

# The Hungry Traveller. 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Transylvanian Travellers and the Western Culinary Experience

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*Article history: Received 15.12.2020; Revised 20.03.2021;*

*Accepted 15.05.2021; Available online 03.02.2022.*

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**Abstract:** The present article discusses food narratives from travelogues written by the Calvinist elite of Transylvania. The paper firstly presents attitudes toward travel and travel writing in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Transylvania and then offers examples about stories associated with food and foodways. In the first instance, we discussed the attachment of Transylvanians to familiar tastes, then we offered examples of food rejection, either culturally or confessionally motivated. The asymmetrically opposed constructions of these food narratives, the constant distinctions made by the authors between “our” food and “theirs”, suggest the importance of food in identity building. In the last part of our paper, we approached the social dimension of food, arguing that we are witnessing a cultural shift and the changing of the existing food regime, processes undergoing due to the increased number of travels, especially to Vienna.

**Keywords:** 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Transylvania, travelogues, culinary history, food narratives.

**Rezumat: Călătorul flămând. Călători transilvăneni din secolul al XVIII-lea și experiența culinară Occidentală.** Prezentul articol abordează istoria culinară din perspectiva literaturii de călătorie scrise de elita calvinistă a Transilvaniei. Lucrarea prezintă mai întâi atitudinile față de călătorii și literatura de călătorie în Transilvania secolului al XVIII-lea, apoi oferă exemple despre povești asociate cu mâncăruri și experiențe culinare. În primă instanță am discutat despre atașamentul ardelenilor față de gusturile familiare, apoi am oferit exemple despre respingerea alimentelor sau dietelor pe baza unor prejudecăți, fie motivate cultural, fie confesional. Construcțiile asimetric opuse ale acestor narațiuni, distincțiile constante făcute de acești autori care diferențiază mâncarea „noastră” de „a lor”, sugerează importanța alimentelor în construirea identităților locale.

*SUBB – Historia, Volume 66, 1, June 2021*

*doi:10.24193/subbhist.2021.1.03*

În ultima parte a lucrării noastre, am abordat dimensiunea socială a alimentației, susținând că, datorită numărului crescut de călătorii, în special spre Viena, asistăm la apariția consumului de prestigiu și la înlocuirea vechiului regim alimentar.

**Cuvinte cheie:** secolul al XVIII-lea, Transilvania, literatură de călătorie, istorie culinară.

We live in an age of food culture; food network channels, culinary competitions, amateur videos promote a great variety of dishes, and through foreign cuisines, they promote cultural diversity as well as contribute to the development of a national or regional sense of identity and pride. This is also reflected on a global level by the UNESCO politics, since the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage contains a great number of food-related entries, not just dishes, but rituals associated with food. Thus, foodways are recognized as being “central to our sense of identity”<sup>1</sup> and part of our heritage, since they play an important cultural, social, and ritual role in every society. Today, everyone seems to embrace – and is willing to try – new tastes, local dishes.

It is therefore hard to imagine that a few centuries ago people did not seem to enjoy foreign cuisine. Even more so, they rejected or feared unknown cooking and eating habits precisely for the above-mentioned reasons. Food was strongly related to identity, and those who were willing to try new and different dishes were in danger of losing their own identity, since “we are what we eat”; or, as Rousseau concluded: “In general, I think one could often find some index of people’s character in the choice of foods they prefer”<sup>2</sup>. The way one chose how and what to eat and drink was part of one’s identity, since popular wisdom states that consuming a particular food could transfer characteristics of that food to the eater<sup>3</sup>. This could explain why the great philosopher described nations through their eating habits, affirming that the Italians who mostly consumed greenery were effeminate; the English, due to their meat consumption, had something harsh about their demeanour and were inflexible; the Swiss were cold and simple, but violent; and from all these European nations, the French, who consumed all sorts of food, were the most flexible and changeable<sup>4</sup>. English travellers would strongly disagree with Rousseau, as suggested by the large number of reflections written by

<sup>1</sup> Claude Fischler, “Food, self and identity” in *Social Science Information*, vol. 27 (1988): 275.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Jaques Rousseau, *Julie or the New Heloise. Letters of two lovers who live in a small town at the foot of the alps*, (Hanover and London, 1997), 372.

<sup>3</sup> Fischler, “Food, self and identity”, 279.

<sup>4</sup> Rousseau, *Julie or the New Heloise*, 372–373.

British travellers during their stay in France, who constantly found something to criticize about French foodways<sup>5</sup>. These characterizations reveal much more about the perception of the other nation than about the actual food consumption; the criticism was made more on a cultural rather than a nutritional level, because the way someone accepted or rejected unfamiliar tastes was strongly related to the origin of the food.

The present article focuses on 18<sup>th</sup>-century Transylvanian nobles who, during their travels in Western Europe, were challenged by foreign customs and tastes as well. Our presentation will rely on personal narrative sources, travel impressions integrated into autobiographies, memoirs, but also diaries and letters written by Transylvanian nobles and intellectuals between 1736 and 1787. Some of the authors visited the imperial capital (László Székely; Ferenc, László and Gergely Bethlen, László Nalácz, Ferenc Gyulay), and some were on an academic pilgrimage to Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and France (Sámuel Fogarasi, István Halmágyi, Sámuel and József Teleki). We want to draw the attention towards the fact that the majority of the travelogues we have from this century belong to the Calvinist male elite of Transylvania; therefore, we will analyse the topic from the standing point of a Protestant literate minority.

### *Travel and narrative*

Travelogues, just like ego-documents in general, were not among the most popular historical sources, since many believed that their subjectivity made them improper for historical research<sup>6</sup>. The situation had changed by the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when, due to the influences of ethnography and later anthropology, historians started to read these narratives with a different approach, admitting their importance in the study of mentalities and collective imagination<sup>7</sup>.

