A pozsonyi vésztörvényszék hatása Erdélyben. Hírek és menekültek

The Impact of the Extraordinary Court of Pressburg in Transylvania. News and refugees.[1]

Judit Balogh
Eszterházy Károly Catholic University
(Translated by Vera Bakonyi-Tánczos)

Összefoglalás

A tanulmány eddig a kutatás által nem vizsgált kérdést feszeget. Azt igyekszik feltárni, hogy az Erdélyi Fejedelemség református elitjének levelezésében, egyéb egodokumentumaiban hogyan jelenik meg az 1671-ben kezdődött magyarországi protestánsüldözés. Emellett arra is választ keres, hogy milyen módokon próbált Erdély református nemessége segítséget nyújtani az üldözött magyarországi protestánsoknak. A kutatás eddigi eredményei alapján az erdélyi reformátusoknak naprakész ismereteik voltak a történtekről és több módon is igyekeztek segíteni. Egyrészt üldözött menekülteket fogadtak be, másrészt felhívták a nemzetközi közvélemény figyelmét az eseményekre és némelyek a katonai segítség adását is támogatták.

Abstract

The study deals with a question that has not yet been addressed in research. It attempts to investigate how the persecution of Protestants in Hungary, which began in 1671, appears in the correspondence and other documents of the Reformed elite of the Principality of Transylvania. It also aims to answer the question of how the Reformed nobility of Transylvania tried to help the persecuted Protestants in Hungary. The results of previous research indicate that the Transylvanian Reformed were aware of what was happening and tried to help in various ways. On the one hand, they took in persecuted refugees; on the other, they drew international attention to the events and in some cases even supported the provision of military aid.

Kulcsszavak: vésztörvényszék, gályarabok, Erdély, református elit, levelezés

Keywords: emergency justice, galley slaves, Transylvania, Reformed elite, correspondence

---

The so-called "decade of mourning" (*gyászévtized*), a period of intense Protestant persecution in the Kingdom of Hungary, began in 1671 fol-

[1] This study was supported by the HUN-REN–ELTE Research Group on Noble Emigration and Memory (1541–1756): Source Exploration and Critical Edition.

DOI: 10.54231/ETSZEMLE.25.2024.4.3

lowing the suppression of the Wesselényi conspiracy.[2] Although the chief organizers of the conspiracy were in fact high-ranking Catholic nobles—among them Palatine István Wesselényi, Ban of Croatia Péter Zrínyi, Croatian magnate Fran Krsto Frankopan, and Prince-elect of Transylvania Francis I Rákóczi—the event, along with the significant number of Protestant lesser nobles involved (mostly from the circles of István Thököly), gave the Catholic Habsburg ruler an opportunity to accelerate the ongoing process of re-Catholicization, which had previously definitely relied on more subtle means. In the second half of the 17th century, it was established that the stability of an increasingly deliberate system of absolutist governance could be further reinforced by religious uniformity, and thus a systematic assault was launched against Protestant denominations. In early 1671, just before the onset of the persecutions, the Bishop of Várad published an agenda-setting anti-Protestant treatise. In his "*Veritas toti mundo declarata*," printed in Košice, Bishop of Várad György Bársony argued that, despite the legal guarantees then in force, the ruler was under no obligation to tolerate Protestants. The ideology was that the Wesselényi uprising had invalidated such obligations, since it was the Protestants who had rebelled against the king.[3] Thus, it was the Protestant estates that had broken their alliance with the monarch, making their subsequent persecution not only legitimate but a sacred duty of the Apostolic King. This ideological groundwork was significant, as the peace treaties concluded during the century between the princes of Transylvania and the Hungarian kings repeatedly affirmed the right to Protestant religious freedom—a right that could be revoked only on well-founded grounds.[4] Throughout the century, Péter Pázmány and the Jesuit order had made sustained efforts to restore the Catholic faith among the nobility, which resulted in notable success, particularly in the western regions of the country.[5] In the northern and eastern territories, however, Protestants continued to live in large numbers, and the garrisons along the frontier[6] were still predominantly Protestant. The reprisals following the Wesselényi conspiracy now seemed to offer a favorable opportunity for the violent transformation of the system. The first court session convened in Pressburg (Bratislava) on January 3, 1671,

[2] The research trips essential to this study were made possible with the support of the Kálmán Újszászy Institute for Reformed Heritage Research at the Sárospatak Reformed Theological University.

[3] Payr, Sándor: *A magyar protestáns gályarabok*. Budapest, 1927, 9.

[4] The pro-Protestant sections of the Treaty of Vienna concluded by István Bocskai, the Peace of Nikolsburg concluded by Gábor Bethlen and the Peace of Linz concluded by George I. Rákóczi.

[5] Tusor, Péter: *Katolikus konfesszionalizáció a kora újkori Magyarországon*. Budapest, 2008, 50–65.

[6] Benda, Kálmán: A végvári harcok ideológiája, in *Történelmi Szemle*, 1963/6, 15–18.

presided over by Johann von Rottal.[7] At this stage, the proceedings focused not primarily on the clergy, but on Protestant nobles implicated in the conspiracy. It was this court that sentenced Ferenc Bónis, a Protestant nobleman committed to Wesselényi, to death[8], and posthumously ordered the confiscation of the property of István Vitnyédy, a lawyer, notary, and parliamentary delegate from Sopron.[9] It was also around this time that Mikuláš Drabík, a Czech-Moravian pastor and associate of the famed Czech educator and visionary Jan Amos Comenius, was also executed in Bratislava.[10] Drabík, who was brutally tortured before his execution, was 82 years old at the time.[11]

The news of the extraordinary court and the persecution of Protestants reached Transylvania swiftly, causing considerable internal turmoil among members of the Protestant elite. The confessional structure of Transylvanian society had undergone significant changes over the course of the 17th century. In particular, the denominational composition of the elite had shifted, largely due to the deliberate confessional policies pursued by Gábor Báthory, Gábor Bethlen, and George I Rákóczi. By the time of Prince Michael I Apafi's rule, however, the situation had become more complex than it had been in previous decades. While both Gábor Bethlen and George I Rákóczi had consistently supported the Reformed Church and its elite throughout their reigns—including financially—this began to change under Prince Michael I Apafi, especially after the first half of his rule. Namely, during the rule of George II Rákóczi, several Catholic families rose to prominence. This was partly due to their distinguished service in the prince's numerous military campaigns and partly due to the influence of his wife, Zsófia Báthory, who outwardly converted to Calvinism but remained closely tied to the Catholic Church and lent her support

---

[7] Barta M., János: *Rottal János levelezése Csáky Istvánnal és Ferenccel*, MTA, BTK, 2017.

[8] W. Salgó, Ágnes (ed.): *A Wesselényi-összeesküvés. Beszámoló a perről és a kivégzésekről*, Budapest., Helikon, OSZK, 2005. (Facsimile and translation of Aussführliche und warhafftige Beschreibung with studies.)

[9] Fabo, András: *Vitnyédy István levelei 1652–1664, Adalékúl a XVII. század politikai és erkölcstörténetéhez*, Pest, Eggenberger, 1871, Vol. 3, 3. (15.), 7–21. (*Magyar Történelmi Tár*, 1.5) URL: http://real-j.mtak.hu/4072/1/MagyarTortenelmiTar_1871_15_2_03.pdf (Last accessed: 15-04-2025); Károlyi, Bálint: Adalékok egy soproni ügyvéd műveltségéhez: Vitnyédy István és könyvtára, *Magyar könyvszemle* Vol. 136, no. 3, 2020, 183–202.; Sárközi, Gergely: Vitnyédy István és az evangélikus oktatásügy, *Credo*, 2006, Vol. 12, no. 1–2, 3–16.

[10] Péter, Katalin: Drabik Miklós, a lehotkai próféta, in *Egyháztörténeti Szemle*, 2006/2, URL: https://epa.oszk.hu/03300/03307/00014/egyhaztorteneti_szemle_2006_02_002.htm (Last accessed: 01-05-2025)

[11] Kvacsala, János: Egy álpróféta a XVII-ik században, *Századok*, 1889, 746.

to these families. Additionally, the prince's confidant, János Kemény, also maintained close ties with prominent Catholic figures, including the Mikes family of Zabola and István Petki of Királyhalma. These dynamics led to Mihály Mikes of Zabola becoming chancellor of Transylvania—filling one of the highest and most influential positions. Despite these shifts, George II Rákóczi remained loyal to his faith and, like his father and Gábor Bethlen, offered substantial support to the Reformed Church. The devastation wrought between 1658 and 1660, however, made continued princely patronage increasingly difficult, forcing the Transylvanian Reformed Church and its institutions to rely more heavily on the financial support of the Protestant nobility. Even so, the Reformed elite itself enjoyed unconditional assurance of the prince only during the first two decades of the Apafi era. Because from the mid-1670s onward, leading members of this Protestant nobility—such as Dénes Bánffy, János Bethlen, Miklós Bethlen, and Pál Béldi[12]—became targets of treason trials[13], Catholic magnates succeeded in capturing key positions within the political elite by the 1680s.[14]

