

MÁRTÁK ÉS MÁRIÁK

Világi devóció és szerzetesi jámborság a 17. században

MARTHAS AND MARYS

Lay Devotion and the Piety of the Poor Clares in the Seventeenth Century

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ÖSSZEFOGLALÁS

Márta és Mária bibliai példázatának keretében ágyazva a tanulmány azt vizsgálja, miként őrződött meg és öröklődött tovább a katolikus női identitás a protestáns uralom alatt álló Erdélyi Fejedelemségben. A ruszcai Kornis család három nemzedékének nőalakjait felidézve arra törekszik, hogy bemutassa a nők nélkülözhetetlen szerepét a felekezeti identitás továbbadásában. A katolikus kegyesség, a jótékonyosság, az imádságok, a felekezethez fűződő szokások és a szentképek tisztelete nemzedékről nemzedékre hagyományozódtak a családokban. A hagyományos társadalom keretei között a nők nem rendelkeztek valódi választási szabadsággal; életük alakulását nem saját döntéseik, hanem körülményeik határozták meg. Katolikus nőkként két hagyományos modellt testesítettek meg: hol Máriát, hol Mártát követték, de mindig igyekeztek hittel, hűséggel és alázattal viselni a rájuk rótt "kereszteket", és így teljesíteni be Isten akaratát.

ABSTRACT

Framed by the biblical paradigm of Martha and Mary, this study analyzes how Catholic female identity was preserved and transmitted within a Protestant-ruled Principality of Transylvania. By recalling female figures of three generations of the Kornis family of Ruszka, it seeks to demonstrate the indispensable role women played in the preservation of confessional identity. The practices of Catholic piety, charitable activities, prayers, religious customs, and the veneration of holy images were all transmitted within the framework of family life through successive generations. Women did not enjoy genuine freedom of choice within the framework of traditional society; the course of their lives was determined not by their own decisions but by the actual circumstances of their family. As Catholic women, they embodied two traditional models: at times following Mary, at times Martha, yet always striving to bear the "crosses" laid upon them with faith, fidelity, and humility, and thus to fulfill the will of God.

Kulcsszavak: női jámborság, vallási identitás, nemesi családok hálózata, klarisszák, kora újkori Erdély

Keywords: female piety, confessional identity, noble family networks, Poor Clares, early modern Transylvania

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“Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus’s feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and asked, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her, then, to help me.’ But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.’”¹

This study presents female figures from three generations of the Kornis family of Ruszka, Transylvania. The first generation is represented by Kata Keresztúry, a woman who was drawn to the life of the secluded nuns from childhood, and who ultimately ended her life in a convent as a broken widow. The second female figure discussed is her daughter, Borbála Kornis, for whom no other path remained open than to embrace a religious vocation. The third generation is examined through Borbála’s nieces, Kata Kornis, Anna Kornis, and Krisztina Kornis—their aunt, being a nun and seeking a successor, wished to receive them into the convent as her spiritual “daughters,” but all three of them ultimately found fulfillment in marriage and family life.

The Kornis family of Ruszka, who adhered to the Roman Catholic faith from the Báthory period onward, had to face numerous challenges under the rule of Protestant princes, when they were reduced to the status of a religious minority. Although the foundations of the family’s religious identity were laid by the male heads of household—through the Catholic upbringing of their children—the steadfastness and devotion of the wives, mothers, and professed religious women, the “Marthas” and the “Marys,” truly made it possible for the Kornis family not merely to preserve the Catholic faith but also to transmit it onward as an exemplary legacy to subsequent generations.

By recalling female figures of three generations, this study seeks to demonstrate the indispensable role women played in the preservation of cultural identity—and within it, religious affiliation. The practices of Catholic piety, charitable activities, prayers, feast days and everyday rituals, religious customs, and the veneration of holy images were all transmitted within the framework of family life through successive generations of women. Women also provided a moral model for subsequent generations—whether through the choice of the nun’s life or through the embrace

¹ This study was prepared with the support of the HUN-REN–ELTE Nemesi Emigráció és Emlékezet (1541–1756) – Forrásfeltárás és Kritikai Szövegkiadás Kutatócsoport (Research Group on Noble Emigration and Memory, 1541–1756: Source Exploration and Critical Text Editions). Luke 10:38–42 (NRSVue)

of a sacramental life in the world—and thus contributed in a decisive way to the survival of communal identity.²

The Catholic Heritage of the Maternal Line

To understand the confessional commitment of the female members of the Kornis family, we must look back to the Báthory period. It was then that the Kornis and Keresztúry families of Ruszka formed an alliance, sealed by the marriage of Kata Keresztúry and Boldizsár Kornis. This union did not only bring together the interests of two noble families but also, through the network of kinship ties, reinforced their attachment to the Catholic faith. The two fathers, Kristóf Keresztúry and Gáspár Kornis, were long-time comrades-in-arms: both belonged to the military elite that supported Sigismund Báthory and was led by István Bocskai. The bonds among the members of this group were further strengthened through marriages.

Kristóf Keresztúry has already been well known to scholars of the Báthory period; newly uncovered sources, however, provide insight into his family connections and shed light on the motivations behind the Kornis–Keresztúry marriage. From a young age, the nobleman served Stephen Báthory, and at the Battle of Hadad he saved his life. In 1573, with his ancestral nobility reaffirmed, he received a grant of arms from Báthory, which highlighted not only his military deeds but also his merits in overseeing various construction projects and in economic affairs as prefect of the Dés Chamber.³ A major milestone in his career was his appointment in 1578 as ispán of the salt chamber of Torda, followed in 1587 by his captaincy of the important frontier fortress of Kővár. From 1595 he served as a councillor and lord lieutenant of Kolozs County.⁴⁵ Between 1596 and 1598 he was chief steward to Maria Christierna, Princess of Transylvania.⁶

² LEHTSALU, Liise – MORAN, Sarah – EVANGELISTI, Silvia: Introduction. Perspectives on Women's Religious Activities in Early Modern Europe and the Americas, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 2018, Special Issue: 1–7.; EVANGELISTI, Silvia: *Religious Women, Mystic Journeys and Agency in Early Modern Spain*, op. cit., 9–27.; BOULDIN, Elizabeth: "A Good Martha?" *Female Leadership and Domestic Life in Radical Pietistic Communities*, op. cit., 28–48.; LEHTSALU, Liise: *A Welcome Presence: The Custodial Activities of Third Order Women Religious in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy*, op. cit., 49–66.