To avoid some of the risks in interpreting these sources, we must pay attention to several aspects, such as the boundaries of the genre itself, the issue of remembrance in the case of the revised travelogues, and the danger of misunderstanding the local cultural system and social behaviour. We have to be sensitive to the “variety of gazes” in these sources and learn how to identify the authors’ strategies, because a

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<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Black, *The British and The Grand Tour*, (London, 1985), 47–50.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Harbsmeier, “Reisebeschreibungen als mentalitätsgeschichtliche Quellen. Überlegungen zu einer historisch-antropologischen Untersuchung frühneuzeitlicher deutscher Reisebeschreibungen”, in Antoni Mączak, Hans Jürgen Teuteberg (eds.), *Reiseberichte als Quellen europäischer Kulturgeschichte. Aufgaben und Möglichkeiten der historischen Reiseforschung* (Wolfenbüttel, 1982), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Burke, “The Cultural History of the Travelogue”, in *Przegląd Historyczny*, vol. CI (2010): 4.

travelogue reveals much more about its writer than the countries or places they visited<sup>8</sup>.

Besides these personal, subjective reflections, we must pay special attention to the mimetic function of writing. The few books on *ars apodemica* do tell how and what to record, and we believe the members of the Transylvanian elite were familiar with these instructions, thus these books had already shaped how the authors perceived things<sup>9</sup>. Some travellers had previously read other travel narratives kept in their family archive and travelogues drafted on academic pilgrimages. In the account book of József Teleki from 1760, we found an interesting entry saying “I have paid for Keisler’s Reisebeschreibung 4 forints”. Count Teleki was in Basel by that time, which means he was on the road when he decided to buy himself a travelogue<sup>10</sup>.

We must pay attention to the question of genre as well. There is a difference between spontaneous perceptions (transmitted by letters and diaries) and ulterior reflections, included in autobiographies and memoirs, where travel is only one stage in the life story of the writer and not necessarily the most important one. Such is the case of László Székely, who included the events of his travel to Vienna (1743–44) into his autobiography: “Dear Reader, in this work I have not written down everything as I should have, because by that time, everything I have seen and heard and thought every day, I wrote down in two volumes, and here, in the story of my life I can include only some of it”<sup>11</sup>. The quotation suggests that the author made significant changes in order to integrate this travel into his life story. Such is the case of József Teleki, whose travelogue and account book from his journey are highly detailed; however, he mentioned several times that “I wrote more about this in my other diary”<sup>12</sup>.

The way things are recorded and the thoroughness of the descriptions varies from case to case. On their first journey, young nobles record almost every impression they have because they were required to, as the letter from 1736 written by Ferenc Bethlen to his widowed mother reveals: “It was your wish dear mother, to send me on my journey in the name of God, offering me advice and expenses. It is, therefore, my duty as

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<sup>8</sup> Burke, “The Cultural History of the Travelogue”, 8–9, 11; Harbsmeier, “Reisebeschreibungen als mentalitätsgeschichtliche Quellen”, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Travel writing and ethnography”, in Idem, *Travellers and Cosmographers: Studies in the History of Early Modern Travel and Ethnology* (London, 2002), 141–142.

<sup>10</sup> József Teleki, *Egy erdélyi gróf a felvilágosult Európában (Teleki József utazásai 1759–1761)* (ed. by Gábor Tolnay), (Budapest, 1987), 285.

<sup>11</sup> *Gróf Székely László Önéletírása* (ed. by Andrea Fehér), (Budapest–Kolozsvár, 2019), 129.

<sup>12</sup> Teleki, *Egy erdélyi gróf a felvilágosult Európában*, 59.

a son to report to you from my travel”<sup>13</sup>. Justifying the money spent was of utmost importance, and not only for the Bethlen brothers. József Teleki included an appendix to his travelogue entitled *Flawless Table of expenses during my travels to Germany (1759, 2<sup>nd</sup> of July – 1761, 3<sup>rd</sup> of April)*<sup>14</sup>, where he mentions all of his expenses (*with no mistakes*, as he said), from the smallest to the costliest ones. His account book is thus of great significance for our topic because the count recorded every penny spent on food<sup>15</sup>, not just his general impressions on the local cuisine or dining invitations.

### *The cautious Transylvanian traveller*

The 18<sup>th</sup> century is indeed, as Péter Apor, one of the most known Transylvanian memoir-writers, characterized it, a time of changes, metamorphoses<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, these changes also occurred in the way travellers perceived Western culture.

Some argue that the history of travel writing can also be defined as a history of curiosity<sup>17</sup>. This statement is not entirely applicable to Transylvanian travellers, since they did not travel abroad. They went to Vienna often, which explains the large number of diaries and letters. However, only students ventured beyond the borders of Austria, not out of a particular passion, but out of necessity<sup>18</sup>. Protestant students were compelled to continue their studies in Calvinist countries, nearby universities being all Catholic<sup>19</sup>. Despite the many works that militated for the importance of travel, Transylvanians preferred to stay at home. And not necessarily out of convenience, but also out of a certain reluctance towards Western modernism. Our ancestors were especially concerned about the unfortunate consequences that Western Europe might have on the character of the individual. As mentioned, most of our

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<sup>13</sup> Ferenc Bethlen to his mother, Mária Folti. Debrecen, July 30, 1736. Romanian National Archives Cluj County Branch, Cluj-Napoca (Arhivele Naționale ale României, Serviciul Județean Cluj, hereafter cited as: Nat. Arch. Cluj), Bethlen Family Archive (fond. fam. Bethlen), The Correspondence of Mária Folti (Corespondența Máriei Folti, soția lui László Bethlen, hereafter cited as CMF). Fond nr. 328/39, 248.