During the Decade of Mourning, leading Reformed aristocrats such as Dénes Bánffy of Losonc, János Bethlen and his son Miklós, as well as Pál Béldi of Uzon, still retained full political power. The robust Transylvanian Reformed elite[15] envisioned by Gábor Bethlen—bound together not only by shared interests but also by a dense web of family ties—had been consolidated during the rule of Prince George I Rákóczi, and this consolidation continued under the early reign of George II Rákóczi. By the second half of the 1650s, however, several Catholic families had risen to significant power and influence in the highest circles of Transylvanian politics. Among them was Mihály Mikes of Zabola, who attained the chancellorship—the highest office after the prince himself—and István Petki of Királyhalma, who served as chief captain of the Csíkszék district and played a prominent role

[12] Balogh, Judit: Béldi Pál, a református székely főember, in Csorba, Dávid – Szatmári, Emília (eds.): *„...Tanácsaid hűség és igazság": Tisztelgő írások Dienes Dénes professzor úr 65. születésnapjára*, Budapest, Sárospatak: Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, Egyház és Társadalom Kutatóintézet, Reformáció Öröksége Műhely, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Hittudományi Kar Egyháztörténeti Kutatóintézet, Tiszáninneni Református Egyházkerület, 2021, 337–348 (*Reformáció Öröksége Könyvek* 2676-9824; 7/1-2)

[13] Balogh, Judit: Hűtlenségi perek az Erdélyi Fejedelemségben, *Miskolci Jogi Szemle: A Miskolci Egyetem Állam- és Jogtudományi Karának Folyóirata* (1788-0386), 16 5 (2021/3 special edition), 2021, pp 42–54.

[14] Balogh, Judit: Református elitcsoport létrehozásának kísérlete a Székelyföldön Apafi Mihály korában, in Horváth, Emőke – Sarnyai, Csaba Máté – Vassányi, Miklós (eds.): *Egyházi és vallási reformtörekvések régen és ma*, Budapest, Kairosz Kiadó, 2020, 123–154.

[15] Balogh, Judit: Bethlen Gábor egyházpolitikája. *Egyháztörténeti Szemle*: 24/4. 29-45. (2023)

in the military campaigns of the 1650s. He was also one of the four nobles to receive Polish citizenship (*indigenatus).*[16] He also raised several orphans from Catholic noble families on his estate, including István Apor, who by the end of the seventeenth century would become one of the wealthiest Szekler nobles and a key figure in the Catholic elite.[17] In addition, Petki arranged for the daughters of several leading Catholic Szekler families to be appointed to the court of Princess Zsófia Báthory.

The strengthening of the Catholic elite toward the end of the Rákóczi era did not go unnoticed by János Bethlen, who was appointed chancellor by Ákos Barcsai and retained this position under Prince Michael I Apafi until 1677.[18] Bethlen, who had converted from Unitarianism to the Reformed faith in childhood under the influence of his guardian, supported the Transylvanian Reformed Church with the fervor of a convert.[19] He recognized that under Prince George II Rákóczi, the Catholic elite had become increasingly organized, thereby strengthening the institutional framework of the so-called Transylvanian Roman-Catholic Status, which had been recognized in law since 1615. The newly compiled legal code—the *Approbatae Constitutiones Regni Transsylvaniae et Partium Hungariae eidem adnexarum*—included provisions that affirmed the Catholic community's right to self-governance on par with the other recognized denominations. The prince sanctioned the resolutions of joint assemblies of the Diet and of the Catholic church—known as status assemblies—provided they were also approved by a majority of the Diet. Among these resolutions was the 1572 law, issued under the rule of István Báthory and often ignored in practice, which reaffirmed the status of Roman Catholicism as an "established religion" and authorized Catholics to administer their educational and foundation affairs at independent assemblies. From that point on, clergy and laypeople were, in principle, to dispute and act upon together on matters affecting the entire Catholic diocese of Transylvania. Over the course of the seventeenth century, these joint—or status—assemblies became increasingly institutionalized. These bodies were dominated by lay members of the Transylvanian Catholic elite, who not only drafted proposals to be submitted to the Diet and regularly voiced their grievances concerning denominational inequalities but also established foundations, founded and maintained schools, and, under George II Rákóczi, even suc-

[16] TT XVIII. 73. Gyulafehérvár, November 24, 1653, II. Rákóczi György Kemény Jánosnak.; TT XVIII. 75. Gyulafehérvár, November 26, 1653, II. Geroge Rákóczi to János Kemény.; EOE XI: 31.

[17] Bíró, Vencel: *Altorja gróf Apor István és kora*, Kolozsvár, 1935.

[18] Trócsányi, Zsolt: *Erdély központi kormányzata 1540–1690*, *Magyar Országos Levéltár kiadványai, III. Hatóság- és hivataltörténet 6*., Budapest, 1980.

[19] Bethlen János, a politikus és a történetíró: Erdély története Szalárdi és Cserei között, in Ex Occidente...: A XVI. századi magyar irodalom európai kapcsolatai, Balassi Kiadó, Budapest, 1999, 103–118.

ceeded in reclaiming a number of properties. Thanks to the intercession of the Status, the Franciscan monastery at Mikháza was spared from closure.[20]

Even though the Reformed princes actively supported the Reformed Church over the other established religions—namely Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Unitarianism—Bethlen János still considered it important to counterbalance the legally increasingly assertive Catholic elite. After the failed Polish campaign led by Prince George II Rákóczi and the ensuing Ottoman punitive expedition and civil war, Bethlen sought closer ties with the Reformed elite of Szeklerland that showed a significant military power, and who also maintained good relations with Prince Ákos Barcsai.[21] This alliance was further reinforced by the marriage of his son, Miklós Bethlen, to Ilona Kun, the daughter of a Szekler noble.[22]

During the 1660s and 1670s, the first two decades of the rule of Prince Michael I Apafi, the political elite was dominated by Reformed magnates who actively supported their own church within Transylvania and were in close contact with fellow Reformed communities in the Kingdom of Hungary, as well as with broader Calvinist networks across Europe. The most important offices at this time were held by János Bethlen of Bethlen, who served both as chancellor and chief captain of Udvarhelyszék; Pál Béldi of Uzon, who held the position of *főkirálybíró* (chief royal judge) of Háromszék and for a time served as captain-general of the country; and Dénes Bánffy of Losonc, who simultaneously held the captaincies of Kolozsvár (Cluj) and Szamosújvár (Gherla), as well as the post of lord-lieutenant of Kolozs County. Alongside them, Mihály Teleki, captain of Kővár, gradually rose in prominence within the Reformed elite, although his true influence only emerged after the deaths of the other leading magnates. All four were members of the princely council.[23] Of the four, two were converts. As mentioned earlier, János Bethlen converted to the Reformed faith from the Unitarian under the influence of his guardian after his father's death. The same was true for Pál Béldi, whose conversion followed a similar path. Béldi lost his father, Kelemen Béldi—a Catholic—while still a child. Unlike János Bethlen, whose mother remarried, Béldi was placed under the guardianship of a distant Reformed relative, along with his two brothers and three sisters. This relative was Zsigmond Kékedy, who had entered the Transylvanian princely court under Prince Gabriel Bethlen, but

[20] Sas, Péter: Az Erdélyi Római Katolikus Státus, in *Egyháztörténeti Szemle*, 2002/3, URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20130729040503/http://www.uni-miskolc.hu/~egyhtort/cikkek/saspeter-erdely.htm, Last accessed: 17-03-25

[21] Barcsai Ákos maintained close ties with Tamás Basa of Zabola, the Reformed captain general of Háromszék, as well as with Judge Royal György Lázár of Gyalakuta, along with their respective circles.

[22] V. Windisch, Éva: Bethlen Miklós élete leírása magától, in *Kemény János és Bethlen Miklós művei*, Budapest, 1980. 624–625.

[23] Bánffy Dénes 1664-1674. Bethlen János 1658-1678. Béldi Pál 1672-1678.

whose career peaked only during the reign of George I Rákóczi.[24] A native of Zemplén County[25] with maternal ancestry among the Szeklers of Csík, the Reformed Kékedy quickly earned the trust of George I Rákóczi, who appointed him lord-lieutenant of Inner Szolnok County already in 1632 and princely councilor in 1636. It was most likely due to the influence of the powerful Zsigmond Kékedy that the young Szekler noble Pál Béldi from Háromszék became a student at the Reformed College of Sárospatak.[26] Béldi's ties to Sárospatak endured: later, as a high-ranking official in Háromszék, he became one of the college's most important patrons, particularly after the institution was expelled from the town by Zsófia Báthory and resettled in Gyulafehérvár, Transylvania.[27] János Bethlen was only two years old when his father died. When he was seven, his widowed mother remarried Ferenc Macskási, a deputy commander at the princely court who later became lord-lieutenant [28]of Fehér County.[29] In a 1636 document, his signature appears alongside his title as chief captain of Szamosújvár.[30] Under the influence of his Reformed stepfather and guardian, János Bethlen converted from Unitarianism to Calvinism. Macskási sent the boy to the most prestigious educational institution in Transylvania at the time, the *Collegium Academicum* founded by Prince Gabriel Bethlen. There, he studied under Pál Keresztúri Bíró, a disciple of Comenius and one of the leading educators of the era.[31] The third major nobleman to play a central role during this period, Dénes Bánffy, was born into a Reformed family. His commitment to his denomination remained strong throughout his life. Like Béldi, he was sent to study at the Reformed College of Sárospatak by his family. When the young Dénes Bánffy enrolled at Sárospatak in 1643, his father, Mihály Bánffy, had already passed away. Dénes had two half-siblings from his father's second marriage, and his upbringing was overseen by his mother, Judit Kapy. It is reasonable to assume that Prince George I Rákóczi, himself a Reformed ruler, sought to influence the education of these orphans and may have played a role in ensuring that Dénes Bánffy enrolled at the Reformed College of Sárospatak, a town under the control of

[24] Trócsányi, Zsolt: *Erdély központi kormányzata 1540-1690*, Budapest, 1980. 30.