³ Mária Krisztierna fejedelemasszony oklevele [Charter of Princess Maria Christierna], August 15, 1598, MNL OL P 1870 Rhédey Family Archive, box 29, series 2, item 31.

⁴ BALOGH, Jolán: Későrenaissance kőfaragó műhelyek. VIII. közlemény, *Ars Hungarica*, 8., 1980/2, 249.; KÁDÁR, József: *Szolnokdoboka vármegye monographiája*, VI, Dés, 1904, 310–312.

⁵ TRÓCSÁNYI, Zsolt: *Erdély központi kormányzata*, A Magyar Országos Levéltár Kiadványai, III. Hatóság- És Hivatalörténet 6., Budapest, 1980, 309.

⁶ LÁZÁR, Miklós: *Erdély főispánjai (1540–1711)*, Budapest, 1889, 34.

Numerous Jesuit sources also attest that the committed Catholic councillor, together with Kőrösy Ilona, his “beloved companion,” stood by the members of the order in decisive moments and in the most difficult times as well.⁷ When the Jesuit father Antonio Possevino arrived in Transylvania, Kristóf Keresztúry was among those who accompanied him and guided the priest in the prince’s game preserve at Szilágysomlyó. In 1586, when the plague reduced the number of monks to less than half, he admitted five Jesuits within the walls of Kővár, which offered secure refuge from the epidemic. He had Father György Törös buried on his own estate at Szentbenedek, in the newly constructed family vault, and had a church built beside his grave.⁸ In 1588, the year of the Jesuits’ expulsion, he also received the gravely ill János Leleszi, the former tutor of Sigismund Báthory.⁹ As a patron, he likewise financed the publication of Gergely Vásárhelyi’s highly significant translation of Canisius’ work, which was published in Kolozsvár at the Heltai press.¹⁰

Information on Keresztúry’s estates and family relations is provided by the will he drew up shortly before his death.¹¹ The testament mentions two estate centers: the castle at Szentbenedek in Inner Szolnok County (today Mănăstiera, Romania), which he had received as a princely grant in 1573—and from which he derived his noble byname—and the noble manor at Györgyfalva in Kolozs County. He appointed his wife, Ilona Kőrösy (Keoreosy), as administrator of his properties and named his only child, Katalin, as his heir.

His wife, Ilona Kőrösy of Sámson, was descended from a landowning family in Mid-Szolnok County and, under the influence of Jesuit

⁷ KESERŰ, Bálint (ed.): J. Argenti iratai 1603–1623 Veress Endre gyűjtésében. Giovanni Argenti jelentései a magyar ügyekről, *Adattár XVI–XVIII. századi szellemi mozgalmaink történetéhez* 7, Szeged, 1983, VI.

⁸ LUKÁCS, Ladislaus, S.I. (ed.): *Monumenta Antiquae Hungariae II. (1580–1586)*, Romae, 1976, 409, 967, 970–971, 987, 1021–1022.; LUKÁCS, Ladislaus, S.I. (ed.): *Monumenta Antiquae Hungariae III. (1587–1592)*, Romae, 1981, 896.; LUKÁCS, Ladislaus, S.I. (. ed.): *Monumenta Antiquae Hungariae IV, Romae, 1987, 603.*; BIRÓ, Vencel – BOROS, Fortunát: *Erdélyi katolikus nagyk*, Kolozsvár, 1941, 28–30.

⁹ *Monumenta Antiquae Hungariae III*, 484.

¹⁰ VÁSÁRHELYI, Gergely: *Catechismus, az az Canisius Pétertől iratot keresztyeni tudomannac rövid summája...*, Claudiopoli, Anno Domini 1599. (RMK I. 312.); cf. HOLL, Béla: Vásárhelyi Gergely pályája, *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 87, 1983, 150–162.

¹¹ Keresztúry Kristóf végrendelete [Last Will and Testament of Kristóf Keresztúry]. Kolozsmonostor, May 16, 1599 (transcript: January 8, 1611). Romanian National Archives, Cluj County Directorate (ANR DJC), Fondul Familial Kornis 378, 345, No. 5.

missionary activity, converted from the Calvinist faith to Catholicism.¹² One of her brothers, Ferenc Kőrösy¹³ (1569–1603), likewise served as a member of the order: he became a teacher at the College of Gyulaféhérvár in 1598 and later held the office of vice-rector at the College of Kolozsvár from 1599 to 1603. Keresztúry's will also bears witness to strong religious commitment. He bequeathed his movable property to the Transylvanian fathers of the Society of Jesus. The possibility was also raised that his only daughter and heir, Kata, would continue her life as a nun, since she felt a vocation for a life dedicated to God.¹⁴ In that event, he would have allotted a substantial portion of his wealth to collateral relatives on both his own and his wife's side.¹⁵

The possibility of entering a convent thus stood before Kata as a real alternative; yet in the end, neither the widow nor her daughter chose this path. The surviving letters of Boldizsár Kornis and Ilona Kőrösy shed light on the background to this decision and the motivations behind the marriage. Michael the Wallachian voivode, having assumed the princely throne, began to harass "Kristóf deákné" on her estates, exploiting the vulnerable position of the widow left without protection. As a recent widow, Ilona needed support, and the Kornis family, well established in the voivode's court, were able to assume the role of patrons. From the time of his betrothal to Kata Keresztúry, Boldizsár Kornis protected his future bride's estates as his own against the property-hungry Orthodox monks (*kalugyers*).

Marriage at the side of a successful man promised happiness and security for the young woman. Nothing foreshadowed either the bloody political intrigue or the personal tragedy that would leave a deep mark on the family's history for generations. Kata Keresztúry, who as a young maiden gave her hand to an energetic and influential man rather than entering a convent, was forced to seek refuge behind cloister walls twenty years

¹² BALÁZS, Mihály – KRUPPA, Tamás – LÁZÁR, István Dávid – LUKÁCS, László (eds.): *Jesuita okmánytár 1/1–2*. Erdélyt és Magyarországot érintő iratok. 1601–1606. [Jesuit Document Collection 1/1–2. Documents Concerning Transylvania and Hungary, 1601–1606.] Introduction by Mihály Balázs. Szeged, 1995. Docs. 66 and 189/1.