<sup>14</sup> Teleki, *Egy erdélyi grófa felvilágosult Európában*, 268–310.

<sup>15</sup> He mentions buying almond milk, coffee (and milk for it), tea, wine and beer, fruits such as cherries or grapes, and cakes.

<sup>16</sup> Péter Apor, *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae* (transl. By Bernard Adams), (London–New York, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Rubiés, “Travel writing and ethnography”, 5.

<sup>18</sup> For earlier centuries, see the travel impressions of Transylvanian students. Pál Binder, *Utazások a régi Európában. Peregrinációs levelek, útleírások és útinaplók (15850–1709)*, (Bukarest, 1976).

<sup>19</sup> During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, cca. 16–17 students/year were studying at Western Universities. Only those who were studying to become Priests were allowed to go abroad, and those who could afford to study. László Szógi, Miklós Szabó, *Erdélyi peregrinusok – Erdélyi diákok európai egyetemeken 1701–1849*, (Marosvásárhely, 1998), 9.

sources on this subject are written in Calvinist, Protestant circles, where the fear of being converted to Catholicism was extremely strong. As evidenced by this fragment from the letter written by Ferenc Bethlen from Vienna: “I believe in my God, and You shall not doubt and feel sorrow, because I will not do anything that evil. And I have told those who tried to persuade me that if I do not have the chance to have what I came for, then I will wait because I do not want my fortune at any cost”<sup>20</sup>. Parents were concerned about the influences of the Court elite, since in Vienna young nobles were easily persuaded to convert.

The danger of being converted or corrupted was a constant preoccupation for the Transylvanian conservative elite, and trips abroad, but especially to Catholic countries, were considered to be extremely dangerous, or, in the words of Sámuel Teleki: “I could write a lot about Paris if it were not needless. I could briefly write that man can learn lots of good and bad things there, conversate with scholars and fools and learn more often from bad examples than good ones”<sup>21</sup>. This is the reason why young boys were generally not allowed to travel alone. Letters kept in the Bethlen family archives show that at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, boys were first sent to Vienna by the age of 26; in the second half of the century, they were on the road by 18 or 19, which shows a serious change in the perception of travel, also noted by László Székely: “Because what once seemed to be so far that many refused to go, even if summoned, today, for the young boys, is just as near as Turda”<sup>22</sup>. These young nobles were not concerned by loss of identity anymore; they simply enjoyed the high life of the imperial city. And despite the anxiety of their parents, they wanted to travel, such as it is written in the diary of Ferenc Gyulai: “my mother did not want me to become a soldier. It is true that she loved me much and promised me many things if I will not go; more so, she promised to send me to Vienna from time to time”<sup>23</sup>.

However excited young nobles were, preparing a journey was not an easy task. The travellers had to first procure a travel-pass – in earlier centuries, these were provided by the Prince, later by the Gubernium<sup>24</sup>. The passport usually came with a tutor or servant, because young nobles were not supposed to travel alone. After that, the authors made

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<sup>20</sup> Bethlen Ferenc to his mother, Mária Folti. Vienna, September 19, 1736. Nat. Arch. Cluj, CMF, Fond nr. 328/39, 264–265.

<sup>21</sup> *Teleki Sámuel peregrinációs naplója* (ed. by Anikó Nagy Déé), (Kolozsvár, 2020), 103.

<sup>22</sup> The author lived in Cluj-Napoca, which is about 30 km away from Turda, therefore the quote suggests that distances were not perceived as before. *Gróf Székely László Önéletírása*, 75.

<sup>23</sup> Gyulai Ferenc, “aki nem tudja, mi légyen a kimeríthetetlen és felérhetetlen költség, csak jöjjön Bécsbe ...”, in Margit Sárdi (ed.), *Bécsi utazások*, (Budapest, 2001), 253.

<sup>24</sup> Szögi, Szabó, *Erdélyi peregrinuszok*, 11.

considerable efforts to change their appearance, because travel involved the temporary renunciation of the conservative Protestant look. Travellers got rid of the Hungarian moustache, they ordered wigs or curled their hair, and they changed their wardrobe. This change of look was a traumatic but extremely necessary action, because dress and facial expressions were of utmost importance for a civilized person<sup>25</sup>. One of the most sympathetic quotes regarding this metamorphosis is recorded in the travelogue of Teleki Pál's companion, István Halmágyi: "I woke up early in the morning and got rid of my moustache, put on a wig and some German-fashioned clothes. I barely recognized myself. The lords also wondered upon my change and laughed at little Sigó, who otherwise was very fond of me. He recognized me as his friend from my voice but considered me a stranger by my look"<sup>26</sup>. The fact that children could not look beyond appearances asserts once more how important appearance was in defining one's identity, and this seems to be suggested by all the authors, every one of them mentioning the first time they dressed in German clothes<sup>27</sup>. Just as amusing is the story recorded by Sámuel Fogarasi. Their traveling group was followed by packs of children screaming and causing panic among the citizens of Leipzig because of the "hussar-look" of the Hungarian boys: "Gyarmathy started to rush, the count (Elek Bethlen) hid, and I trudged myself on the streets"<sup>28</sup>. According to Halmágyi, the reason for the antipathy and fear toward Hungarian dresses could be explained with the fact that parents scared their children with hussars, "just like Hungarians did with Turks"<sup>29</sup>. However, Hungarian clothing seemed odd in Hannover too, where king George did not want to accept the greetings of count Pál Teleki because he was dressed in the Hungarian style. It was therefore of utmost importance to wear proper clothes, which is why it is no wonder that Gergely and László Bethlen had remained in their room in Vienna for days, since they had no proper gentlemen cloaks: "until our clothing is made, we will not go anywhere, and then if we start to go out, we will

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<sup>25</sup> Norbert Elias, "The Development of the Concept of *Civilité*", in Idem, *On Civilization, Power, and Knowledge. Selected Writings*, (ed. by Stephen Mennel, Johan Goudsblom), (Chicago-London, 1998), 77.

