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"The Politics of Translation and Transmission. The Beginnings of Political Theorising in the Hungarian Vernacular"

a Ph.D. public defense by

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Preface

The present study arose from a larger research project designed as a monographic review of early modern Hungarian political thought. From very early on, however, it became clear that the groundwork for such a study has not been laid down. There are very few modern editions of texts making up the corpus of works of early modern Hungarian political theory. Similarly, very little work has been done on the persons of authors.

The extant research in the field was primarily carried out by literary historians according to their own criteria, these texts being important for them from the point of view of the development of Hungarian prose style, and representing additional genres of old Hungarian literature. The postface of to the present day the only anthology of 17th century Hungarian thinkers discussed for example all theoretical-philosophical works of the period in their thematic, generic and stylistic diversity as mere surrogates for the lack of literary prose genres like short-stories or novels.[i] Another author wrote about a translation from Guevara that it would be illegitimate to treat it as a work of political theory, since it mainly consisted of fiction meant to entertain. It was much more interesting, the argument went, as a work pertaining to the *belles lettres,* representing a significant momentum of 17th century trends in 17th century Hungarian prose.[ii]

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[i] MártonTarnóc, ed., ed., *Magyar gondolkodók 17. század,* Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1979, 1265.

[ii] Imre Bán, "Fejedelmek serkentő órája. Adalék a XVII. századi magyar stílus történetéhez," in idem, *Eszmék és stílusok,* Budapest: Akadémiai, 1976, 156.

Historians seem to have accepted that the field was a dominion of literary studies, implicitly accepting thus the insignificance of these texts from the point of view of intellectual history or political thought. This is the stance László Makkai adopted when he spoke of the lack of political thought in the period.[iii] The reason for this apparent shying away from the topic is the lack of originality of these texts. A significant part of the corpus consists of translations. The other works are original in the sense that there is no single other work that has been or can be identified as their source, but they too transmit arguments and topoi familiar from the dominant European languages of political thought.

The above features of the historiography of the field define several main aspects of the present study. The first concerns its design. We shall be concerned with the first two texts of political theory in the Hungarian vernacular, György Szepsi Korotz's Hungarian translation of King James VI and I's *Basilikon Doron*, Oppenheim, 1612, and János Pataki Füsüs's *Királyoknak tüköre*, Bártfa, 1626. We shall need to clarify some basic issues like the stemma of the first, the international and local contexts of these texts' birth, or the intellectual and personal connections of the authors. Together with the analysis of the political languages they spoke and the questions they were attempting to answer, this will take up the space available for such a study.

Treating the two texts together is warranted by factors other than chronology as well. Apart from belonging together in present-day canons of early modern political works, or in the genre-specific canon of mirror of princes literature, several further factors connect them historically as well: as the chapter dealing with the connections of

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iii The chapter on political thought in the ten-volume academic history of Hungary starts with the heading: „The Lack of Political Thought." In Zsigmond Pál Pach, ed.gen., *Magyarország története*. Vol. 3/2 (1526-1686.) Budapest: Akadémiai, 1985, 1529.

the authors will show, these figures belonged to the same circle of literati. There is also textual evidence that the second was written with reference to the first, the meaning of which we shall of course investigate in close textual analysis. Finally, the two books were already seen as belonging together by contemporaries: they keep recurring together in surviving seventeenth century book records.

As concerns their alleged lack of originality, this study will look at the fact of the first being a translation, and the second mixing a large variety of political languages in use at the time as a source of inspiration rather than embarrassment. Translated texts underwent changes due to the intentional interventions of their translators, who abridged them or added their own comments or examples. Prefaces, introductions, dedications attached to them further channelled the possible meanings into a desired direction. These rewordings and re-readings of originals are possible points where specificities of the transmission and reception of ideas can be grasped. Apart from the intentions of the agents proper, necessary transformations were also brought about by the new linguistic, historic, cultural context in which ideas were formulated anew. Translations mark an attempt at creating a language capable of articulating the received ideas, and reflections on the possibilities of articulation in the vernacular will occur in both texts.