¹³ VARGA, Júlia: *Katolikus közép- és felsőoktatás Erdélyben a 17. századtól a 19. század közepéig*, PhD diss., Budapest, 2007, 57, URL: <https://doktori.btk.elte.hu/hist/vargajulia/disszert.pdf>, Last Accessed: 21-11-2025.

¹⁴ Keresztúry Kata végrendelete [Last Will and Testament of Kata Keresztúry], Kolozsmonostor, July 8, 1624. ANR DJC, FF Kornis 378/234, No. 2.

¹⁵ According to contemporary rumor, Kata Keresztúry had a dowry worth more than one hundred thousand florins. Aloiso Radibrad to David Ungnad, Gyulaféhérvár, July 31, 1600, in SZÁDECZKY, Lajos (ed.): *Historiai forgácsok: Regesták Mihály vajda történetéhez*. IV., *Magyar Történelmi Tár*, 3. ser., 7. vol., Budapest, 1884, 456.

later—a broken widow with a tarnished reputation, and a posthumous daughter.

The Widow's Path to the Convent

From the ten-year marriage of Kata Keresztúry and Boldizsár Kornis, we have records of three children who survived to adulthood: Ferenc, István, and Borbála. Boldizsár did not live to see the birth of his daughter; he had been implicated in a conspiracy against Prince Gabriel Báthory and perished in the ensuing confrontation. During the nighttime raid at Szék on March 24, the prince's men killed Boldizsár's half-brother, György Kornis; Boldizsár himself was wounded and captured, while their youngest brother, Zsigmond, fled to Hungary. In early July 1610, after making a confession under torture, Boldizsár was beheaded in Kolozsvár.

The assassination attempt at Szék entered historical memory under the name “the conspiracy of the cuckolded husbands.” Decades later, it also became part of the shared family memory, in which it is recounted that Prince Gabriel Báthory had attempted to rape Boldizsár Kornis's wife at the castle of Radnót. Whether the act was actually consummated or merely attempted remains unknown; the remark attached to the story—‘a sorrowful memory mingled with shame’—points rather to a family trauma spanning generations.¹⁶ The prince's visit to Radnót took place in early March 1610, and the little girl was born nine months later, at the end of that year. Understandably, the mother emphasized the child's legitimacy in the surviving documents.¹⁷ Based on our present knowledge, however, the mystery cannot be resolved: we do not know who was in fact the father of the posthumous Borbála.

In the summer of 1610, Kata Keresztúry was left a widow with two young sons and pregnant with her third child. Her burdens were further compounded by the fact that husband's execution entailed the total confiscation of their wealth; she lost not only her husband's estates but also her own holdings, and was forced to flee Transylvania with her family.

Kata Keresztúry and her brother-in-law—Zsigmond Kornis, the only surviving brother—did not only seek and receive financial support from the Habsburg court but were also able to mobilize their network of relatives in western Hungary. This network later proved effective even after their return to Transylvania. One of its members was Ferenc Forgách, bishop of Nyitra (1596–1607) and later archbishop of Esztergom (1607–1615), who had known the Kornis family since his youth, having studied together with Boldizsár Kornis at the Jesuit gymnasium in Pułtusk.¹⁸ His younger brother, Zsigmond Forgách (II) (1565–1621), who served as judge royal

¹⁶ ANR DJC, FF Kornis 378/131. 14r.

¹⁷ ORGONA, Angelika: op. cit. 2020, 43.

¹⁸ ORGONA, Angelika: *Unikornisok Tündérországbán. A ruszkai Kornisok Erdélyben (1546 k.–1648)*, Budapest, 2014, 157–164.

(1606–1608, 1610–1618), master of the treasury (1608–1610), and captain general of Upper Hungary (1609–1618), also became related to the Kornis family through his second wife, Katalin Pállfy.¹⁹ Both Forgách brothers played an important mediating role for Zsigmond Kornis in his dealings with the Viennese court, as well as with the Hungarian clergy and the Vatican;²⁰ surviving sources also demonstrate that they provided particular support to Kata Keresztúry and her orphaned children. In December 1613, Zsigmond Forgách intervened on behalf of the widow in the matter of her former debts.²¹ The following year, he supported Kata Keresztúry's petition before the Szepes Chamber, in which she requested financial assistance for the elementary studies (*artes liberales*) of her school-aged sons; the chamber granted a monthly allowance of 80 florins.²² In 1616, Zsigmond Forgách invited Kata Keresztúry to the funeral of Cardinal Archbishop Ferenc Forgách, who had died unexpectedly.²³

In 1613, following the accession of Gabriel Bethlen to the throne, the family returned to Transylvania.²⁴ Zsigmond's aim was to obtain guardianship over the children, in hope of the associated financial advantages. After the Diet lifted the proscription imposed on the exiles,²⁵ the extended family—Zsigmond with his wife, his sister-in-law, and the three orphaned children—settled at Radnót, on the confiscated estate of Boldizsár Kornis. The castle and lordship of Radnót had originally been a patrimonial estate, which may have provided Zsigmond with a legal basis to reclaim the property for himself, taking advantage of his superior position over the

¹⁹ SZABÓ, András Péter: Egy felső-magyarországi katolikus főúr pengeélen. Forgách (III.) Zsigmond levelezése I. Rákóczi György erdélyi fejedelemmel (1644–1645), *Collectanea Sancti Martini, A Pannonhalmi Főapátság Gyűjteményeinek Értesítője*, 2, 2014, 291–342.; TUSOR, Péter: Forgách Zsigmond katolizálása (Egy római misszilis [irodalom]történeti forrásértéke), in IMRE, Mihály et al. (eds.): *Eruditio, virtus et constantia. Tanulmányok a 70 éves Bitskey István tiszteletére*, 2, Debrecen, 2011, 640–645.; HORN, Ildikó: Nemesi árvák, in PÉTER, Katalin (ed.): *Gyermek a kora újkori Magyarországon, Társadalom- és Művelődéstörténeti Tanulmányok*, 19., Budapest, 1996, 51–90, 87.

²⁰ Forgách Ferenc bíboros Kornis Zsigmondnak. Nagyszombat, 1612. szept. 8., Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MNL OL) P 437 2. b. no. 44.

