes of the calamities afflicting Christianity and the Empire. The most important of the causes, not surprisingly for a Wittenberg theologian, are the machinations of the Devil. The command of *resipiscite* is repeatedly mentioned in the work as the only way, partly to avoid war and partly to prevent the human soul from hell; a typical paragraph is enough to cite:

> "When we are caught between two fires, in the grip of fear and hope, not knowing what divine anger has decided for us because of our sins, we need above all to pray and repent, if we do not want to be miserably slaughtered alongside our wives and children. By repenting *(resipiscendo)* and praying, we can avoid the divine vengeance upon us. If we persevere in the sins we have already committed, we can hardly avoid the punishment we deserve."[45]

After all this, it is perhaps not surprising to find the same key word and mild exhortation in the very introduction to Melanchthon's *Loci communes*:

> "History contains the examples of the law and the Gospel, and of wrath and mercy, because God does indeed punish sin; but he forgives those who repent *(resipiscunt)*, and treats the righteous well."[46]

To which we only need to remember a quote from Forgách, where, in conjunction with the much-mentioned concept of divine vengeance, the reader finds the very same Erasmian moral *imperativus*:

> "And if it is an impious sin to believe that everything on the earth is governed by chance and fortune, then the piety of God and truth surely dictate to us,

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superest, nisi ut omnes, maximi pariter ac minimi, sacri simul ac prophani, submissis animis ad domini misericordiam eonfugiamus? Quanta id consultius, quam si, dum suam quisque culpam non agnoscit in alium reiiciens, et numinis iram magis etiam exasperemus et mutuis nos morsibus non sanemus, sed gravius vulneremus."

45 Corvinus, *De periculosissimo praesentium rerum statu*, 15–16: "Imo cum inter saxum iam et sacrum, inter spem et metum haereamus, ignari quid propter peccata nostra de nobis divina ira statuerit, opus ante omnia huiusmodi resipiscentia et invocatione est, nisi et in hac vita infensissimis hostibus nostris obiici, ac cum uxoribus liberisque miserabiliter trucidari et post hanc vitam aeternum damnari velimus. Resipiscendo et invocando avertere divinam a nobis vindictam possumus. Perdurando in commissis peccatis, effugere meritas poenas haud possumus."

46 Melanchthon, *Loci Communes*, 349: "Historiae deinde continent exempla legis et Evangelii, irae et misericordiae, quod Deus vere puniat peccata et ignoscat his, qui resipiscunt, bene faciat iustis."

> that divine majesty, divine anger, divine vengeance are directed against these terrible sins. Whoever lives, therefore, may remember his descendants: fear the immortal gods, and be mindful (*resipiscant*); and may the descendants learn from the example of their ancestors and be wise."[47]

Conclusion

This article has shown how the universalist, Wittenberg view of the past and the Erasmian, moralistic reform doctrine together shaped the language of historiography in Central Europe, which was suffering in the mid-sixteenth century by severe political, religious and moral crisis. The vision of the four empires, the idea of constant struggle between Christ and the Antichrist, and the belief in the approaching Apocalypse, based on Daniel's prophecy, did provide a predominant interpretative framework for historiography, especially in an age when the encyclopaedic collection of moralising examples was a major objective of both religious and secular literature.[48] Ferenc Forgách can certainly be considered as a unique example in that sense that, despite being both a Catholic prelate and a humanist historian, he came very close in his attitude to the prophetical and preaching zeal of his Protestant contemporaries. Yet, to emphasise the moral core of his work, he chose a less confessional code and language, which was developed by Christian humanism. He did not use the imminent apocalypse as a final argument, but a substantially Erasmian exhortation to moral conversion—which was strongly present in Melanchthonian tradition as well—and supported this by the theory of divine vengeance of Platonist origin, which had been likewise reinforced in Christian humanism.

Against the background of all this, a well-known debate, not discussed here, can also be found, on the prophecy of Daniel, on the four empires and the limited cycles of world history. Melanchthon had already sought to refine and moderate Luther's rigid eschatology, but the final refutation was made by such great names as Jean Calvin and Jean Bodin. Thus, the works of Forgách and Budina also mark this transition and the slow erosion of the Lutheran eschatology. Despite this all, the reference to Daniel have by no means disappeared. As it is well known, it has been even reinforced towards the end of the century in connection with the Long Turkish War.

47 *Ghymesi Forgách Ferenc Magyar Históriája*, 32: Quodsi casu et fortuna res mundanas geri impium atque flagitium est credere: certe pium et verissimum numen divinum, divinam iram, divinam vindictam, in atrocissima delicta desaevire. Ergo vivi posteritati consulant suae, deosque immortales metuendo resipiscant: posteri vero majorum exemplo discant atque sapiant.

48 Brückner, *Volkserzählung und Reformation*; Haug and Wachinger, *Exempel und Exempelsammlungen*.

In Hungary, it also remained one of the fundamental tones of Calvinist sermon literature, although in a much darker, more and more confessionalist context, as now the Thirty Years' War was approaching. But the purely Erasmian, didactic tone and disposition of the authors, registered above, disappeared for sure, from the historiographical discourse by the end of the sixteenth century.

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