<sup>26</sup> Halmágyi István *naplói. 1752-53*, (ed. by Lajos Szádeczky) (Budapest, 1906), 459.

<sup>27</sup> Teleki, *Egy erdélyi gróf a felvilágosult Európában*, p. 53.; Teleki Sámuel *peregrinációs naplója*, 37.

<sup>28</sup> Sámuel Fogarasi, *Marosvásárhely és Göttinga. Önéletírás (1770-1799)* (ed. by István Juhász), (Bukarest, 1974), 202.

<sup>29</sup> Halmágyi István *naplói*, 462. And the hussars are not the worst image associated to Hungarians. 18<sup>th</sup>-century foreign travelers "expected" to witness scenes of anthropophagy among the Hungarian people. Andrea Fehér, "Cannibalism in Early Modern Transylvania", in *Brukenthalia*, vol. 10 (2020): 837, 840.

have more to write to you”<sup>30</sup>. For nobles, changing countries could also mean changing wardrobes as well. Longer travel came with great expenses regarding clothes – for instance, in France, József Teleki changed his clothing according to French fashion, although not the latest one, since: “The new fabric costs 40–42 livres, but since mine was from last year’s fashion, I paid 24 livres. I think this tells enough about the French folly”. Pál Teleki, after his unpleasant experience with King George, also dressed up in English-fashioned costumes<sup>31</sup>.

*Taste of home. The quest for familiar tastes*

If the wardrobe must be adapted to local taste, the travellers seem to be more conservative regarding food. Sources suggest that the travellers were constantly searching for familiar tastes, which could explain their preoccupation with food. Most of the travelogues rarely reflect on travel conditions; they do so usually when the lives of their authors were in danger, or they suffered inconveniences. Accommodation is constantly but briefly mentioned in travelogues. What stand out, however, are reflections regarding food, mostly about its lack or expensiveness. Sámuel Teleki wrote from Utrecht that “life was high”, in Leyden “innkeepers were evil”, in The Hague “I had a fine table and room and did not pay a lot”, but in Versailles “I ate expensively but poorly”<sup>32</sup>. Halmágyi was also discontent with his innkeepers, mentioning that in Bamberg and in nearby places “inns are poor and innkeepers are inhuman”<sup>33</sup>. This mistrust regarding taverns and inns is present in every travel narrative. No wonder that Transylvanians, like most travellers of this century, travelled with serious food supplies, did not leave the table to chance, and very often ate home-cooked dishes from Transylvania, even when they were abroad. As long as their own resources were available, no money was spent on food. Cold supplies were always at hand; among them, the most appreciated were bacon and sausage. This could be explained, besides the attachment to familiar tastes, with the fact that without supplies, travellers in this century were vulnerable, and as István Halmágyi noted, “if we did not have food with us, we would starve”<sup>34</sup>. Therefore, travellers were carrying considerable amounts of food, even on a “short journey” – especially then.

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<sup>30</sup> Gergely Bethlen to his mother, Borbála Nalácz. Vienna, June 29, 1787. Nat. Arch. Cluj, Bethlen Family Archive (fond. fam. Bethlen), The Correspondence of Borbála Nalácz (Correspondența Borbalei Nalácz, soția contelui Gergely Bethlen II., hereafter cited as CNB). Fond nr. 328/67, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Teleki, *Egy erdélyi grófa felvilágosult Európában*, 189; *Halmágyi István naplói*, 525.

<sup>32</sup> Teleki Sámuel peregrinációs naplója, 43, 77, 79, 81–82, 84, 86, 99.

<sup>33</sup> *Halmágyi István naplói*, p. 477–478.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 460.



Letters written on the way to Vienna prove that most nobles travelled with their own cooks, and sometimes sent them back only after they reached their destination: "The cook was there with us all the way and prepared for us twice a day 4-5 hot dishes", wrote Ferenc Bethlen to his mother.<sup>35</sup> The Székely family, during their 6-month stay, relied on their "old woman" [servant], who occasionally prepared, at the request of the Viennese elite, "traditional Transylvanian" dishes, especially cabbage. Moreover, not only the method of preparation was Transylvanian; the cook had to use cabbage from Transylvania, László Székely having also taken along a barrel of sauerkraut and bacon to Vienna<sup>36</sup>. The attachment of our travellers to this particular dish is expressed in Fogarasi's narrative, too. The author and Elek Bethlen decided to make Transylvanian cabbage in Göttingen. They asked for the recipe, did everything according to the instructions, but were disappointed with the result. Both travelogues contain explanations for the failure: according to Székely, the Viennese did not prepare good *sauerkraut* because they did not chop the vegetable well, while the Germans did not achieve the proper taste because they did not have quality salt - at least that was Fogarasi's conclusion, after visiting a saltern in Halle<sup>37</sup>.