²¹ Forgách Zsigmond Keresztúry Katának, Szeben, 1613. dec. 19. ANR DJC, FF Kornis 378/250. No. 28.

²² MNL OL E 249. Benigna Mandata, April 10, 1614. N. 18.

²³ Forgách Zsigmond Keresztúry Katának, Komját vára, 1615. október 28. ANR DJC, FF Kornis 378/250. No. 29 Himmelreich's invitation addressed to the Abbot of Pannonhalma was published in: SÖRÖS, Pongrác: Meghívó Forgách Ferencz temetésére, *Századok*, 39, 1905, 779–780.

²⁴ Kornis Zsigmond kérvénye, Gyulafehérvár, 1614. márc. 13., ANR DJC, FF Kornis 378/250. No. 3

²⁵ Medgyes, 1614. márc. 14., ANR DJC FF Kornis 378/680, No. 50–55.

widow and the orphans, while leaving only a smaller portion of the estate to his sister-in-law and the children.²⁶

While the widow struggled with her brother-in-law over the possession of Radnót, she also became involved in a confessional conflict with Prince Gabriel Bethlen. The dispute arose over the emoluments of the preacher in Radnót. The *quarta* and the *sabbatalis* had been instituted by Prince Gabriel Báthory for the support of the Reformed minister, but the Catholic patroness, upon returning to her former estate, refused to tolerate a Reformed clergyman in Radnót and therefore withheld these payments. This was possibly also influenced by her reduced financial circumstances, which required her to manage her resources far more cautiously than before, when she had possessed the entire estate. However, the matter eventually reached the Reformed princely court, and Keresztúry incurred the anger of Gabriel Bethlen.²⁷

The prince's anger foreshadowed more serious consequences. His wrath also signaled the unexpected turn of events that would ultimately decide the struggle between the widow and her brother-in-law over the possession of Radnót. In the autumn of 1616, as a result of a temporary loss of favor, Bethlen confiscated the estate from Zsigmond Kornis. He ordered the new owner, his loyal chancellor Simon Péchi, to pay 3,000 florins to Kata Keresztúry and her orphaned children in compensation for relinquishing the property. The widow was granted only a half-year reprieve, in view of the approaching winter.²⁸ In the spring of 1617, they were required to vacate the property, at which point Péchi was prepared to pay the stipulated sum.²⁹ Kata Keresztúry, however, renounced 500 florins on the condition that the chancellor secure from the prince a *nova donatio*, that is, a new grant by which she might recover her own inherited estates, including the *caput bonorum*, Szentbenedek.³⁰

²⁶ "...I set aside a portion of the Radnót estate for my sister-in-law, and assigned one part of it for the maintenance of the children." Zsigmond Kornis to Kristóf Borbély of Arnót. Radnót, May 25, 1614. ANR DJC FF Kornis 378/37, No. 4.

²⁷ Bethlen Gábor Keresztúry Katának. Segesvár, 1616. október 31. ANR DJC FF Kornis 378/37, No. 11.

²⁸ Bethlen Gábor Keresztúry Katának. Kolozsvár, 1616. december 2. ANR DJC FF Kornis 378/37, No. 14.; Péchi Simon Keresztúry Katának. Kolozsvár, 1616. december 2. ANR DJC FF Kornis 378/37, No. 16.; Bethlen Gábor Keresztúry Katának. Várad, 1616. december 28. ANR DJC FF Kornis 378/37. No. 18.; Péchi Simon Keresztúry Katának. Várad, 1616. december 28. ANR DJC FF Kornis 378/37. No. 20. Péchi Simon Keresztúry Katának. Gyulafehérvár, 1617. április 3.

²⁹ ANR DJC FF Kornis 378/37, No. 22.

³⁰ Bethlen Gábor nova donatioja Keresztúry Kata és az árvák: Ferenc, István és Borbála számára. Gyulafehérvár, 1617. május 20. ANR DJC, FF Kornis 378/629. No. 16; Kávásy Gergely elismervénye, Gyulafehérvár, 1617. május 26. ANR DJC, FF Kornis 378/629. No. 14.

By the spring of 1618, an agreement between the widow and her brother-in-law regarding the future of the orphans had begun to take shape.³¹ In her will, the widow stipulated that if her posthumous daughter Borbála, then about eight years old and already placed in a convent by her mother, were to take a perpetual vow of virginity at the age of fifteen, half of her inheritance was to be given in money to the convent, while the other half was to be divided equally among her agnatic brothers. The testament also raised the possibility that one of the sons might pursue an ecclesiastical career upon completing his studies. The widow had originally intended the elder brother, Ferenc, for the apostolic life (see below). At the time, the boys, aged nine and eleven, were studying at the Jesuit gymnasium in Nagyszombat³², while the eight-year-old Borbála had been placed in the convent of the Poor Clares in Pozsony. Their mother therefore appointed certain patrons as their guardians in western Hungary who had already supported her and her orphaned children in previous years and whose residences were closer to the towns of Lower Hungary where the children were living: Zsigmond Forgách, who that same year had been elevated to the office of palatine, István Pálffy, and Gáspár Horváth of Vegla.³³

In 1624, the fate of the orphans took another turn. The changes that occurred in the family that year reveal a clear causal connection. The decision—likely not sudden but formed gradually over the years—compelled both the widow and her brother-in-law to make concessions in order to restore the economic and social standing of the House of Kornis. This new family strategy unfolded in the following steps.

1. Kata Keresztúry did not remarry, and thus all her inherited and acquired estates passed to her children.
2. Her daughter Borbála took a perpetual vow of virginity at the age of fifteen, eliminating the need to provide her with a marriage portion and ensuring that her inheritance would not pass into another family.
3. Kata Keresztúry, revising her earlier testament, drew up a new will in which she appointed Zsigmond Kornis as *curator* and *defensor*, that is, guardian and protector of the estates. She then

³¹ Kornis Zsigmond és Kornis Boldizsárné egyezsége. Tasnád, 1618. márc. 1. ANR DJC, FF Kornis 378/646. No. 2.