There is another issue that will recur in the analysis of both texts to a great extent because of the need to tackle a widely and uncritically accepted truism of the literature in the field: that both are instances of absolutist political theory, the first translating, according to the academic history of Hungarian literature, "a primitive work

of the widespread literature of absolutist theory,"[iv] and the second allegedly being written in support of the absolutist rule of Gábor Bethlen, prince of Transylvania.[v] There are several problematic assumptions underlying these arguments. One is common in English historiography as well, and has recently come into much heated discussion. It has been poignantly summarized by Jenny Wormald as "an error which has been remarkably persistent: the belief that an English king called James I wrote a book about absolute kingship called *Basilikon Doron*."[vi] If in English historiography, the question of Stuart absolutism is related to mapping the road leading up to the English revolution, and is portrayed in works positing James's absolutism as concealing a conspiracy against the monarchy and the institution of king-in-parliament,[vii] in East-Central European historiographies in general, the Hungarian included, the opposite is the case: absolutism is not associated with the arbitrary exercise of power, but with the strengthening of the administrative powers of the state, the provision for schools and public welfare.[viii]

[iv] Klaniczay Tibor, ed., *A magyar irodalom története 1600-ig*, vol. 2 of István Sőtér ed., *A magyar irodalom története*, Budapest: Akadémiai, 1964, 41.

[v] Emil Hargittay, *Gloria, fama, literatura. Az uralkodói eszmény a régi magyarországi fejedelmi tükrökben*, Budapest: Universitas, 2001, 51; István Schlett, *A magyar politikai gondolkodás története*, vol. 1, Budapest: Korona, 1996, 160.

[vi] Jenny Wormald, "James VI and I, Basilikon Doron and The Trew Law of Free Monarchies: The Scottish Context and the English Translation," in Linda Levy Peck, ed., *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 52.

[vii] J.G.A. Pocock, "A Discourse of Sovereignty: Observations on the Work in Progress,", in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 390. 377-428.

[viii] On the different meanings of the term in European historiographies, as despotic and autocratic, as well as bureaucratic, strengthening the military and focusing on the welfare of subjects also Nicolas Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism. Change and Continuity in Early Modern European Monarchy*, London and New York: Longman, 1992, 1-6. Henshall here argues that none of the latter developments leading to the rise of the modern state required tools commonly designated as "absolutist:" centralised, bureaucratic states emerged in cooperation with ruling elites and town guilds and corporations. A somewhat diverging view is that of Heinz Schilling, who wrote that the rise of princely absolutism in the German principalities, understood by him as the rise of centralised territorial states, "not only limited the economic opportunities of the middle class, but it was also a blow to their self-confidence and a setback for the political culture of German society in general." (Heinz Schilling, "Civic

Another assumption, sometimes made explicit as an argument in favour of the absolutism of the early seventeenth century Hungarian mirror of princes literature, is that the government of the Transylvanian principality exhibited such tendencies in the period, and Korotz as well as Pataki gave theoretical expression to, legitimized and underpinned it. The persons of their authors, their dedications or maecenature indeed link our texts to the principality. The government of Transylvania in the seventeenth century is, however, hard to describe as absolutist. Historians dealing with the government of Transylvania and the nature of princely power in the period generally stress that the power of the prince only extended to his own private and crown estates, and it was in these realms that his actions were not bound – nor regulated – by positive law. The lack of an aristocracy and the weakness of the estates, as well as the fact that the prince tended to be the richest landowner of the principality were not enough to let princely power penetrate realms regarded as belonging to the noble or urban estates, including jurisdiction and taxation.[ix] We shall devote special attention to Füsüs's relationship to the propaganda literature around Gábor Bethlen, to whom the work was dedicated, with a dedication centring on the need that the ruler governed together with

Republicanism in Late Medieval and Early modern German Cities", in idem, *Religion, Political Culture and the Emergence of Early Modern Society. Essays in German and Dutch History*, Leiden, New York, Köln: E.J.Brill, 1992, xii.)