[25] On his mother's side, he came from the Andrássy family, who had Krasznahorka as the center of their estate, but originally lived in Csíkszék. Lázár, Miklós: *Erdély főispánjai*, 167.

[26] Hörcsik, Richárd: *A sárospataki református kollégium diákjai. 1617-1777*, Sárospatak, 1998. 41, 164.

[27] Ibid. "Patronus Scholae in exilio" as it is written in the register next to his name.

[28] Jankovics, József: Bethlen János, a politikus és történetíró, in *Bethlen János, Erdély története 1629-1673*, P. Vásárhelyi, Judit (trans.), Jankovics, József (afterword and notes), Budapest, 1993, 103–104.

[29] EOE. 9. 580.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Dienes, Dénes: *Keresztúri Bíró Pál (1594?-1655)*, Sárospatak, 2001, 69.

the Rákóczi family and Zsuzsanna Lorántffy.[32] Mihály Teleki, like Bánffy, was born into a Reformed family. His lineage stemmed from the lower nobility of Partium. His father, János Teleki, had served as a soldier at the forts of Borosjenő and Várad.[33] The young Mihály Teleki enrolled at the Reformed College of Várad, which—partly under the influence of Puritanism—had become one of the most prestigious educational institutions of the time by the 1640s, that is, exactly when Teleki was a student there.

Among the four noblemen, János Bethlen—born in 1613—was the eldest, while Mihály Teleki, born around 1634, was the youngest. Most of János Bethlen's college years coincided with the reign of Gabriel Bethlen, whereas the education of the other three young men took place under the watchful eye of Prince George I Rákóczi. All four of them provided substantial financial support to their churches and were deeply interested in the situation of Hungarian Protestants beyond Transylvania's borders.

Among them, János Bethlen was the most open to engagement with European Protestant communities. Although he himself had not been able to study at foreign academies[34] in his youth—something he regretted throughout his life—he sent his son on an unusually long educational journey through Europe, one that extended far beyond what was customary among the Transylvanian elite. This journey was only partly about formal studies. Building and maintaining European Protestant networks played just as central a role in the itinerary of Miklós Bethlen as academic pursuits did. During his journey, he not only strengthened but also rebuilt his father's existing international connections, naturally mainly in the Protestant

[32] Hörcsik, Richárd: *A sárospataki református kollégium diákjai. 1617–1777*, Sárospatak, 1998. 167.

[33] Iványi, Béla: *A római szent birodalmi széki gróf Teleki-család gyömrői levéltára*. Szeged, 1931. 53.

[34] According to József Jankovics, "Bethlen Miklós characterized him as 'a man of respectable learning by Transylvanian standards,' who, even in old age, lamented his *domidoctus* state, that is, not having attended foreign universities, and so being excluded from the life of the domestic educated elite. He lamented that he had never been permitted—as a noble *peregrinus*—to 'greet the Muses beyond the borders of Transylvania,' nor to meet, as prescribed by custom, the great minds of Europe's political, scholarly, or artistic life; he could not gather nor bring home the fruits of European intellectual life, to enrich the garden of his homeland with their seeds. And yet, it was precisely this breadth of perspective, this network of connections and firsthand experience gained at European courts, that he would have most sorely needed throughout his life and political activity. Learning from his own example, he later sent both of his sons—born of his first wife—to universities and royal courts in Germany, the Netherlands, and England, a practice still exceedingly rare in his time." Jankovics, József: Bethlen Miklós a politikus és történetíró, in Jankovics, József (ed.): *Ex Occidente... A 17. századi magyar irodalom európai kapcsolatai*, Régi Magyar Könyvtár, Tanulmányok 3, Budapest, 1999, 105.

parts of Europe he visited. The peregrinatio began in May 1661 and initially followed the usual route of Protestant students: Heidelberg, Utrecht, and finally Leiden. In these university towns, his focus was no doubt on academic study—even if he later maintained relationships with some of his professors, which facilitated the exchange and acquisition of information. At Heidelberg, however, he also spent considerable time at the princely court. One of his chief patrons and mentors there was the elderly Joachim Camerarius, a princely councilor, jurist, and diplomat[35], whose father, Ludwig Camerarius, had previously maintained important connections with Gabriel Bethlen and George I Rákóczi.[36] In his autobiography, Bethlen recounts that he was frequently invited to dine at the table of Prince-Elector Charles I Louis[37], who received him warmly.[38] It is therefore certain that already in Heidelberg, the young Bethlen was actively cultivating Protestant networks. Although he met many famous professors—especially in Leiden—he did not pursue any particular discipline in depth and did not engage in formal academic disputation. He did, however, devote himself enthusiastically to the studying of languages, including French and English, which later proved valuable in his diplomatic career as well.[39] After Leiden, he visited several towns in the Dutch Republic and then crossed the channel to England, where he both travelled and strengthened his network of Protestant contacts—sometimes renewing older acquaintances. One such acquaintance from his time at the Academy of Gyulafehérvár was Pál Jászberényi P.[40], who had been Bethlen's *praeceptor* and later served as the trusted adviser and tutor of Prince George II Rákóczi. After the destruction of the Gyulafehérvár academy and the death of George II Rákóczi, Jászberényi left Transylvania and settled in England. He initially lived in Durham, where—thanks to the support of John Cosin—he became a canon. He travelled frequently to London and preached several times at the

[35] "There was indeed at that time in Heidelberg a certain venerable gentleman by the name of Joachimus Camerarius, who had once served as secretary and counselor to Fridericus V, King of Bohemia, and to Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden. He was a most benevolent instructor to me, likewise a counselor to the *Elector* himself, and being a man of great learning and vast experience—both seen and heard—he was held in high esteem and honor before all men." in *Bethlen Miklós élete leírása magától*, 573.

[36] Kármán, Gábor: Gábor Bethlen's Diplomats at the Protestant Courts of Europe, in *Hungarian Historical Review*, Vol. 2, Issue 4, 2013., 801.

[37] Fuchs, Peter: Karl I. Ludwig, in *Neue Deutsche Biographie 11*, 1977, 246–249, URL: https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118560182.html, Last accessed: 23-05-22.

[38] V. Windisch, Éva: *Bethlen Miklós élete*, op. cit., 572–573.

[39] Ibid. 578–580.

[40] More about him: Gömöri, György: Jászberényi P. Pál ismeretlen levele Isaac Basire-hoz, in *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények*, 2002, Vol. 106, Issue 3-4, 412.

royal court. He also maintained good relations with Isaac Basire[41] and Jean (John) Durel[42], the minister of the French Episcopal Chapel in London.[43] When Miklós Bethlen visited London, Jászberényi not only welcomed him warmly but also introduced him to new acquaintances and helped him gain access to King Charles II. Since the episcopal-leaning Transylvanian Reformed Church was met with sympathy by some members of the similarly episcopal Anglican Church, both Basire and Durel supported not only Jászberényi but also Miklós Bethlen.[44] Bethlen continued his correspondence with Jászberényi even later on.[45] It was during this time that the young Transylvanian noble also became acquainted with John William Curtius[46], a German-born diplomat and representative of the House of Stuart during the Thirty Years' War and the exile of Charles II.[47] Curtius later served as a resident ambassador of the English crown in the Holy Roman Empire and was chief magistrate of two districts in the Palatinate.[48] In his memoirs, Bethlen wrote the following about him: "I also became

[41] Darnell, W. (ed): *The correspondence of Isaac Basire*, 1831.; Monok, István – Viskolcz, Noémi: Isaac Basire könyvei a nagyenyedi református kollégium könyvtárában (1679–1680), in *Magyar Könyvszemle*, 108 (3), 1992, 256–264.; Kármán, Gábor: Isaac Basire Erdélyben, in Kunt, Gergely – Nagy, Gábor – Sz. Halász, Dorottya (eds.): *Háborúk, alkotások, életutak: Tanulmányok a 17. század közepének európai történelméről*, Miskolc, Miskolci Egyetemi Kiadó, 2019, 20–42.

[42] "Durell, John (1663–1683)", *The Clergy of the Church of England Database 1540–1835*, CCEd Person ID 13958, URL: https://www.storiadigitale.it/clergy-church-england-database-1540-1835/ Last Accessed: 13-05-2020.; Gribben, Crawford: *John Owen and English Puritanism*, Oxford University Press, 2017, 242.