³² A receipt from Kristóf Goda, the landlord, has survived in relation to this. Nagyszombat, 1618. júl. 26. ANR DJC, FF Kornis 378/63. No. 1 Unfortunately, neither of them appear in the Nagyszombat repository, because those particular years are missing. FAZEKAS, István – KÁDÁR, Zsófia – kökényesi, Zsolt – Ternovác, Bálint (eds): *A nagyszombati jezsuita gimnázium diáksága*. Anyakönyvi adattár (1616–1772), Budapest, 2019.

³³ Keresztúry Kata végrendelete. Esztergomi káptalan (Nagyszombat), 1618. január. 31. Fejedelmi megerősítése: Gyulafehérvár, 1618. április 24. MNL OL F1 Libri Regii 52–53.b.; ANR DJC FF Kornis 378/629. No. 18.

left Transylvania and herself entered the Poor Clare convent in Pozsony.

4. 4. Zsigmond Kornis—now serving as lord lieutenant of Bihar County and as one of Bethlen's generals—assumed guardianship of the boys, restoring the family's damaged prestige and strengthening its economic position.³⁴

The widow's entry into the convent was motivated not only by material considerations. The spiritual dimension must also be taken into account. From childhood, Kata Keresztúry had experienced and later deepened, within her husband's family, the faith, religiosity, and confessional commitment she had inherited from her parents—something she herself referred to in her orally declared last will before the convent of Kolozsmonostor: “from an early age, by the inclination of her nature, she had approved of the contemplative life devoted to divine meditation.” According to Catholic belief, relatives who embraced the ecclesiastical vocation became intercessors for their family before God³⁵, regularly praying for the forgiveness of the sins and the salvation of both living and deceased kin. Finally, within the walls of the distant convent, in the company of her daughter, she found spiritual peace and refuge from the rumors that questioned her honor and her daughter's legitimacy.

As a resident of the Pozsony convent, Kata Keresztúry's responsibilities extended beyond the service of God; she was also expected to maintain contact with the Catholic minority in Transylvania and to gather information. Although her letter to István Erdélyi has not survived, the recipient's reply reveals that the widow sought his support for her son Ferenc, who had by then reached adulthood and chosen a secular career, and that the Transylvanian Catholic nobleman complied with this request. Namely, it is likely that István Erdélyi mediated the marriage of Ferenc Kornis to his ward, Kata Wesselényi, who was the half-sister of Erdélyi's wife, Krisztina Mindszenti. After her husband's death, Krisztina Mindszenti married István Csáky and also played a role in the exchange of information and in the delivery of letters sent from Szentbenedek.³⁶

The correspondence maintained with the convent resident also addressed the condition of Catholicism in Transylvania. István Erdélyi, who had overseen the reconstruction of the Kolozsmonostor church, reported on the completion of the altar and on the successful missionary

³⁴ Keresztúry Kata végrendelete [Last Will and Testament of Kata Keresztúry], Kolozsmonostor, July 8, 1624. ANR DJC, FF Kornis 378/234, No. 2.

³⁵ The expression originates from Csáky Mária Franciska, a Poor Clare nun in Pozsony: “I remain your intercessor before God.” Csáky Anna Franciska Kornis Ferencnek. Pozsony, 1653. nov. 11. ANR DJC Mike Sándor Gyűjtemény, Col. Pers. Mike Sándor 248, (hereinafter: ANR DJC CMS) No 926.

³⁶ Csáky Anna Franciska Kornis Ferencnek, Pozsony, 1655 szept. 1. ANR DJC CMS 248/970.

work of the Jesuit fathers. He also informed Kata Keresztúry that István Móry³⁷, a Jesuit missionary priest in Karánsebes, had converted the sons of the late Farkas Kamuthi, Balázs and Miklós, who subsequently donated their spacious noble residence in Karánsebes, located in a central position, along with its appurtenances, to the Jesuit fathers György Bujtúl and István Móry, thereby contributing to the construction of a Catholic church.³⁸ The elderly and ailing Erdélyi also sent candle wax to the widow so that she might pray for him—not for the prolongation of his life, but for a “blessed death.”³⁹

Kata Keresztúry died in 1629 at the Pozsony convent.⁴⁰ Her life shows striking parallels with that of her friend Anna Wesselényi (1584–1649).⁴¹ Both were widowed—yet while Anna could live in freedom, Kata was compelled by circumstances on a path that, in her case, led to the convent. Their daughters, Borbála Konstancia Kornis and Anna Franciska Csáky, were fellow nuns among the Poor Clares in Pozsony.⁴² The close relationship between the two widows and the two nuns was further reinforced by the marriages between the Wesselényi and Kornis families and between the Csáky and Kornis families.

The Posthumous Daughter

Borbála Konstancia, the sister of Ferenc Kornis, entered the Poor Clare convent in Pozsony at the age of eight in 1618 and took her perpetual vow of virginity at the age of fifteen in 1624.⁴³ Our knowledge of her daily life

³⁷ István Móry (1576–1632), a Jesuit father, served as a pastor between 1623 and 1632, primarily based in Kolozsmonostor, and in 1632 became head of the mission. Cf. *Catalogi personarum et officiorum Provinciae Austriae S. II. 1601–1640*. Coll. et ed. Ladislaus Lukács. Romae, Institutum Historicum S. I., 1982.

³⁸ Molnár, Antal: *Jezsuita misszió Karánsebesen (1625–1642)*, *Történelmi Szemle* 41, 1999, 127–156, 140.

³⁹ Erdélyi István Keresztúry Katának, Gernyeszeg, 1628. július 4. ANR DJC CMS 248/423.

⁴⁰ The exact date of her death remains uncertain; in 1629, Abbess Katalin Kondé already referred to her as deceased. Kondé Katalin Kornis Ferencnek, Pozsony 1629. szept. 16. ANR DJC CMS 248/442.

⁴¹ Wesselényi Anna Dóczy Andrásnak, Szentbenedek, 1619. jan.20. MNL OL E 173 Dóczy, 1. cs. No. 260–261.

⁴² Wesselényi Anna's biography: DEÁK, Farkas: *Wesselényi Anna özv. Csáky Istvánné (1584-1649) életrajza és levelezése*, Budapest, 1875.; HORN, Ildikó: Csáky Anna Franciska és a pozsonyi klarisszák, *Aetas* 7, 1992, 28–43.; PAPP, Klára: Az erdélyi Csákyak, *Erdélyi tudományos füzetek*, 273., Kolozsvár, 2011.