Bringing along bacon or cabbage for miles is somehow understandable, but it is hard to imagine how poultry meat was sent to Vienna. László Naláczí wrote to his sister in February 1764: "I have received the fowls ... I do not know if you paid for them. However, I did, 2 forints, and I would not mind if all of them were in good condition, but those which were at the bottom were not good... I mean they are good in here, but not for me, accustomed to fresh meat; I will not eat them, but the others will. I must tell that I would scold that bad man or crone because they did not take out the intestines and the maw, which caused the rotting"<sup>38</sup>. Under normal conditions, a journey to Vienna took about 2 or 3 weeks, which is a considerable amount of time to transport meat in "natural conditions" even during winter. What is surprising, however, is that Naláczí was convinced that no one would care about the bad-smelling meat, because his soldier colleagues could not recognize good quality food. The count's attachment to home-baked and cooked food is

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<sup>35</sup> Ferenc Bethlen to his mother, Mária Folti. Debrecen, July 30, 1736. Nat. Arc. Cluj, CFM, Fond nr. 328/ 39, 248; László Bethlen to his mother Borbála Naláczí. Vienna, August 25, 1787. Nat. Arch. Cluj, CNB, Fond nr. 328/ 67, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Gróf Székely László *Önéletírása*, 174.

<sup>37</sup> Fogarasi, *Marosvásárhely és Göttinga*, 192.

<sup>38</sup> László Naláczí to his sister, Borbála Naláczí. Vienna, February 24, 1764. Nat. Arch. Cluj, CNB, Fond 328/66,33-34.

also traceable during the Christmas Holiday, because he requested that his sister send him some Christmas Cake, too.

As shown by the quotes, supplies arrived in Vienna relatively easily, but the situation was different when one spent months or years in Western Europe, in the Netherlands or Germany. On these occasions, we have noticed that travellers usually searched for accommodation in inns and taverns accustomed to Hungarians. Diaries suggest that most of the authors changed their taverns if they could not get proper food. "I persuaded Mr. Türenisz to make his table better and to offer me roast at least once a day, and I will pay him more, but since there were many other guests who would not pay more, nothing changed", thus József Teleki left<sup>39</sup>. Sámuel Teleki, for example, left the inn he lived in but kept his table, being more than content with the company and food. Also, he recorded that during his travels, he sometimes disguised himself as a simple student in order to pay less for food. Nevertheless, he could not fool everybody. For example, in Köln, the innkeeper charged him properly. Students did not receive good quality food all the time, but they were charged far less than the other travellers. Fogarasi, who could not afford expensive taverns after separating himself from count Elek Bethlen, mentioned that at the University of Marburg, he ate at the free-table a few times, where "lunch was thin, dinner thinner"<sup>40</sup>. Students saved themselves from starving with some Roggenbrot, which was in abundance<sup>41</sup>. As the author noted, "those who travel shall be determined to eat everything, they should not be picky and fastidious, because they cannot afford that"<sup>42</sup>.

Along with food, drinks were also constantly present in these descriptions, and if we could trace down another attachment to the familiar, that would be the preference for good quality wine. Wine was something Hungarians were extremely proud of. József Teleki constantly narrates about events where he provided the Tokaj wine, and "all were extremely content" with it. The count paid a considerable amount of taxes for the wine he took with himself, not just for making a good impression at his dinner table, but because he believed that there was no illness, he could not cure with Tokaj wine<sup>43</sup>. Sámuel Fogarasi also wrote that his German landlord mentioned: "that we Hungarians are very friendly, and often invite strangers to dine with us, and that we eat greasy food, and

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<sup>39</sup> Teleki Sámuel *peregrinációs naplója*, 73.

<sup>40</sup> The Calvinist nobility from Transylvania often supported the meals of Transylvanian students at Universities such Halle, Leipzig, Utrecht. Szögi, Szabó, *Erdélyi peregrinusok*, 14–15.

<sup>41</sup> Fogarasi, *Marosvásárhely és Göttinga*, 252.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>43</sup> Teleki, *Egy erdélyi gróf a felvilágosult Európában*, 69–70.

drink such excellent wine”<sup>44</sup>. The quote is suggestive from several aspects because, on the one hand, it reveals the general opinion Germans had on Hungarian/Transylvanian foodways, and, on the other hand, it seems that these nations were associated with quality wine and high consumption. Generally, Transylvanians and Hungarians were accustomed to consuming great quantities of wine (and alcohol in general),<sup>45</sup> which is also suggested by Sámuel Teleki’s recount of a Banquette from Basel: “the wine would not be sufficient if it were poured in the Hungarian way”<sup>46</sup>. No wonder that all Transylvanian travelogues narrate about visits to (and heavy drinking at) different cellars.

### *The rejected food*

As Felipe Fernández-Armesto asserts in his book on food history: “When tasters are tempted to experiment, the palate often rejects unfamiliar flavours”<sup>47</sup>. Food preferences could be, on the one hand, explained by individual preferences but, on the other hand, they could just as well be inculcated by culture<sup>48</sup>. We find examples for both reasons of food-rejection.

Reluctance towards new tastes could manifest through embarrassment, disgust, or lack of linguistic knowledge because people, in general, display distrust towards unfamiliar food<sup>49</sup>.

Most criticism refers to bakery and dairy products. Although Transylvanians thought that the French were more extravagant with their clothes than with their diet and ate – for their taste – too little meat, they still had a great advantage over the rest of Western Europe, namely because they prepared tasty bread. Germans also prepared acceptable bread, though a little unsalted for the taste of the authors. In the Netherlands, bread was not to the liking of Transylvanian students at all, as Miklós Bethlen complained a century earlier: “not even table servants and those of lower rank would eat such a thing”. Most of the negative notes refer to rye bread, the so-called Roggenbrot, which was red-purple or black in colour, was as heavy as salt, thick as soap, could not even be

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<sup>44</sup> Fogarasi, *Marosvásárhely és Göttinga*, 206.

<sup>45</sup> We also want to draw attention to the fact that alcohol consumption changed significantly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and that alcoholism was no longer tolerated in higher circles. Andrea Fehér, “Trends and Controversies in The Transylvanian Kitchen. Contribution to the Culinary History of Eighteenth Century Transylvania”, in *Brukenenthalia*, vol. 9 (2019): 946-947.