[43] Randall, Elizabeth: A special case? London's French Protestants, in Kelly, Debra – Cornick, Martyn (eds.:) *A history of the French in London: Liberty, equality, opportunity*, London, 2013, 25–26.

[44] Gömöri, György: Jászberényi P. Pál ismeretlen levele Isaac Basire-hoz, in *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények*, 2002, Vol. 106, Issue 3-4, 413.

[45] *Bethlen Miklós levelei (1657–1698)*, *Régi magyar prózai emlékek*, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1987, 137. Collected, edited, with an introductory essay and notes by József Jankovics. Hungarian language notes by Gáborné Nényei, translated by Péter Kulcsár.

[46] Grosskopf, Gertrud: Wilhelm Curtius (1599–1678): Lebensspuren eines kurpfälzischen Adeligen aus Bensheim im Dienst der englischen Krone, in Historischer Verein für Hessen, *Archive für hessische Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, Vol. Neue Folge 45, 1987.

[47] The National Archives (ex-Public Records Office), London, SP/81/56-73, SP/104/56 &170

[48] Grosskopf, Gertrud: Wilhelm Curtius (1599–1678): Lebensspuren eines kurpfälzischen Adeligen aus Bensheim im Dienst der englischen Krone, in Historischer

acquainted with an old German gentleman named Wilhelm Curtius, who had once been a councilor to King Frederick V of Bohemia—a man of great learning, whom God gave me here as a father... He even wrote to the preacher of Prince Turenne in Paris on my behalf and sent the letter."[49] Through Curtius, Bethlen established contact with the renowned Huguenot Henri de La Tour d'Auvergne de Turenne, commonly known as "Marshal Turenne", who was the grandson of William of Orange and Marshal of France.[50]

Even this minor detail clearly illustrates how Miklós Bethlen's Protestant European network of connections was formed. After his journey to England, he continued on to France: "I visited, with a letter from Vilhelmus Curtius, the preacher of the prince Marshal Turenne, who—with his lord, lady, kinsmen, and among others the marquis de Ruvigny,[51] the general procurator of the *gallica reformata ecclesiae* who customarily resided in Paris—was a most courteous, intelligent, devout, and zealous man, and showed me great kindness."[52] Thus, it is evident that Bethlen's French journey was already a diplomatic mission, which he carried out with the help of his existing—moreover Protestant—network of contacts: "Prince Turenne, who was overseeing the preparation and dispatch of this army, would have seen to it that I be placed in it with a proper rank, for he was the maréchal de France, the most senior of them all. This Turenne informed the king of me, and shortly thereafter conveyed, in the king's name, that His Majesty extended his favor to me, and instructed me to go to one named de Lionne, a secretary of state, handing me a sealed note addressed to him. He was one of the four great secretaries of state. Hearing this, I went and presented the note. Upon reading it, he received me with great courtesy, conversed with me at length, especially concerning the affairs of Transylvania, Turkey, and Wallachia, and then dismissed me, instructing me to return on the third day, or whenever he or Turenne should summon me again—he even made note of my lodgings. Some days later—I cannot recall exactly how many—Turenne asked me whether I might carry a letter from the king to the prince of Transylvania, saying I must make haste, for it would greatly benefit both Transylvania and the prince. I replied that I would gladly do so. He had me to go once more to de Lionne, who again spoke with me, among other things about the delivery of the letter, and

Verein für Hessen, *Archive für hessische Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, Vol. Neue Folge 45, 1987, 61–116.

[49] V. Windisch, Éva: *Bethlen Miklós élete*, op. cit., 587.

[50] Bérenger, Jean: Turenne, Fayard, Paris, 1987, 54-67.

[51] Murtagh, Harman: Massue de Ruvigny, Henri de, earl of Galway, and marquess of Ruvigny in the French nobility, in Matthew, H. C. G. – Harrison, Brian (eds.): *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 37. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, 242–246.

[52] Ibid. 592.

gave me a sealed note addressed to a certain Monsieur Colbert, *surintendant de la maison du roi*, a man of very high office and one of the king's most trusted ministers."[53] Thus, by the end of his peregrination, while still a young man, Miklós Bethlen had become a key figure in Transylvanian diplomacy. Not only did he meet several leading personalities of contemporary French politics, but he also conveyed a letter from the French court—specifically from Louis XIV himself—to Michael Apafi, Prince of Transylvania. These episodes vividly demonstrate the strength of the European Protestant network already at that time, a network that Miklós Bethlen and his father, János, sought to make full use of. It may be assumed that this journey, undertaken in Bethlen's early twenties, was planned by his father and supported by him through his old acquaintances. Miklós Bethlen, however, showed great aptitude in expanding that circle of acquaintances. The Bethlens—both János and Miklós—incorporated into this network members of the Protestant nobility of northeastern Hungary, who were organizing around István Thököly as part of the Wesselényi conspiracy. One of them, Ambrus Ketzer, received a letter from Miklós Bethlen dated May 27, 1665, sent from Bethlenszentmiklós, in which he wrote: "We place our trust in the envoys of the German, French, English, and Dutch."[54] In other words, even before the onset of the "decade of mourning," they had begun to establish the connections they would later seek to mobilize in aid of the persecuted Hungarian Protestants. In his letters from this period, alongside Ketzer Ambrus, Miklós Bethlen would frequently mention István Vitnyédy and István Petrőczi—figures who would later become leaders of the Protestant movement.[55] At around the same time, he also helped maintain contact between the Transylvanian Reformed Church and the former professor of the Gyulafehérvár Academy, Isaac Basire, who was then still living in England—thus strengthening the English Protestant connection as well.[56] On March 19, 1666, he wrote to Mihály Teleki: "News comes to me ever more frequently from the German, Belgian, French, Italian, and Polish realms..."[57] In a letter to his father, Chancellor of Transylvania János Bethlen, Miklós also commented on his ties to Palatine Wesselényi and the Palatine's wife.[58] Unlike much of the Transylvanian elite, the Bethlens generally considered the European context and they were often the ones

[53] Ibid. 593.

[54] *Bethlen Miklós levelei (1657–1698)*, *Régi magyar prózai emlékek*, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1987, 125. Collected, edited, with an introductory essay and notes by József Jankovics. Hungarian language notes by Gáborné Nényei, translated by Péter Kulcsár.

[55] Ibid. 126.

[56] Ibid. 128–129.

[57] Ibid. 129.

[58] Ibid. 132–133.

informing the Transylvanian nobility about international affairs.[59] This may explain why, even before the verdicts were pronounced in the conspiracy trials, Prince Apafi tasked them—in the fall of 1670—with informing the Protestant prince-electors of the Holy Roman Empire.[60] Miklós Bethlen reported that he had placed his hopes in the Elector of Brandenburg, Frederick William[61], "the great prince-elector," and intended to send him a letter of appeal. But Prince Apafi, fearing the potential consequences of international entanglements, ultimately hesitated, as did Mihály Teleki. From this point onward, however, both Miklós and János Bethlen advocated for appealing to the international Protestant community: "I advise that we write everything clearly to the Palatine Elector."[62] The "Palatine Elector," that is, the Elector of the Palatinate, had always served as an important point of reference for the Reformed princes of Transylvania; it is no coincidence that Elector Karl Ludwig I was among those whose support Chancellor János Bethlen and his son counted on. Even at this stage, they proposed to Prince Apafi that a letter be sent to Harsányi Nagy Jakab, who at the time served as a counselor at the court of the Elector of Brandenburg. Harsányi Nagy had previously been the Puritan-minded rector of the Reformed College in Várad[63], and later became a chancery scribe and diplomat.[64] Miklós Bethlen's correspondence reveals the emergence of a strategy through which the Reformed elite of Transylvania, led by the likewise Reformed Prince Michael I Apafi, not only sought to provide all possible assistance to persecuted Protestants in Hungary but also attempted to draw the attention of international public opinion to their plight.

Transylvania's elite remained continuously informed about the uprising connected to the Wesselényi conspiracy and the Habsburg retaliation that followed, just as Bethlen János and his associates kept up-to-date with news of the movement itself from the mid-1660s. These developments were also shared at sessions of the Transylvanian Diet.[65] In the 1671 ses-

[59] Ibid. 140.

[60] Letter from Miklós Bethlen to Dénes Bánffy and Mihály Teleki on October 13, 1670. *Bethlen Miklós levelei (1657–1698)*, *Régi magyar prózai emlékek*, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1987, 230–231. Collected, edited, with an introductory essay and notes by József Jankovics. Hungarian language notes by Gáborné Nényei, translated by Péter Kulcsár.

[61] Luh, Jürgen: *Der Große Kurfürst: Friedrich Wilhelm von Brandenburg – Sein Leben neu betrachtet*, Siedler, München 2020.

[62] *Bethlen Miklós levelei*, op. cit., 231.