⁴³ Keresztúry Kata végrendelete. Esztergomi káptalan (Nagyszombat), 1618. január. 31. Fejedelmi megerősítése: Gyulafehérvár, 1618. április 24. MNL OL F1 Libri Regii 52–53.b.; ANR DJC FF Kornis 378/629. No. 18.; Keresztúry Kata végrendelete. Kolozsmonostor, 1624. július 8. ANR DJC, FF Kornis 378/234. No. 2.

in the convent derives primarily from the eighteenth-century history of the order by Jenő Kósa,⁴⁴ as well as from her own surviving letters, which allow us to reconstruct at least an outline of her convent life.

The Poor Clare community in Pozsony underwent significant changes during the first half of the seventeenth century. Following the Bocskai uprising, German-speaking nuns from Austria arrived at the convent and introduced stricter regulations in the spirit of the order's reform.⁴⁵ In 1618, Dominican nuns who had fled from Nyúl Island—first to Várad and then to Nagyszombat—also relocated to Pozsony, bringing with them the relics of Margaret of Hungary.

The Poor Clares were forced to abandon their convent from time to time. During Gábor Bethlen's attack in 1619, they fled to Vienna, where, according to the history of the order, they were lodged in a secular residence, "at the house of the royal stables." They returned only in 1623, and by that time it was exclusively the Hungarian nuns who came back.⁴⁶ Under the direction of the Marian provincial, Father Ferenc Vég, the convent was thus reshaped into an institution that was Hungarian both in language and spirit. With the support of Péter Pázmány and his successor, Imre Lósy, archbishop of Esztergom, a new convent was constructed between 1633 and 1640 at a cost of 60,000 florins.⁴⁷ During the construction, the nuns resided in the neighboring parish house. On January 16, 1638, Ferdinand III, Holy Roman Emperor dined with the Poor Clares in the company of the empress and his younger brother, the future Leopold I.

In the spring of 1645, the community faced danger once again. George I Rákóczi, in alliance with the Swedes, laid siege to the coronation city. It was at this time that Borbála Konstancia Kornis wrote her letter to Ádám Batthyány, signing it in her capacity as abbess of the convent. In this

⁴⁴ Szent Ferencz Atyánk Rendén lévő Boldog Asszony Provinciájának Megyéjében Szűz Szent Klára Szerzetében élő Szűzek Klastromának kezdete, Néhai és Mostani Állapottja. Amint az említett Provincianak Archivumából a Szűzek Conventeinek Protocollumbul és egyéb Irásokbul és Könyvekbül Deák nyelven egybe szedte, és az után említett Szűzek kedvéért Magyar Nyelvre fordította P. Eug. Kósa (Kósa Jenő OFM Prov. Mar.). 1768. Eszt. Magyar Ferences Könyvtár, Kézirattár, 017217. MaNDA Hungarian National Digital Archive: https://en.mandadb.hu/tetel/414919/Szent_Ferencz_atyank_renden_levo_Boldog_Asszony_provincia-janak_megyejeben_Szuz_Szent_Klara_Szerzeteben_elo_szuzek_klastrominak_kezdetenehai_es_mostani_allapottja Last accessed: 04-12-2025. (Hereinafter: KÓSA, Jenő: *Rendtörténet*)

⁴⁵ KARÁCSONYI, János: *Szent Ferencz rendjének története Magyarországon 1711-ig*, II., Budapest, 1924, 524–525.

⁴⁶ KÓSA, Jenő: *Rendtörténet*, 14r–15v; HORN, Ildikó: op. cit. *Csáky Anna Franciska*

⁴⁷ KÓSA, Jenő: *Rendtörténet*, 16 r–v; FAZEKAS, István: A katolikus egyház helyzete és intézményrendszere a kora újkori Pozsonyban, *Történelmi Szemle* 60, 2018, 201–213.

role, she appealed to the captain general of Transdanubia for assistance, as the safety of the convent's residents was under threat. If necessary, the nuns intended to seek refuge on the Batthyány estate at Némétújvár, from which they might, should circumstances require, flee onward to Croatia or return to Pozsony once the situation had stabilized.⁴⁸ According to the history of the order, part of the community ultimately found refuge in the convent adjoining the newly established Church of the Holy Trinity in Zagreb, while others fled to Győr, from where they were able to return home after a few days. By 1650, Borbála was already singing in the convent choir together with eighteen of her fellow nuns.⁴⁹

The route of flight taken by the Poor Clares of Nagyszombat followed a similar pattern. During the attack of Gabriel Bethlen on September 7, 1619, they first withdrew to the Batthyány family estate at Némétújhely, then to Zagreb, and finally to Vienna, from which they were able to return to Nagyszombat only in 1622. During Rákóczi's campaigns, in 1644 they fled to Kismarton, and in 1645 once again to Ádám Batthyány's Transdanubian estate, the castle of Rohonc.

The nun living in the convent maintained contact with her Transylvanian family through correspondence. She wrote regularly to her brother Ferenc and to her uncle Zsigmond. After the death of her mother, Kata Keresztúry, in 1629, letters and gifts remained the primary link between her and her family.⁵⁰ These missives were intended to substitute for the experience of personal visits: "My gracious patron and dear father, I would not wish to miss this good opportunity to visit Your Lordship through this humble letter."⁵¹

A recurring element in Sister Konstancia's letters was her concern for her own well-being and for the health of the recipient. In keeping with ecclesiastical convention, she began her letters with an invocation—"Jesus, Mary, Saint Clare"—and regularly included intercessory prayers for her family members. Shortly before the death of Zsigmond Kornis, she addressed a deeply emotional letter to her uncle, expressing her concern

⁴⁸ Kornis Borbála soror abbatissa, és az egész convent Batthyány Ádám dunántúli főkapitánynak, Pozsony, 1645. márc. 15. MNL OL P 1314 Batthyány, X 7435, mf. 4852. nr. 27236.

⁴⁹ KARÁCSONYI, János: op. cit. *Szent Ferencz rendjének története* II., 526.

⁵⁰ Kondé Katalin Kornis Ferencnek. Pozsony, 1629. szept. 15. Pozsony 1629. szept. 16. ANR DJC CMS 248/442.