<sup>46</sup> Teleki Sámuel *peregrináció naplója*, 41.

<sup>47</sup> Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Near a Thousand Tables. A History of Food*, (New-York, London, 2002), 132.

<sup>48</sup> Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste. Food and Philosophy*, (Ithaca, London, 2002), 89.

<sup>49</sup> Fischler, “Food, self and identity”, 283.

cut, but was scraped with a knife into small pieces. To the great surprise of the Transylvanians, the locals enjoyed it, “even the wealthy and fastidious people”<sup>50</sup>.

Some German taverns offered bread with butter, another novelty for Transylvanians who were not used to the taste of butter, since in Transylvania it was only used for cooking. Some were initially disgusted with the taste of raw butter, but later it seems that they overcame their disgust, as was the case of Sámuel Fogarasi: “I almost finished the bread when it split, I looked at it, and noticed that it had butter spread on it. I felt nauseated because I had never eaten butter until then; moreover, I felt disgust looking at others eating it. But then again, I thought it was not that bad, and I have enjoyed it since”<sup>51</sup>. He was not alone in this discovery: according to the Account book of Teleki, he must have been accustomed with this new taste, because we have daily entries regarding money spent on French rolls with butter, especially during his stays in France.

In addition to the remarks regarding bakery products, dairy products seemed to be among the most debated foods. Butter was a pleasant surprise for some Transylvanian travellers, unlike milk, which smelled of manure. We might have become accustomed to the curiosity shown by Fogarasi in this regard: he provides an explanation, namely that the foul smell and taste of the milk can be attributed to the fact that in western towns, cattle were not grazed, but kept in the stable<sup>52</sup>.

Cheese was also rejected, although this dish would be more affordable for students. Apparently, in this case, it was not only taste that created problems, but also uncertainty. In the refusal to try new products, the fear of being ridiculed plays a significant role: “Once, when there was no one to see me and laugh, I cut a piece and I started to chew, without any boredom, but I did not feel anything pleasant, or any taste, there was no way I could swallow it”<sup>53</sup>. Fogarasi could not overcome his distrust, so he never tasted cheese again. Cheese was a real punishment for Transylvanians, as it appears from the notes of count Székely, who, in his autobiography, mentions several gambling scenes in which the stake was tasting dishes one disliked, and cheese seemed to always be among them<sup>54</sup>.

Another interesting fact is provided by József Teleki, who visited the town Gouda, famous today for its cheese, but he mentioned nothing about its food, instead recording that “I stood here for two hours or more to visit

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<sup>50</sup> *The autobiography of Miklós Bethlen*, (trans. by Bernard Adams), (London, New York, 2004), 188.

<sup>51</sup> Fogarasi, *Marosvásárhely és Göttinga*, 203.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>54</sup> *Gróf Székely László Önéletrása*, 344.

the two most worthy things, the church and the pipe-manufacture"<sup>55</sup>. Therefore, what today seems to be considered a brand may not have been perceived as an evident trademark by 18<sup>th</sup>-century travellers.

As mentioned, the lack of linguistic knowledge also created disturbances. Fogarasi did not understand the Viennese waiter who, according to the author, was talking too fast, and in order not to embarrass himself, at one point he said "ja" without knowing exactly what he ordered. The author noticed the amusement of his entourage, but he realized only days after that he ate fried frog. The story reveals something interesting about the perception of unfamiliar tastes. The travel companion of Fogarasi, Gyarmathi, a physician, asked the author: "If, out of ignorance, someone ate something he did not like, and after that, he found out what he had eaten, would this person have then fallen ill?" Fogarasi answered: "It depends on the nature of that person; it is likely for someone weak and sensitive to fall sick." After the author found out about the frog, he started to wonder: "Was it that bad? It did not feel that way. After that, I ate it knowing what it was, but only fried. Boiled I have not, because I imagine it is sticky and silky"<sup>56</sup>. Therefore, it was believed, as mentioned before, that unfamiliar dishes could make one ill, since we eat with the mind as much as with the mouth<sup>57</sup>. We want to draw attention to another interesting detail. Frog is usually something that belongs to the French culture; all travellers express their disgust with this "French delicatessen"<sup>58</sup>, they condemn the frog-eating French; therefore, the appearance of the dish in Vienna is surprising. According to the above fragment, the *nationality* of this food is shadowed by the general disgust; therefore, trying out a new dish in a country other than its homeland changed the perception of the food as well.

In the last part of this subsection, I would like to draw attention to the religious dimension of food<sup>59</sup>. Curiously, most of the notes about this topic are related to the adventures of Calvinist travellers during fast. A good Protestant could not glorify the Catholic diet and often rebelled, if he could, over the rules imposed by Catholic innkeepers on food. Transylvanian Calvinists will try to defy these restrictions, as László Székely did in Komarno: "the waiter had come, I ordered meat, the waiter

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<sup>55</sup> Instead of cheese, Teleki bought here some pipes. Teleki, *Egy erdélyi gróf a felvilágosult Európában*, 153.

<sup>56</sup> Fogarasi, *Marosvásárhely és Göttinga*, 170.

<sup>57</sup> Alan Beardsworth, Teresa Keil, *Sociology on the menu. An invitation to the study of food and society*, (London, 1997), 52.

<sup>58</sup> Black, *The British and The Grand Tour*, 45–46.

<sup>59</sup> Fischler, "Food, self and identity", 281.

reported to the innkeeper, they gave us meat, but they were very upset that they had to fry our meat together with the fasting dishes. I got annoyed right away and told him that the innkeeper has an obligation to give the traveller everything he asks for in exchange for money"<sup>60</sup>. The arrogance of the traveller was probably ill-perceived by the Catholic owners or guests, but this did not seem to trouble the author, who constantly mocked Catholic rituals, architecture, and religion in his autobiography.