[ix] cf. Zsolt Trócsányi, *Erdély központi kormányzata, 1540-1690*, Budapest: Akadémiai, 1980, a work describing the practice of government as medieval (228); cf. also László Makkai and Zoltán Szász, eds., *History of Transylvania, vol. II.* From 1606 to 1830. Translated by Peter Szaffkó et al., Boulder, Colorado: Atlantic Research and Publications, 2002, where Katalin Péter makes the point that not even the reign of Gábor Bethlen can be described with the term „absolutism" as used in Western historiography (esp. 53-55.) The same point is made by legal and constitutional historians as well, though on opposite grounds; they claim that the form of government was a feudal-representative one (see for example Andor Csizmadia, Kálmán Kovács, László Asztalos, eds., *Magyar állam- és jogtörténet*, Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 1987, 197. The latter argument was taken in extremis by Lajos Rácz, who argued that the laws and election contracts passed by Transylvanian diets laid down the basis of a constitutional monarchy and ministerial responsibility to the diet; cf. Lajos Rácz, *Főhatalom és kormányzás az erdélyi fejedelemségben*, Budapest: Akadémiai, 1992.

the magistrates – an idea also central to Korotz's dedication -, and that he relinquished the false and tyrannical opinion inculcated by flatterers that "princeps lege solutus est."

It is interesting, and somewhat puzzling, that historiographical treatments of the government of the Transylvanian state failed to make an impact on the work of authors dealing with early modern Hungarian political theory, with a recent monograph of the seventeenth century mirror of princes literature explicitly ascribing the absolutism of these texts to the existence of an absolutist state.[x] That Füsüs explicitly discussed the nature of princely power as subordinate to the authority of the law and spiritual authority of ministers as magistrates, and is still commonly referred to as an exponent of princely absolutism, similarly is. The answer to the puzzle again lies in the historiographical stakes of using the label, which is most apparent in the literature on the treatise generally regarded as the first instance of Transylvanian political theory, Farkas Kovacsóczy's *De administratione Transylvaniae dialogus*.[xi] The Latin text in discussed if form of a dialogue the best form of government during the rule of a minor prince. One partner argued for government by a single person versus the government of the many, and was defeated in the debate by his friend, who rephrased the question as referring to the structure of the council with whom the ruler had to govern, so that he could be checked and tempered, preventing the ascent of flatterers and the destruction of the life and property of subjects. The text used the same phrase from Juvenal as Füsüs to refer to absolute rule to be avoided, "Sic volo, sic iubeo, sit pro ratione voluntas."

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[x] "It is a fact that the genre of mirror of princes appears at the meeting point of political theory and practice: the precondition of its flourishing is the protracted existence of a homogeneous, absolutistic legal unit. As in Europe the genre flourished in the 16th-17th centuries, and the kingdom of Hungary was in the period in a specific decentralised state, it was primarily in the 17th century Transylvanian principality that the conditions of the genre becoming popular existed." Hargittay, *Gloria, fama, literatura*, 8,.

[xi] István Kovacsóczy, *De administratione Transylvaniae dialogus*, Kolozsvár, 1584. RMNY I 545.

Discussions of Kovacsóczy's text were carried out with a heat indicating that the primary stakes of the label touched upon Marxist visions on the unfolding of history. According to the academic history of the Hungarian literature, the dialogue was a debate on absolutistic and republican forms of government, and supported the latter with a "reactionary"[xii] argument. Béla Köpeczi on the other hand argued that the dialogue did not question the absolute rule of the prince, a forward-looking idea as it promoted centralisation and opposed "nobiliar anarchy." The debate was, he showed, about the number of governors assisting the prince, and Kovacsóczy argued for a governing council, as a single governor would presumably have been easier to counter by the nobility opposing princely centralisation. According to Köpeczi, the dialogue was a humanist political treatise relying on Lipsius, who was in his turn described as an ideologist of absolute monarchy, understood as a progressive ideology overcoming in the backwardness of feudalism.[xiii]