⁵¹ Kornis Borbála Konstancia Kornis Ferencnek. Pozsony, 1648. szept. 17. ANR DJC CMS 248/860.; Cf. ERDÉLYI, Gabriella: Stepfamily relationships in autobiographical writings from seventeenth-century Hungary, in Warner, Lyndan (ed.): *Stepfamilies in Europe, 1400-1800*, London – New York, 2018, 146–167.; For a comprehensive overview, see: DEL LUNGO CAMICIOTTI, Gabriella: Letters and letter writing. *Early modern culture: An introduction, Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 2014, Volume, 17–35.

over his illness: “I have heard in these days of Your Lordship’s illness, which has caused me no small sorrow, and for which I have prayed to my God, that He might comfort Your Lordship.” In contrast, when writing of her own health, illness, or her sense of approaching death, she spoke with striking composure: “I do not trust in a long life.” She addressed her uncle as “my dear father” and “my patron,” openly expressing her affection and attachment: “There is no greater joy in the world for me than to hear that Your Lordship is in good health and to receive your gracious letter.” Although Zsigmond’s letters to Borbála have not survived, in his will he referred to her as “my poor nun sister, Lady Borbála Kornis.” He bequeathed to her one hundred gold pieces and three hundred florins and instructed that prayers be said for him in the convent.⁵²

Family ties were reinforced not only through letters but also through the exchange of gifts. Borbála Konstancia requested from her brother Ferenc and from her *ángy*—that is, her sister-in-law, Kata Wesselényi—materials for convent handiwork and for a domestic altar, including gold or silver thread, as well as fur skins and glove linings.

The Poor Clare convent in Pozsony consciously sought to ensure that the presence of particular noble families would continue from generation to generation. In the Kornis family of Ruszka, the circle of prospective nuns was effectively limited to the daughters of Ferenc, since the third sibling, István, had become a Jesuit. It is certain that the family intended the eldest daughter, named Borbála after her aunt, for the vocation of the nuns; the choice of name itself suggests that the decision had been made even before her birth. The most ardent supporter of this plan was Borbála Konstancia herself, who repeatedly urged both her uncle Zsigmond and her brother Ferenc to place the child in the convent even in the event of her own early death.⁵³

She evidently sensed that her time in this world was limited. The family, however, did not anticipate that the firstborn daughter, destined for the convent, would depart this life sooner than expected: Borbála fell victim to an epidemic in 1651, together with her younger brother Ferenc. Borbála Konstancia herself returned to her Creator two years later, in 1653.⁵⁴

⁵² Kornis Zsigmond végrendelete, Papmező, 1641. febr. 2. ANR DJC, FF Kornis 378/652. No. 11–21.

⁵³ Kornis Borbála Konstancia Kornis Ferencnek. Pozsony, 1648. szept. 17. ANR DJC CMS 248/860.

⁵⁴ Csáky Anna Franciska Kornis ferencnek. Pozsony, 1653. nov. 11. ANR DJC CMS 248/926.

“In every state there is a cross to bear..”⁵⁵

With the deaths of the two Borbálas, a new chapter began in the history of the relationship between the convent in Pozsony and the Transylvanian Kornis family. The role of intercessor was assumed by Anna Franciska Csáky, who was related to the family and maintained regular contact with her sister-in-law Krisztina Mindszenti, the wife of István Csáky, master of the treasury, and the stepsister of Kata Wesselényi. Her first surviving letter addressed to Ferenc Kornis dates from late fall 1653. At that time, the next daughter in line, Kata, had been betrothed to János Haller of Hallerkő. Their marriage took place on April 22, 1654, and thus the next girl designated for a religious vocation became Anna, then about ten years old. Appealing to the attraction of companionship among children, Anna Franciska Csáky informed the family that a daughter of similar age belonging to László Révay would soon arrive at the convent. The emphasis of her letter, however, rested on respecting the “last wish,” for the deceased Borbála Konstancia had carried this wish with her “before God.”⁵⁶

The following year, the abbess of the convent, Erzsébet Zsuzsanna Bercsényi, presented the family with special devotional gifts intended for private piety. She sent an *Agnus Dei* both to Ferenc Kornis and his wife, and gave the now-married Kata “a small picture,” that is, a devotional image. A more substantial gift in the form of a book was presented to the school-aged boy Gáspár. Among the most valuable gifts was likely the ornament intended for the young girl Anna, who had been invited to enter the convent. The *Agnus Dei* medallions—cast from wax of the Easter candle and often set in precious metal frames, depicting the Lamb of God and originating from papal blessing—held not only religious but also material value.⁵⁷

The convent’s residents frequently sent handcrafted devotional objects to their relatives and benefactors. Baroque devotional images were held in great reverence both in churches and in private homes. The frames were embroidered by the nuns with precious metal or silk thread, sometimes adorned with gemstones or pearls, and occasionally they even contained hidden relics.⁵⁸ The *Agnus Dei* medallions and devotional images were used not only for private devotion but also for protective purposes, placed near beds or cradles, or affixed above the headboard.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Csáky Anna Franciska Kornis Ferencnek, Pozsony, 1655. szept. 1. ANR DJC CMS 248/970.

⁵⁶ Csáky Anna Franciska Kornis Ferencnek. Pozsony, 1653. nov. 11. ANR DJC CMS 248/926.

⁵⁷ Bercsényi Erzsébet Zsuzsanna, Pozsony, 1654. szept. 16. ANR DJC CMS 248/946.

⁵⁸ Cf. Soós, Sándor: *Apácamunkák. 17–20. század*, Esztergom, 2006.

⁵⁹ VISKOLCZ, Noémi – ZVARA, Edina – KISS, Erika – KIRÁLY, Péter (eds.): *Esterházy Pál és Thököly Éva iratai*, Budapest, 2024, Nr. 85, 191.