Another fasting-related narrative is given by Istvan Halmágyi. During his travel in Germany together with Count Pál Teleki, they were accompanied on the road by "a fat Franciscan monk, who claimed to be the confessor of the Kaiser, lustful, a great eater and drinker, and very useful on the road. He ate meat with us all the way, but here [Bavaria] he was afraid knowing how pious the Bavarians are, otherwise there was no meat to be found in the whole town [Filschoffen]; since we still had some capon with us, he kept telling us that we will have problems if we ate it; I think he said that out of envy, because we ate the meat without any trouble, and he was left without it because of his monastic robe"<sup>61</sup>.

The quotes thus create the impression that Calvinists were ardent carnivores. Not by far. József Teleki mentioned that in Bern, all Protestants were fasting on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August; they went four times to church, and ate their first meal at 4 o'clock in the afternoon; Teleki, however, was invited to dine earlier<sup>62</sup>. Many Transylvanian Protestants fasted; for instance, the great-grandmother of the aforementioned László Székely, who kept a strict diet most of the year, and Zsuzsánna Gálffy's grandchildren and great-grandchildren were convinced that she had lived 100 years precisely because of her strict diet. The above quotes suggest that in the perception of the Protestant authors, Catholic fasting was not authentic; it was held only superficially, because, in reality, Catholics were desperately seeking to escape restrictions.

For Protestant travellers, being in Catholic places was always disturbing. We already mentioned the critiques of Sámuel Teleki about the French in general and Paris in particular. But the author was not content with German Catholic towns either: "I have never seen a town so ugly, stinky and weedy as Colonia, big crazy city, with lots of priests, fraters and all kinds of monks. Has 270 Temples and Chapels, that one is disgusted to walk on its streets"<sup>63</sup>. This disgust and despise is present in every diary written in Vienna. Protestant nobles visited churches only to

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<sup>60</sup> *Gróf Székely László Önéletírása*, 226.

<sup>61</sup> *Halmágyi István naplói*, 462.

<sup>62</sup> Teleki, *Egy erdélyi gróf a felvilágosult Európában*, 67–68.

<sup>63</sup> *Teleki Sámuel peregrinációs naplója*, 79.

mock the superstitions; they argued with the clergy and generally did not hide their contempt toward Catholics.

*Food – hierarchy – and the loss of the authentic*

The anthropologist Mary Douglas argues that food must be treated as a code, and once we learn to read that code, we could decipher the social relations expressed through food<sup>64</sup>, since eating is “an activity with intense social meaning”<sup>65</sup>. Roland Barthes also sought this code on a linguistic level, considering foodways as a “part of a system of differences in signification”<sup>66</sup>. Reading the travel narratives from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we encountered several food narratives regarding boundaries expressed through foodways.

Rituals, such as the dining of the monarch, were among the most often recorded food-related events that do not require active participation. These ceremonial meals had deep significance. Cultural theorists believe that even a perfectly natural action, such as eating, could be transformed into myths in a way to support and maintain dominant social hierarchical constructions<sup>67</sup>. Our sources easily support this statement. Travellers were deeply impressed by the meals they could attend as viewers and took every opportunity to take part in them. Székely’s notes are the most detailed regarding Maria Theresa’s dining habits. The author described the “everyday” and special meals of the empress, the way food was served and the table was set, paying attention to every little detail that could indicate special relational bonds between the diners; he even tried to disclose these relationships. We are under the impression that in describing the rituals of the monarch, the author tries to capture the essence of the civilized court. The long fragments on the etiquette and ceremony, regardless of whether they are food-related or not, show an increasing interest not in the system itself but in those who were privileged enough to take part in this routine. Everything had significance at the court, and all the minor details actually revealed relations of power and prestige<sup>68</sup>. The same thorough description is to be

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<sup>64</sup> Mary Douglas, *Implicit meanings. Selected essays in anthropology*, (London, 1999), 231.

<sup>65</sup> Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Roland Barthes, “Toward a psychosociology of contemporary food consumption”, in E. Forster, R. Forster (eds.), *European Diet from Preindustrial to Modern Times*, (London, 1975), p. 51 cited by Pat Caplan, “Approaches to study of food, health and identity”, in Idem (ed.), *Food, Health and Identity*, (London, New York, 1997), 2.

<sup>67</sup> Dick Hebdige, “From culture to hegemony”, in Simon During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader*, (London, New York, 1993), 360–361.

<sup>68</sup> Elias, “The Changing Functions of Etiquette”, in Idem, *On Civilization, Power, and Knowledge*, 87.

found in Halmágyi's diary, when he narrates the dining rituals from the Court of King George from Hannover, or Sámuel Teleki's travelogue when recounting the dinners, he had in several German Princely Courts.

As mentioned before, travellers abroad were constantly preoccupied with procuring adequate food and searching for proper company, because eating was an indispensable aspect of social life<sup>69</sup>. The food-related events, the dinner invitations, are narrated in detail in the travelogues and diaries. These meals had a deep significance for the authors: it was believed that those who eat together recognize each other as equal,<sup>70</sup> since food is never just about eating, but strongly bound to social relations and cultural ideas<sup>71</sup>. A smaller nuance in behaviour had great significance<sup>72</sup>. One had to choose his table-companions carefully, as suggested by this fragment from the letter of Ferenc Bethlen: "for this day we [the author and Miklós Teleki] lived in the same lodging, but the Chancellor [László Gyulaffy], since he lives near us, after finding out that we live together, he told me that he was not content with this, and if I want to call him my well-wisher, I cannot live with his *so-called enemy*, so I should find myself another place" ... "I dined often by the Chancellor, who is with good intentions towards me, but I sense that he disproves that I still live with the Teleki lords"<sup>73</sup>. He was, therefore, afraid to confront the Chancellor, but the situation was a bit complicated, because the Chancellor Gyulaffy, just like the Teleki lords, Miklós and Mihály, were above him in rank, and it was dangerous to be disrespectful to someone of a higher rank. Nobles were extremely sensitive to this hierarchy, which could explain the number of food narratives where the authors enumerate those with whom they dined and often specify the menus as well. It was of great significance if someone had breakfast, dined, or drunk coffee in the company of a person with a higher social status.