[63] Herepei, János: A váradi kollégium és a Rákócziak, in Keserű, Bálint (ed.): *Apáczai és kortársai: Herepei János cikkei*, *Adattár XVII. századi szellemi mozgalmaink történetéhez 2*, Budapest–Szeged, 1966, 52–63.

[64] Kármán, Gábor: *A Seventeenth-Century Odyssey in East Central Europe: The Life of Jakab Harsányi Nagy, The History of Oriental Studies 2*, Brill, Boston, 2015.

[65] *EOE*. 15. 17.

sion, several members raised the idea that the princely council should maintain closer ties with the Protestant princes of Europe.[66] As a result, already during the days when the Habsburg government was preparing to execute those condemned for their role in the Wesselényi conspiracy—including the only Protestant among them, Ferenc Bónis—Prince Michael I Apafi drafted a circular letter addressed to European Protestant rulers regarding the persecution of Protestants in Hungary.[67] According to the autobiography of Miklós Bethlen, however, the letters were ultimately never sent, following prolonged hesitation.[68] Helping the fugitives who had remained together since the time of the Wesselényi conspiracy was seen by Mihály Teleki, captain of Kővár, as a direct continuation of the customary actions taken by previous Transylvanian princes when the interests of Hungarian Protestants were harmed.[69] Dénes Bánffy, captain of Kolozsvár, along with János and Miklós Bethlen, preferred a more cautious approach when it came to military action. Thus, the Transylvanian estates not only followed developments in Hungary with keen interest, but also drafted various plans of action in response to the new circumstances. All factions agreed that from 1670–1671 onward, the Habsburg government's attitude toward Protestants had fundamentally changed.

On October 22, 1671, Miklós Bethlen wrote to Mihály Teleki: "Upon returning from the assembly, my father ordered me to reply to the letter recently received from Mr. Jakab Harsányi and, at the same time, to write on behalf of His Highness to the Elector of Brandenburg, and to send it through Your Grace to the Court, for both His Highness and the Lords are in favor of establishing relations with them, should a good path be opened."[70]

In addition to urging international support, Bethlen also advocated in another letter for the principality to welcome and settle those fleeing persecution—if necessary, in great numbers: "What persecution our poor brethren may be facing out there, Your Grace surely knows better than I. Five days ago, I spoke much about this with His Lordship[71]. We should strive to enrich our poor homeland with them and grant them the many desolate lands, if they are exiled from their homes for the sake of truth; but as I do not trust either the Prince or the envious Saxons to initiate this publicly, we agreed with His Lordship that we should take the lead ourselves. And if there come godly men of our faith... let us provide for a certain number of them. May your Lordship grant room for fifty households in

[66] *EOE*. 15.

[67] *EOE*. 15. 33.

[68] V. Windisch, Éva: *Bethlen Miklós élete*, op. cit., 664.

[69] *EOE*. 15. 39.

[70] Letter from Miklós Bethlen to Dénes Bánffy and Mihály Teleki on October 13, 1670. *Bethlen Miklós levelei*, op. cit., 240.

[71] With his father, János Bethlen.

Teremi. In Vajdakamarás, for a hundred couples. I too will provide here in Szentmiklós for 25 or 30 couples. If Your Grace accepts my advice, then in Szentpéter you may also provide for a hundred couples.[72] These are the conditions we considered: if they are peasants, let them owe half the service they gave their lords out there—whether in taxes or other duties; but for the first two years, let them owe nothing at all. If they are nobles, *hajdú* soldiers, or free townsmen, let them enjoy the same freedoms here as they did there, provided that if they cultivate vineyards or farmland and previously paid full tithe, they shall pay the same here; if they paid no tithe before, let them be exempt up to fifty sheaves of grain and forty buckets of wine, if it grows. If God blesses them beyond that, they shall pay tithe on the surplus; but again, for two years, they shall owe nothing."[73] The letter thus thoroughly outlined the settlement conditions for refugees of various social statuses and even urged Teleki to publicize the opportunity among the persecuted and fugitive communities. This initiative was far more than a spur-of-the-moment idea; it was a carefully conceived plan for settling potential refugees. Unfortunately, little is known about the further fate of this proposal, but it is certain that during the decade under study here, Transylvania became a refuge for Protestant exiles. Among them were nobles fleeing from the first wave of repression in northeastern Hungary, such as the still-young Imre Thököly and others associated with his circle, including Pál Négyessy Szepesi (or Szepessy), Pál Csernel, Ambrus Ketzer, and more. On February 3, 1671, János Nemes, the chief captain of Háromszék and a key member of the Reformed elite circle established by János Bethlen, noted in his diary: "At that time, the Hungarian lords arrived with His Lordship Mihály Teleki: Mr. István Petrőczi and Mr. Imre Tököly, along with Ambrus Ketzer, Pál Csernel, and Pál Szepesi, among other honorable nobles."[74] Négyessy Szepesi (or Szepessy) Pál (1630–1687), the sub-lieutenant of Borsod County, owned extensive estates in Miskolc[75] and became one of the leaders of the fugitives in Transylvania. He was a courtier and confidant of Imre Thököly.[76] Ambrus Lipóczi Ketzer, a landowner in Sáros County, was Lutheran, as were his brothers András and Menyhért. Ambrus had served as a steward of István Thököly's

[72] Letter from Miklós Bethlen to Dénes Bánffy and Mihály Teleki on October 13, 1670. *Bethlen Miklós levelei*, op. cit., 250.

[73] TML. V. 80–81.

[74] *Hídvégi id. Nemes János naplója az 1651-1686. évekről*, Háromszéki Téka I., Barót, 2023, 159–160. Introductory study and notes by Judit Balogh.

[75] Dobrossy, István (ed. ch.) – Szakály, Ferenc (ed.): *Miskolc története. II. 1526-tól 1702-ig*, Miskolc, 1998, 43.

[76] Künstlerné Virág, Éva: Közélet és privát szféra eseményei Kazinczy András naplójában, in *Turul*, 2014/2, 53.; Szendrei, János: *Miskolcz város története és egyetemes helyiratai II. Miskolcz város története 1000–1800*, Miskolc, 1904. IX., 227.;

estates and was a loyal assistant of the family.[77] Not long after the date mentioned in János Nemes's diary, Ambrus, whose diary we also know[78], was summoned to Bratislava but died en route near Nagyszombat on June 5.[79] After his death, his brother Menyhért (or Menyhárt) remained in contact with the Transylvanian Principality and participated in several diplomatic missions. This entry clearly shows that the refugees consciously sought ties with the Transylvanian Reformed nobility and, when necessary, traveled even to the Szekler Land for negotiations. István Petrőczi, Menyhért Keczer, and Pál Szepesi later frequently appeared alongside Mihály Teleki and undertook significant diplomatic efforts to secure support for the fugitives from both Teleki and Transylvania.[80] Thus, through these Protestant nobles—many of whom had also supported István Thököly—Teleki gained first-hand knowledge of the persecution of Protestants. Unsurprisingly, his letters frequently conveyed updates to the Transylvanian elite about the situation. Both István Petrőczi and Pál Szepesi, who corresponded regularly with prominent Reformed leaders in Transylvania, often reminded their Transylvanian allies of their denominational obligations.[81] Szepesi and his associates were primarily in contact with Mihály Teleki and, to a lesser extent, Dénes Bánffy.[82] The correspondence of both lords frequently referenced the extraordinary court proceedings or made allusions to them.

In addition to welcoming and supporting refugee Protestant nobles, Prince Michael I Apafi also gave refuge to the Reformed college that had been expelled from Sárospatak by Zsófia Báthory. Zsófia Báthory, the mother of Francis I Rákóczi—who had taken part in the Wesselényi conspiracy—saved her son from execution partly thanks to her excellent church connections and partly by launching a significant re-Catholicization campaign across her estates as early as the 1660s. These estates, formerly strongholds of Protestantism through the Rákóczi family, thus underwent a dramatic shift. In addition, she paid an enormous ransom and agreed to admit imperial troops into the castle of Sárospatak. In the spring of 1671, German soldiers occupied Sárospatak under this agreement, and on August 5, they also seized the church. The church, which had been in Protestant hands up to that point, was subsequently returned by the army to Zsófia Báthory, who handed it over to the Jesuits—at which point mass-

[77] Szabó, András Péter: Egy elveszett gyűjtemény kincsei. Ondrej Czemanka turóci nemes könyvtára, in *Magyar Könyvszemle*, Vol. 136., 3., 2020, 220.

[78] *Lipóczi Keczer Ambrus naplója*, *Monumenta Hungariae Historica II. Scriptores 33, Magyar történelmi évkönyvek és naplók a XVI–XVIII. századból II*, Budapest, A Magyar Tud. Akadémia Könyvkiadó-hivatala, 1894, 80–421.

[79] Néhay Nemzetes Keczer Menyhárt Úr teste felett 1683. die 8. Marity, in *Adattár*, *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények*, 1910, Vol. 20, 2, 213.

[80] TML. 5. 415., 475.,

[81] TML. 5. 591.