In 1655, Anna reached the age of twelve and thus became legally eligible for a definitive decision regarding her future.⁶⁰ The convent's residents perceived from both the family's silence and reports conveyed through their relative Krisztina Mindszenti that Anna, as well as her younger sister Krisztina, were intended for marriage.⁶¹ At this point, Anna Franciska Csáky, a relative of the Kornis family endowed with exceptional verbal ability and emotional intelligence, sent a lengthy letter to Ferenc. It was carried from the Franciscan convent in Csík to Nagyszombat by friars traveling for ordination, in response to a message that Ferenc had conveyed through Krisztina Mindszenti.⁶² In her letter, the nun listed the names and offices of the convent's members and even provided brief and perceptive characterizations. The list had been prepared at Ferenc Kornis's request, so that he could gain an accurate picture of the convent's personnel. Anna Franciska Csáky undertook this detailed work in order to support her principal argument: the case for placing the young Kornis girl in the convent. However, by this time she was already aware—through mediation by Mrs. Csáky herself—that Ferenc had “given” the girl to a certain “young lord Prini [Perényi],” that is, had promised her in marriage. Thus the “information center” of the Poor Clares in Pozsony had learned of the planned Kornis marriage already two years before the wedding; Anna was eventually married in 1657 to Baron Gábor Perényi, lord lieutenant of Abaúj and Ugocsa Counties. Consequently, Anna Franciska Csáky could only refer to the possibility—now deferred to a distant future—that one of the daughters born from this Perényi marriage might someday be offered by the family to the service of God.

Anna Franciska Csáky then addressed Ferenc in his capacity as patron of the convent. She counted on assistance in the form of red and blue silk remnants from garments being prepared for the wedding, which could be used to frame devotional objects and *Agnus Dei* medallions. She also requested gold- or silver-threaded silk with a droplet pattern (“*rác tafota*”) for decorating her domestic altar. The letter further reveals that Ferenc Kornis was indebted to the convent: he was expected to settle the cost of Borbála Kornis's “silver cup,” likely a liturgical vessel used for communion. The reciprocal nature of the relationship is clearly reflected in a remark linking the anticipated payment of the debt with the prayers of the nuns: “perhaps the father will come here, if the plague subsides; we shall not fail to offer our prayers for my poor lady.”

⁶⁰ WERBŐCZI, István: *Tripartitum*, 111th title. https://www.staff.u-szeged.hu/~capitul/analecta/trip_hung.htm Last Accessed: 30-11-2025.

⁶¹ Bercsényi Erzsébet Zsuzsanna Kornis Ferencnek. Pozsony, 1655. aug 28. ANR DJC CMS 248/969.

⁶² Csáky Anna Franciska Kornis Ferencnek, Pozsony, 1655. szept. 1. ANR DJC CMS 248/970.

In addition to prayers, the nuns also offered small gifts to their secular associates. On a previous occasion, Anna Franciska Csáky had sent Ferenc a special rosary, which he reported in his reply to have received with great joy. Only now did she reveal its origin: it had been the final gift of her younger brother, László Csáky.⁶³ Her brother, elected judge royal in 1649, died suddenly in 1654; in 1655 an investigation was launched under suspicion of poisoning, though without result.⁶⁴ László Csáky was buried near his sister in the Franciscan church in Pozsony.⁶⁵ The family itself believed in the poisoning theory, as reflected in Anna Franciska's words that her brother had been "cruelly killed by poison administered by envious men." She recalled the events with emotion, trusting in divine justice: "Had it not been permitted by God, they would have had no power over him, and the great God reserves their punishment for Himself. Amen."⁶⁶

Historians continue to seek an answer as to who may have been responsible for the poisoning. It is certain that László Csáky and his brother were politically opposed to the Rákóczi family and were also in conflict with Miklós Zrínyi, who sympathized with George II Rákóczi, in part due to rivalries over property.⁶⁷ Whether it was intentional that the rosary was given specifically to Ferenc Kornis remains uncertain. Did the gift carry a hidden message, or did it simply recall earlier familial, political, and personal ties between the noblemen? Only further research into the relationship between Ferenc Kornis and the Csáky brothers may answer this question.

The most important part of Anna Franciska Csáky's letter is the meditation in which she reflects on the differing burdens and sufferings of ecclesiastical and secular life in order to support her argument. She saw in the going blind of one of her fellow nuns and in her own deafness sufferings ordained by divine will: "whatever is given to us, we must drink it; in every state there is a cross to bear, bitterness, and suffering, and the arrows of this world penetrate everywhere." This passage responds to an earlier, now-lost letter from Ferenc Kornis, in which he had lamented that he was "burdened by the heavy crosses of this world... had he known this so well, perhaps he would have withdrawn earlier and taken up the cowl." Anna

⁶³ A brief summary of his career: BARTA, M. János: "...valamely Istenét, vallását, Királyságát és hazáját igazán szerető nemes ember..." *Egy 17. századi főnemes, gróf Csáky István országbíró pályaképe.*, Budapest, 2021, 31–35.

⁶⁴ A brief summary of his career: BARTA, M. János: "...valamely Istenét, vallását, Királyságát és hazáját igazán szerető nemes ember..." *Egy 17. századi főnemes, gróf Csáky István országbíró pályaképe.*, Budapest, 2021, 31–35.

⁶⁵ MIKÓ, Árpád – PÁLFFY, Géza: A pozsonyi ferences templom késő reneszánsz és korai barokk síremlékei, *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 54, 2005, 319–348., 335–336.

⁶⁶ Csáky Anna Franciska Kornis Ferencnek, Pozsony, 1655. szept. 1. ANR DJC CMS 248/970.

⁶⁷ PAPP, Klára: op. cit. *Az erdélyi Csákyak*, 52–53.

Franciska Csáky turned these very words back upon him, arguing that if he so keenly felt “the cross of the world,” then he should be more willing to offer his daughter to religious life rather than to worldly existence. Sensing that she had gone too far, she softened her words with an apology, appealing to family ties, longstanding acquaintance, and her own goodwill.

“Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her”—thus Anna Franciska Csáky quoted the words of Jesus Christ.⁶⁸ The story of Mary and Martha is, in essence, a parable of choice: it contrasts two fundamental forms of divine service—the active life, engaged in the affairs of the world, and the contemplative life. The parable presents inward reflection and attentiveness to God as superior to worldly service.

The women discussed in this study, although they possessed their own aspirations and visions of the future, did not yet enjoy genuine freedom of choice within the framework of traditional society; the course of their lives was determined not by their own decisions but by the actual circumstances of their family. As Catholic women, they embodied two traditional models: at times following Mary, at times Martha, yet always striving to bear the “crosses” laid upon them with faith, fidelity, and humility, and thus to fulfill the will of God.

⁶⁸ Luke 10:41–42 (NRSVue)