It is interesting to analyse these dining rituals from an "outsider's" perspective, such as István Halmágyi's, the companion of count Pál Teleki. Halmágyi did not belong to the nobility, but he was already an accomplished clerk in Transylvania; he was also often invited to the table of the political and academic elites. From his descriptions of these occasions, we also learn about fashionable dining customs because

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<sup>69</sup> Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 69.

<sup>70</sup> Eadem, 200.

<sup>71</sup> Caplan, "Approaches to study of food, health and identity", 3.

<sup>72</sup> Elias, "The Changing Functions of Etiquette", 90.

<sup>73</sup> Bethlen Ferenc to his mother, Mária Folti. Vienna, August 22, 1736. Nat. Arch. Cluj. CFM. Fond nr. 328/39, 248; and another letter regarding this matter written a week after the first one. Vienna, September 5, 1736. Nat. Arch. Cluj. CFM. Fond nr. 328/39, 254.



his “outsider gaze” observed rituals which might seem familiar to authors belonging to the nobility: “At 6 o’clock in the evening, we received tea, coffee, fruits, cakes and we each helped ourselves as we pleased from the goods on the table. I was a little scared that we would not have dinner, but once we got up from the table – because some were going to play cards, others to talk ... at nine I wake up with a feast one can see only at weddings”<sup>74</sup>. If the author felt good in Nürnberg at the table of the Haller family, he was embarrassed in Hannover at the royal court: “however, the Count was invited, I could also join, and even if I was not accepted at the table of the Hoffmeister, I could sit at the third table”. Halmágyi tried to avoid these dinners because he could not converse, since “Latin is dead, German is also in agony, all they could talk was French”<sup>75</sup>. We thus once again encounter the linguistic barrier which shadowed the culinary experience.

### Conclusions

We believe that due to these travel experiences, in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century we are witnessing the change of the Transylvanian food regime and that food-related social experiences facilitated the rise of the prestige-based consumption of the “civilized” elite<sup>76</sup>. Food no longer merely nourished, but also bore meaning, sent a message, or as Barthes said, “food will lose in substance and gain in function”<sup>77</sup>. New hegemonic structures came into life due to these modern and fashionable food practices, which were vividly criticized by the traditional ruling classes. Péter Apor, member of the conservative Catholic elite, gives a bitter commentary on the way the authentic Transylvanian kitchen altered due to foreign culinary practices in his nostalgic work *Metamorphosis Transsylvaniae*. Apor believed that this phenomenon weakened the body and the purse of the Transylvanians equally: “there were no such weak stomachs as people have today”; “Poor Transylvania, how many thousand forints of yours are spent nowadays on that madness?”<sup>78</sup>.

We have to underline that the change of taste does not necessarily refer to the change in the consistency of the food, but concerns especially attitudes regarding the changes that have taken place in the dining room since the “civilizing of the appetite” came with the transformation of table

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<sup>74</sup> Halmágyi *Istoán naplói*, 472–473.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 529, 533.

<sup>76</sup> Fehér, “Trends and Controversies”, 947.

<sup>77</sup> Roland Barthes, “Toward a psychosociology of contemporary food consumption”, in Counihan, P. van Esteric (eds.), *Food and Culture: A reader*, (London, 1997), 26.

<sup>78</sup> Apor, *Metamorphosis Transsylvaniae*, 9, 15.

manners as well, and with great expenses. Therefore, Apor's above-mentioned criticism was well justified since many Transylvanian nobles would accumulate significant debts out of their desire to conform to the new habits that were financially beyond their reach<sup>79</sup>. Alternatively, as Sámuel Teleki wrote after he received an invitation from the son of a wealthy merchant from Amsterdam: "such are people here, they are not beggars as we are, poor Hungarians"<sup>80</sup>.

Despite the fact that Transylvanian young nobles do not possess the economic and cultural capital of the Austrian and Hungarian aristocrats, they seek to conform to fashionable tastes to consolidate their class identity. Therefore, these *food regimes* could also be explained as *cultural regimes*, "significant in the creation of the well-mannered, civilized" individual, setting of a new system of rules of behaviour<sup>81</sup>. Hence, food, as Bourdieu asserts, could also be used for social differentiation, and changes in food habits also support this idea, since upper classes change their tastes to distinguish themselves<sup>82</sup>. If, at the beginning of the century, Transylvanians did not seem to be impressed by the exoticism of the Western cooking and preferred traditional dishes, by the end of the century they became more and more concerned with the gustatory pleasures and aesthetic value of food.

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<sup>79</sup> Fehér, "Trends and Controversies", 941.

<sup>80</sup> Teleki Sámuel *peregrináció naplója*, 90.

<sup>81</sup> Sara Jane Littlejohn, *The Rhetoric of Food Narratives. Ideology and Influence in American Culture* (Dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2008), 17.

<sup>82</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, (London, 1986) cited by Caplan, "Approaches to study of food, health and identity", 11; Beardsworth, Keil, *Sociology on the menu*, 88.