[82] TML. 5. 594.

es resumed there. The college itself was occupied later that year, on October 20, by the imperial-royal garrison, acting on the orders of Francis I Rákóczi and Zsófia Báthory. The buildings were handed over to the Jesuits, who did not establish a school there but rented them out instead. The students and professors of the once-renowned Reformed college—like many of the persecuted Protestant nobles—first made their way to Debrecen, then to Transylvania. In February 1672, Dénes Bánffy, captain of Kolozsvár, assisted their escape and reported the matter to Mihály Teleki. The large group had to pay a considerable sum to the Ottomans to ensure safe passage: "The students and masters from Patak are now at Somlyó; they will arrive here on Tuesday or Wednesday. The people of Debrecen paid Kucsuk a great sum, so they could travel in peace."[83] They had managed to bring the printing press with them, though only a small portion of the college's substantial library could be loaded onto the wagons. Professors of the college at that time, Mihály Buzinkai and János Pósaházi, turned to Prince Apafi for help, and he took them in that same year. By this time, the academic institution in Gyulafehérvár—destroyed during the wars of 1658–1660—had been relocated to Nagyenyed, and the old buildings had been restored. These were assigned to the displaced Patak students, who would remain in their Transylvanian "exile" for 44 years.[84] Teaching resumed at the exiled college in 1673 with the remaining students and professors.[85] The school's reopening was marked by a festive worship service, personally attended by the prince and leading nobles, where János Pósaházi delivered the sermon. Prince Apafi appointed curators to oversee the college and ensured its continued support.[86] A later entry in the princely court records, dated 1685, shows that funding for the college was disbursed biannually: "For the annual maintenance of the students at the college in Fehérvár, as ordered by His Lordship the Prefect, three hundred forints were disbursed for the half-year period from July 24 to December 24, from the *annual six hundred forints allotted*."

From 1672 onward, enrollment began at the relocated college in Gyulafehérvár.[87] The institution preserved its Sárospatak identity in name, referring to itself as the Sárospatak–Gyulafehérvár College. Many of the students continued to come from the same counties as those of the Patak college. The community of the college-in-exile expanded again in 1674, when numerous students from the school in Košice also fled to Transyl-

[83] TML. V. 61.

[84] P. Szathmáry, Károly: *A gyulafehérvár-nagyenyedi Bethlen-főtanoda története*, Nagyenyed, 1868. 86–88.

[85] Ibid. 88.

[86] Szádeczky, Béla (ed.): *I. Apafi Mihály fejedelem udvartartása*, Budapest, 1911, 440.

[87] Dienes, Dénes: *A Sárospataki Református Kollégium története*, Sárospatak, 2013. 45.

vania and enrolled at the college in Gyulafehérvár.[88] In this period of intensified persecution of Protestants, Transylvania provided refuge to many Protestant students, teachers, and ministers. Some of these refugees went on to build notable careers in their new homeland. For example, both Mihály Buzinkai and János Pósaházi became respected theologians of the Principality of Transylvania. Professor Pósaházi emerged as a leading figure in the Transylvanian anti-Cartesian and anti-Cocceian movement, fighting alongside the later bishop Mihály Tófeus.[89] Mihály Buzinkai remained in Transylvania as well until his death, successfully integrating into local society. In addition to princely support, Reformed aristocrats also provided assistance to the college and to the professors individually. Mihály Teleki, for instance, donated 100 forints annually to the two professors.[90] The college register itself records that Pál Béldi was considered the "*Patronus Scholae in exilio*."[91] Even during his captivity in Istanbul, Béldi left a 5,000-forint endowment in his handwritten will for the benefit of the colleges in Nagyenyed and Gyulafehérvár.[92]

These details indicate that both professors' livelihoods were secure, and they even received donations. In 1679, for example, the prince granted Buzinkai and his wife a house plot with serf tenancy rights in Magyarigen (Fejér County)[93], and a year later, Buzinkai purchased an inner plot and a vineyard there as well.[94]

The deaths of both professors became a subject of conversation in the princely household. Anna Bornemissza, the prince's consort, mentioned Buzinkai's death in one of her letters, while Pósaházi's passing was reported to the prince by Buzinkai's eldest son.[95] The Transylvanian nobility also

[88] On the process of confiscating Protestant schools, see: Mihalik, Béla Vilmos: A Szepesi Kamara szerepe az 1670–1674 közötti felsőmagyarországi rekatolizációban, in *Fons (Forráskutatás és Történeti Segédtudományok)*, Vol. XVII, 2010, 3, 255–320.

[89] Simon, József: Vészmadarak. Pósaházi János és a németalföldi karteziánus viták a 17. század második felében, in *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények (ItK)*, 127, 2023, 3, 279–295.

[90] Szilády, Áron – Szilágyi, Sándor (eds.): *Török-magyarkori emlékek. VIII.*, Pest, 1871, 18–19.

[91] Hörcsik, Richárd: *A Sárospataki Református Kollégium diákjai. 1617–1777*, Sárospatak, 1998, 164.

[92] *Történelmi tár*. 1899. 344.

[93] *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények 1984*, 452–454.

[94] Simon, Melinda: Egy XVII. századi erdélyi értelmiségi család könyvműveltsége, in *Magyar Könyvszemle*, Vol. 114, 1, 1998, URL: https://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00021/00016/0003-e5.html, Last accessed: 19-03-2025.

[95] In a letter, Anna Bornemissza put it like this: "Truly, my dear Brother, it seems that God deals with His Church in part as He did with the people of Israel in the wilderness: He takes Moses—so useful to the people—out from among them.

welcomed and supported Reformed ministers who had emigrated to avoid being summoned to Bratislava. Both Pál Béldi and his wife Zsuzsanna Vitéz actively participated in helping the refugees. Zsuzsanna not only supported the education of talented youths but also extended her assistance to persecuted Reformed ministers from Hungary. She provided shelter and sustenance to them, and for those who wished to continue their pastoral vocation, she even secured parishes. For example, Miklós Szaniszlai, a minister from Mád, was taken in by the Béldis at their castle in Bethlen, and she successfully arranged for him to be appointed pastor of the Bodola congregation.[96]

From the outset of the persecution of Protestants, the correspondence and consultations of the Transylvanian Reformed elite consistently reflected three simultaneous objectives: the possibility of providing military aid—advocated primarily by Prince Michael I Apafi's Chancellor, Mihály Teleki; the reception of refugees—which enjoyed near-universal support; and the intention to raise awareness among the European public—chiefly championed by János and Miklós Bethlen. Unlike much of the Transylvanian elite, they typically considered the European context, and they were often the ones informing the Transylvanian nobility about such international affairs.[97]

A letter dated March 14 1672, also addressed to Teleki, reveals the extent to which the news of Protestant persecution had already been dis-

---

For my dear Brother, whether one looks at the churches in our homeland or those beyond, His Majesty the Lord can indeed provide—but is there, or will there be, such a teacher for our churches, one of such spirit and learning? That only His Majesty knows. It is enough, dear Brother, that his departure from the Church is a true cause for mourning, both for this church of ours, which received much of his teaching, and for those beyond, who longed for the salvation of their souls with a spirit not seeking worldly glory." (In: Román Nemzeti Levéltár Maros megyei igazgatóság, Teleki család levéltára, *Missilisek*, 1099.) György Buzinkai's letter: "Most Honorable Prince and Gracious Lord! With sorrow and truly bitter hearts we write to Your Grace, as our most gracious lord, that the Lord God has indeed visited our poor orphaned college—until now resting under your graciously protecting and nourishing wings in this land of exile—adding one sorrow upon another. For two and a half years ago, He called to Himself our father of blessed memory—and now, with our Reverend Pósaházi left alone, on the evening of May 4th, at ten o'clock, He took him as well from among us, weary of his long exile, to the great loss of God's Church and to the ever-unmournable diminishment of our poor orphaned college." (*Történelmi tár*, 1895. 756–757.)

[96] Deák, Farkas: *Uzoni Béldi Pál 1621–1679*, Budapest, 1887, 63.