The meaning and use of the term "absolutism" is thus highly problematic. Even more so is the process of the transfer of a work sometimes described as "absolutist" in English historiography, with the applicability of the term so strongly disputed, to the Hungarian context, where the label has totally different meanings and uses, and with the process of transfer itself occasioning profound changes to the text and its powers of articulation. We shall cover the English debate in the chapter discussing Korotz's translation, and argue that his translation was one of the contemporary interpretations supporting the constitutionalist rather than absolutist understanding of James's work. The other problematic issue in describing the politics of translation of James's text is

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[xii] Klaniczay, ed., *A magyar irodalom története 1600-ig,* vol 1. of Sőtér ed., *A magyar irodalom története,* 428-29.

[xiii] Béla Köpeczi, "A magyar politikai irodalom kezdeteihez. Kovacsóczy Farkas Dialógusáról," *ItK* 74. no. 5. 1970: 577-587.

the question of what was transferred. The chapter devoted to the international fortunes of *Basilikon Doron,* a book that was actually an early modern bestseller with numbers of copies rivalling that of Castiglione's *Courtier,* will show that each printing of the book in different contexts and languages enlisted it to different agendas, making it difficult to cast the process as a story of a reception of an idea, but calling attention to the importance of the local stakes involved in translation.

This latter point leads us to the importance of the language the two works were published in, the Hungarian vernacular. The first, introductory chapter argues that the programme of making the vernacular the language of culture and learning, a prominent exponent of which, Albert Szenci Molnár, will be shown to have stood at the centre of the network of authors and translators Korotz and Füsüs belonged to, was in itself laden with political stakes. This chapter also explains why the category of speech situation will be central to our analysis of the two texts: in works written in the Hungarian vernacular, reflections on the choice of language, the rhetorical structure of dedications, the double audience of patrons and reading public framed a complex speech situation in which needs of representation of patrons could be met by addressing them, too, in a strongly normative discourse, putting forward norms of everyday conduct and of exercising political power that were binding for all.

The importance given in this study to the speech situation as explanatory of the local and transnational stakes of the texts discussed also explains the wording of the title. The choice of the vernacular as the language to be used, the wordings of paratexts contextualising the texts, the sermonising, didactic and thus strongly normative dictions will be shown to have been political acts in themselves. Hence the discussion of these texts as instances of translation and transmission and political acts, but also as "theorising." The latter word is ambiguous, with some negative connotations: it denies

the performance of solving lofty issues of political philosophy, which could have been described as "theory" or "political thought." Instead, it focuses our attention on the actual historical performances of authors and texts as agents. Simply put, the performance these texts carried out was putting forward norms of conduct, in everyday life as well as in the exercise of political power. The biblical, civic humanist, neostoic, millenarian or reason of state languages they mixed all came together to serve this function.

Throughout the text, Hungarian names will be used according to English usage, i.e. with given names coming first. Several early modern Hungarian names, however, are made up of three elements, with the first element of the family name being typically a place-name: János Pataki Füsüs for example was originally from the town of Sárospatak. Such figures will be referred to by their last name, i.e., Korotz for György Szepsi Korotz, or Molnár for Albert Szenci Molnár. Placenames of Hungary and Transylvania are given according to the Hungarian usage that was customary in the circles of our authors, i.e. Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca, Klausenburg), Bártfa (Bardejov, Bartfeld), Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia, Weissenburg), Pozsony (Bratislava, Pressburg.) Other placenames are used in their English versions, if available. In comparing texts, double and single quotes will alternate. Double quotes refer to word forms and passages as they occur in the text they are quoted from, whereas single quotes are used in rendering of meaning: „oltalmazni," 'to protect.' Translations from Hungarian texts, primary and secondary, are all mine, unless otherwise indicated. A list of abbreviations used, some of them devised for the purposes of this study, is provided in the following pages.