[97] *Bethlen Miklós levelei (1657-1698)*. Collected, edited, with an introductory essay and notes by József Jankovics. Hungarian language notes by Gáborné Nényei, translated by Péter Kulcsár. (*Régi magyar prózai emlékek*). Akadémiai Kiadó, BP., 1987. I. 140.

seminated across Europe by that time: "Meanwhile, we have arranged for the Saxon bishop to write to the court chaplains of the Lutheran kings and princes; and for our own bishop to write to the court preachers and the academies and bishops of the Calvinist kings and princes, urging them to intercede with the emperor and to offer prayers in their churches for the Hungarian Church suffering persecution, etc."[98]

These efforts are also described in detail in the memoirs of Miklós Bethlen: "My father, I, and other high-ranking exiles from Hungary, seeing that the Turks never assisted us—or did so in an untimely fashion—we devised the following: the prince should send an envoy to the Protestant princes, asking them to intercede with the emperor and to seek reconciliation with the Hungarians. The prince and Dienes Bánffi would have agreed, but Teleki said: the envoy would be a good idea, but it would be very costly and dangerous. 'And whom could we send?' (though he knew full well the prince intended to send me); 'it would be dangerous,' he said, 'as far as the Turks are concerned, because the Porte would arrest the envoy, and the prince would suffer for it.' But this argument held no weight, for the Turks had already informed the prince that they would not intervene and would not break the peace; the prince was therefore free to accommodate the exiles as he best saw fit. 'However,' said Teleki, 'let us instead try to address the Christian potentates through letters; that could work.' Accordingly, we resolved that letters should be sent in the following form: in the prince's name, in two versions—one to the Catholic rulers, arguing on political grounds the implications of the Hungarian unrest for Christendom in general and for Germany in particular; the other to the Protestant rulers, including not only political but also religious arguments. Meanwhile, the Lutheran bishop should write under his own name to court preachers and academies serving princes of the Augsburg Confession, and the Reformed bishop should do likewise to those of the Reformed faith. All these letters were to be delivered together with the prince's letter. He suggested that a certain András Fleischer, a German Lutheran officer, would deliver these. The prince promised one hundred gold coins—no one else contributed anything. At that time, in Berlin, the Elector of Brandenburg was, out of piety and generosity, maintaining a Hungarian man named Jakab Harsányi with a respectable salary and the title of councillor. In his youth, he had served as tutor to the prince and was later trained by Prince Francis I Rákóczi to serve as a Turkish interpreter in the Porte on behalf of Transylvania. After Rákóczi's death, he ended up in Berlin—a respectable and learned man. It was therefore decided that all the letters would be brought

[98] Letter from Miklós Bethlen to Dénes Bánffy and Mihály Teleki on October 13, 1670. *Bethlen Miklós levelei (1657–1698)*, *Régi magyar prózai emlékek*, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1987, 251. Collected, edited, with an introductory essay and notes by József Jankovics. Hungarian language notes by Gáborné Nényei, translated by Péter Kulcsár.

to him, so that he might act as solicitor, and the Elector as the protector of the entire cause...

The letters in the prince's name were drafted and dispatched by me, as both the prince and my father entrusted the task to me, and they were duly completed. I went in person—perhaps twice—to Berethalom to visit the Saxon bishop, who very willingly made all the necessary preparations. The Reformed bishop, Péter Kovásznai, and István Pataki, professor in Kolozsvár, did likewise. I then went to Szeben, where I finalized everything with András Fleischer and dispatched the envoy to Kővár to Teleki, whence, following Teleki's instructions, he was to proceed through Máramaros and Poland to Berlin. I even wrote separately to Joachim Camerarius in Heidelberg and to several other esteemed gentlemen close to the Elector... God knows who acted how in this matter, but subsequent events proved that it was Teleki who had hindered the endeavor."[99] These closing remarks from Miklós Bethlen clearly demonstrate how he sought to leverage the network of contacts he had established during his peregrinations a decade earlier in order to solicit international support for the persecuted Protestants. He did so despite the fact that Mihály Teleki—and, under his influence, Prince Michael I Apafi—envisioned assistance through other means and consequently obstructed Miklós Bethlen's initiatives.

In what follows, I will draw on the correspondence of the Reformed Transylvanian elite of the period to show how the so-called "decade of mourning" was processed and internalized by these nobles, and how reflections on this era came to occupy a central place in their political letters—eventually shaping not only their political views but also their religious life.

At the beginning of his career, Dénes Bánffy, captain of Kolozsvár, was one of the members of the Transylvanian elite who most strongly advocated maintaining good relations with the Viennese court. However, even his trust changed in light of the anti-Protestant actions. Already on January 23, 1672, he wrote to Mihály Teleki, to whom he was related by family ties[100], that: "The doggishness of the Germans is sad enough, and it is bad news for us too. Nothing good can come from there, for the devil and the priests, even if we were their most loyal allies, would not allow us to love our Christian faith. Moreover, my Lord, it is clear that God does not want us to place our trust in men. If His Majesty wills it, He can preserve us even in the midst of all this—only let us be faithful and zealous in our religion, and God will surely help us."[101] This shows how strongly Bánffy's denominational preferences influenced his former attitude toward Vienna and how, from early 1672 on, he was already expressing concern for the

[99] V. Windisch, Éva: *Bethlen Miklós élete*, op. cit., 662–664.

[100] Dénes Bánffy married a Bornemissza girl, Kata, while Mihály Teleki's mother was also a Bornemissza girl, and Mihály Teleki's mother, Anna Bornemissza, was Kata's cousin.

[101] TML. V. 33.

Reformed Church in his letters. Shortly afterward, on February 2, 1672, Mihály Teleki wrote a long letter to Miklós Bethlen from the Kővár castle, in which he also discussed the situation in Hungary: "The course of public affairs is bitter for every good soul. Truly, the poor Hungarian nation and the Church have fallen into the hands of ungrateful men who only seek their own private benefit. So it must be, as God has ordained. I believe that God will not give His glory to another, and the devil and his members can go no farther than He allows; when He so chooses, He will also deliver His own. But woe to those who work idly, or for show, or not at all; I truly fear that if God does not show favor to the better sort, He will utterly destroy us who have turned away from His Majesty. I do not even know what good we could expect, seeing as we thought we could deceive God and refuse to serve His Majesty, seeking instead to please the devil. Truly, we are neither hot nor cold. May God have mercy on us and grant us repentance. But I fear greatly that before long, on account of this dreadful envy, our constant intrigues and lack of love and trust for one another, our indulgence in unrestrained sin, God would turn us into a spectacle before all nations. For it seems to me, my Lord, that we are only interested in following our passions and exacting revenge on each other, slandering and maligning one another—even if all our churches were destroyed in a single hour, we would not do more than give out a sigh over it. We are only friends when we have need of each other's services; but when a friend is in need of us, we cast him aside. I had a taste of such things even in the last Diet, and your dear father is my witness. God has indeed brought our poor homeland to a wretched state, but we could certainly have done much more until now, and we still could—if only we truly loved one another, if we truly helped one another for the common good, and did not twist each other's reasonable words into something God only knows what. Nor would we refute one another when someone finds a good idea. I do feel compassion for our relatives who have fled and are suffering abroad, but I cannot do much about it. What I do grieve over bitterly is the persecution of our churches. It is terrible, my Lord, to hear it. Ten churches were seized in the past ten days in Ugocsa and Bereg. (O Lord God, rise up for Your glory!) Now they are driving the poor people to mass by force, by sword—and in many places, even the nobility. Jezebel has issued edicts throughout her estates, and so has her son, though they are both very ill. Nyírbátor is entirely lost because the church was seized; the people of Légrád have fled to Kanizsa; those of Ónod are wandering around Eger; even the *hajdú* soldiers have resolved to abandon their towns. The word is that the emperor has made an eternal alliance with the French, the Danes, the electors, the Swedes, the Poles, and the Venetians, and is now preparing to move against the Turks. If this proves true, might not Transylvania become a theater of war? We can never curry favor with the Germans to the point that they would be our friends—indeed, even if we all became Papists, they would not swerve from their original

aim."[102] This lengthy exposition reveals, first of all, that the Transylvanian Reformed nobility, educated in prestigious Reformed colleges, interpreted the persecution of their church as divine punishment and framed the whole matter in a biblical context, seeing it as a call to repentance. Based on the content of the letter, Teleki had the most information regarding the persecution of Protestants on the estates of Zsófia Báthory, whom the Transylvanian Protestant nobility scornfully called "Jezebel."[103] On the former Rákóczi–Lorántffy estates, once strongholds of the flourishing Reformed faith, Báthory systematically suppressed and dismantled the Protestant church—an especially painful loss for the Transylvanian Protestant elite. Teleki's text expresses both anti-Habsburg sentiment and anger at the violence of re-Catholicization.

István Naláczy, a close friend of Mihály Teleki and himself a Reformed counselor to the prince, responded to the news on February 7, 1672: "I read your letter with a sorrowful heart, and Master Tofeus[104] truly says that we have fallen into the times of the prophet Jeremiah. May God grant that our end not be like that of the people of Israel in his day. The Lord God gives us no word of comfort from any side—He has turned His back on us completely for our many sins, and there is no one to mourn this; each seeks only his own benefit. I speak often enough of these things to His Highness, but you know, my dear friend, what is his disposition like. I see the danger is at our very door, yet we give it little thought until it falls upon us—though the beginning is already evident in many certain signs. Even if there were no other signs, this alone is a bad enough omen for our ruin: that we do not grieve over the dishonor done to God's glory. It seems to me, my dear friend, that if there were a royal profit in it—not a religious one—there would be much greater diligence. But I will leave it at that. You write that the French, the electors, and the Poles have formed a league with the emperor. It is not impossible, for when the people of Israel fell into ruin and God rejected them, how many nations conspired against them? Although His Highness does not believe the French would join with the Germans, whether they do or not, our religion and our nation are in enough

[102] TML. V. 53–55.

[103] Jezebel is the Phoenician princess of the Old Testament, from the first and second Books of Kings, who was the wife of the 9th century ruler Ahab of Israel. In the Old Testament texts, she persuaded her husband, as his "evil spirit", to allow the foreign cult of Baal. The Transylvanian nobility saw Báthory Zsófia, who was catholicized together with her son after the death of her husband George II Rákóczi, to be such a "Jezebel."

[104] Mihály Tófeus, court chaplain of the Transylvanian Prince Michael I Apafi from 1665, and bishop of the Transylvanian Reformed Church from 1679. Kurta, József: Tofeus Mihály (1624-1684), *Református Szemle*, 104.6, 2011, 651–658 ; Herepei, János: Tofeus Mihály, *Adattár XVI–XVII. századi szellemi mozgalmainkhoz. II*., Szeged–Budapest, 1972, 75–82.

danger already. Those poor souls are suffering greatly, it seems, for the true evangelical knowledge. May God have mercy on them and rise up for the sake of His glory. What more can I write about these things? So it must be, as God has ordained."[105]

Like most of his contemporaries, Dénes Bánffy experienced these events on the level of his personal faith. He wrote to Mihály Teleki from Gyalu on February 7, 1672: "They are bound against our Christian faith, and at the same time it is to be feared that for our sins, God may send them against us even more. Yet they can only go as far as God permits... May He act for the sake of His holy Son. The persecution is bitter enough; so it must be, as God has ordained..."[106]

Mihály Teleki, who maintained close contact with the outlaws of Hegyalja, supplied the Transylvanians with many reports. In February 1672, he wrote to Gábor Kapy: "I will not write anything further about the seizing of the churches—I know that we were even trying to contest the one in Eperjes, to which our reply was: *non est praesentis fori*. If God has sent this visitation upon us for our sins, He will end it when He is satisfied, and he will also remedy the sufferings of the Mother Church..."[107] At the same time, in another letter, his focus already shifted to penitence: "As for the spiritual affliction suffered by the Lutheran status, it is deeply grievous and hard to forget for us all; yet, knowing that all trials come from God upon humanity, we now entrust our just cause to Him. When He deems our sins sufficiently punished through these trials, He will heal our afflictions and remove the undeserved sufferings inflicted upon us by men. I see no remedy from humans, for those who have acted contrary to His Majesty's sworn promises, compelling him to such deeds, will persist in their efforts unless God restrains them. All things must occur as ordained by God. Just as He has permitted persecution upon us, our clergy, and our schools, so can He turn it away, having many means of deliverance. When He chooses to bring about salvation, as He did in ancient times for His true Church and chosen ones, He will find a Moses, a David, a Jephthah, or a Gideon. Indeed, the fault is ours; we deserve the punishment. Even if individuals have sinned against kings, the churches and schools have not."[108]

However, the nobility disagreed on the extent of support to be provided. Many were concerned about the fate of Transylvanian Reformed communities, several nobles prompting caution, including Dénes Bánffy. On March 3, 1672, he wrote from Gyalu to Mihály Teleki: "None among His Graces can lament more the grievous suffering of the Hungarian nation and the Holy Mother Church within it; thus, I must also aim to ensure that we do not utterly and foolishly lose both the country and the religion.

[105] TML. V. 59–61.
[106] TML. V. 61.
[107] TML. V. 74.
[108] TML. V. 86.

When God ordains it, deliverance and its means will come. I write this in confidence to Your Grace."[109] Bánffy thus advocated for minimal action, while János Bethlen and his associates supported international advocacy and the admission of and assistance to refugees. Mihály Teleki considered military support for the fugitives and increasingly aligned with the Protestant lesser nobility uprising led by István Thököly, which Bánffy firmly opposed. In a letter dated March 6, 1672, Bánffy stated: "I have written my modest opinion to Your Grace from Gyalu regarding our Hungarian brethren's affairs and have conveyed the same to my good friend Petróczi. I still hold no other view; I do not agree with their actions and will not support them. I urge Your Grace to abstain as well, lest you bring lasting harm upon yourself, your children, and your homeland."[110] The idea of informing international public opinion through letters appeared in several noble correspondences. Apart from the memoirs of Miklós Bethlen, we know that initial enthusiasm was followed by growing uncertainty. On March 16, 1672, Prince Mihály Apafi wrote to Teleki: "We have sent our letters addressed to the electors, along with travel expenses for the messenger appointed by Miklós Bethlen, to our royal judge in Szeben, so that he may expedite them with proper instruction."[111] The following day, László Székely, the princely chief postmaster[112], inquired of Teleki: "I have inquired from Kassai whether, according to Your Grace's command, the letters have been delivered. He says that both to the bishop and other places designated by Your Grace, they have been sent."[113] Despite this, even in early April, debates continued over the letters' content. Bánffy believed that "The form and style of the expeditions to the Christian electors and princes were dangerous, had they been intercepted. They have been revised in many aspects and are now being dispatched."[114] Persistent uncertainty remained about whether the Principality of Transylvania and Prince Apafi should officially address Europe's Protestant leaders. This is evident from two successive letters by László Székely: "János Bethlen has recently corrected the letters to the electors by our Lord's command and with the council's approval."[115] These lines were written on April 6, but Székely wrote about another correction nearly two weeks later, on April 18 as well: "The letters to the electors have been corrected again, but still did not please our Lord; now he wishes them to be corrected anew. Once finalized, I will send Your Grace a copy and write more extensively."[116]

[109] TML. V. 100.
[110] TML. V. 103.
[111] TML. V. 117.
[112] Lázár, Miklós: *Erdély főispánjai*, op. cit., 67.
[113] TML. V. 119.
[114] TML. V. 152.
[115] TML. V. 157.
[116] TML. V. 180.

In the spring of 1672, Mihály Teleki received further reports of Zsófia Báthory's intensifying anti-Protestant actions: "I pity the churches and schools. Oh, oh, oh God, how long will You be angry with us? This week in Bánya, the locals were interrogated. They intend to seize the church and school there as well. My dear Lord, if we are no longer free, and do not wish to act against the Germans, perhaps we should make them our friends, rather than dwell in isolation, awaiting blows from all sides. The poor people of Tarpa were the bravest. They told Jezebel that if she did not sit beside the father, they would surely kill her. We shall see how they can remain."[117]

As persecutions intensified, Teleki gathered information through his agents. In September, István Baksa wrote him from Debrecen: "The misery of this poor Hungarian nation increases daily; those expelled from their homeland are losing hope, and many, lacking means to live, return to their homes and possessions, only to face further suffering. Recently, a merchant named János Csakó from Dobsina, Gömör County, being here, reported that he witnessed Lord Sigmond Theököly's possessions—one quintal of gold, much silver, and all his valuables—being confiscated, after which he himself was released; similarly with Lord Imre Máriássi. From Szepes County, preachers have been expelled six miles away. A student from the Bratislava area reports that even wealthy Lutherans, upon converting to Catholicism, had their properties seized; only their residences were returned upon conversion."[118] Thus, the Transylvanian Reformed elite had nearly real-time information about the escalating Protestant persecutions. And in 1674, when the sentence on the pastors and teachers was finally passed, it was reported to them by several sources. On March 2, 1674, Teleki notified Prince Michael Apafi: "They are summoning the pastors here, whom I wrote to Your Highness."[119] Although over 700 Protestant pastors and teachers were summoned before the extraordinary court in Bratislava on March 5, Teleki had already received news about it on the 2nd. Shortly thereafter, on March 12, Pál Béldi had precise information as well: "Sad news about the pastors' summoning; it is likely (if the expulsion of Lutheran pastors in Bratislava is true) that this will follow, which may God prevent."[120] News of the sentences and galley slavery reached Transylvania, as István Baksa wrote to Teleki on October 28, 1675: "Péter Kazinczi staged a play in Patak, mocking our exiled, imprisoned, and galley-suffering preachers and the holy ministry, ridiculing our religion and God. He did this to showcase and reinforce his Catholicism; for this, the emperor granted him Demeter castle in Sáros County, once belonging to the poor István Bocskay, and my village Duplin—not for his pious service, but for his betrayal. There has been no greater traitor to the Hungarian homeland

[117] TML. V. 144.
[118] TML. 6, 503–504.
[119] TML. 6, 570.
[120] TML. 6, 574.

and its lords than he."[121]

In summary, the Reformed elite of the Transylvanian Principality not only kept abreast of the events of the "decade of mourning" but were also involved in the movements of the 1660s through figures like János and Miklós Bethlen, and tried to help the Hungarian Lutherans, especially those of the Reformed faith, in many ways. On the one hand, they welcomed and supported refugees, pastors, the Patak College and members of the Protestant nobility fleeing to Transylvania, and on the other hand, they tried to draw Europe's attention to what was happening. Although an official letter representing all of Transylvania was not successfully sent to Europe's crowned heads as Bethlen Miklós and his circle had hoped, he nonetheless mobilized his entire international Protestant network through his letters. In addition, under Mihály Teleki's leadership, efforts to organize military aid began, with Teleki attempting to lead the fugitives, the so-called *bújdosók*. Moreover, political correspondence was permeated with themes of penitence and self-examination in response to the persecution. Many members of the Reformed elite placed the events in a biblical, theological context and sought to interpret them through the lens of their faith. The events of the decade of mourning affected Transylvanian Protestants on many levels, shaping both their personal and community lives. Further exploration of this impact through additional ego-documents would be valuable.

[121] TML. 7, 72–73.