

## OUR HERITAGE: HUNGARIAN PROTESTANT ANTIPHONS<sup>1</sup>

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**SUMMARY.** During the Middle Ages, the seemingly diverse liturgical practices across Europe were actually rooted in stable centers with long-standing traditions, with the Hungarian archbishopric center, Esztergom, notably contributing its own variant known as the Esztergom rite. This regional custom became the basis of liturgical practice in all of Hungary until it was replaced by the official Roman liturgy in 1630. The Esztergom rite, characterized by a blend of European and Hungarian traditions, influenced Hungarian Protestantism, leading to the development of vernacular plainchant, particularly flourishing from the mid-16th century onward. This resulted in a unique repertoire of Protestant vernacular chant, primarily found in gradual books. Research confirms that the majority of Hungarian Protestant graduals were not influenced by foreign models, but can be traced back to local medieval traditions, especially those of Esztergom.

**Keywords:** antiphon, Hungarian Protestant Gradual-books, medieval Hungarian tradition, Esztergom/Strigonium rite.

The apparently vivid and colorful liturgical map of the Middle-Ages is in fact based on stable centers with long, continuous traditions. The liturgical material of these centers is typically very stable, almost uniform in the case of the Mass. The local traditions that define the ‘particular image’ are mainly present in the Office. The Hungarian archbishopric center, Esztergom (Strigonium) has a liturgical variant which is itself part of the Roman secular course, but is a specific, regional version of that<sup>3</sup>. This custom, the Esztergom rite, became

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<sup>3</sup> For more information see Dobszay, László. *Corpus Antiphonarum. Európai örökség és hazai alakítás (Corpus Antiphonarum. European heritage and Its Hungarian Formulation)*. Budapest, Balassi Kiadó, 2003. pp. 47–76, 335–412.



the basis of the “pan-Hungarian” custom of all dioceses within the borders of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary<sup>4</sup>. This liturgy was cultivated and enriched by the medieval church until 1630, when, following the decision of the national synod, the local liturgy variant was given up in favor of the official Roman liturgical books. The *Ritus Strigoniensis* is an exceptional product of the Hungarian intellectual elite, which created an exceptional unity of Europeanism and Hungarian tradition. This spiritual heritage – or at least a part of it – was carried on by Hungarian Protestantism when it incorporated some of the characteristic elements of the Esztergom rite into its own liturgy, transposing them into the Hungarian language.

While the local version of the plainchant in Hungary was weakened and later disappeared due to the Turkish occupation, the collapse of the medieval Hungarian school and institutional system, the rise of the Reformation and the rise of the Tridentine rite under the leadership of Péter Pázmány, the vernacular plainchant began to flourish in the Hungarian Protestant churches from the mid-16th century. In Hungary, hundreds of chants were translated to Hungarian, considering the medieval tradition, thus creating a unique repertoire of Protestant vernacular chant for liturgical use, which was sang by our forefathers throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, and in some cases up until the 19th and 20th centuries. The books in which this new, vernacular Protestant plainchant material was written are called gradual books. The most important and most numerous chants of these books, also musically the most colorful and varied liturgical genre, is the antiphon, the framing verse of psalmody.

Today’s research confirms that although the demand for the book-genre of Hungarian gradual did not arise independently of foreign models, the repertoire of Hungarian Protestant graduals can be traced back to local medieval models: most of the items are thus based on Hungarian models, and predominantly on the models of the central rite area of the Hungarian Middle Ages, Esztergom. It is possible that the preface to Imre Szilvás Újfalvi’s hymnal published in 1602<sup>5</sup> refers to the intellectual connection with the Esztergom rite when, at the end of *Praefatio*, he begins his bibliography of the hymnal publications of the Reformation era with a printed Esztergom liturgical book, a Psalterium<sup>6</sup>. In reverse: if our predecessors based their ceremonial singing

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<sup>4</sup> On the history of the Esztergom rite, see Dobszay, László. *The Esztergom rite*. Budapest, Új Ember, without year.

<sup>5</sup> Újfalvi, Imre. *Keresztyéni énekek, Debrecen, 1602 (Christian hymns. Debrecen, 1602)*. The text of the facsimile is published by Péter Kőszeghy, Bibliotheca Hungarica Antiqua 38 (Ed.: Kőszeghy Péter), Budapest, Balassi Kiadó, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Azoknak Nevek Kik Enekes könyveknek ki bocsatasaban munkalkottanak, (Ex Catalogo scriptorum Ungaricorum, ab E. A. Sz. U. Collecto adhuc manu scripto) az időnek rendi szerint. (Ex Catalogo scriptorum Ungaricorum, ab E. A. Sz. U. Collecto adhuc manu scripto in chronological order, those who worked in hymnbook publishing) Psalterium Strigoniense,

primarily on the Esztergom repertoire, which was regarded by contemporaries as almost equal to the country's tradition, then the Protestant sources retroactively confirm Esztergom's acceptance and embeddedness. In order to explore this intellectual connection, we will take a look at those Hungarian Protestant antiphons which are modelled on the medieval "mos patriae": the elements of Hungarian custom which give the Esztergom rite its specific character, i.e. which cannot be documented from foreign sources (other medieval rites), or cannot be documented in a significant way<sup>7</sup>.

### 1. A diebus antiquis nos audivimus

All medieval antiphonals in Hungary begin the Advent with a specific antiphon cycle. In the first Vespers of the first Sunday, the series of five antiphons A diebus antiquis - Dominum Salvatorem - Gabriel Angelus - Maria dixit - Respondit Angelus is sung to the five psalms. This is already the case in the first surviving completely notated codex, the Codex Albensis, which contains the chants of the Office. The codex was written in the first half of the 12th century, and although it still was written with neume notation, the repertoire, the composition and, as far as can be traced, the melodic variants show that the main features of the 'Hungarian Gregorian' can already be traced in this codex. Although the emblematic opening antiphon of A diebus antiquis appears in some Italian sources and in the Krakow (and Plock) tradition, as well as in late Salzburg and Passau sources, the Codex Albensis' record is earlier than all of these, and in other European sources A diebus is far from being an emblematic, prominent, dominant chant. This antiphon, however, is the emblematic piece of the Hungarian rite, and it defines the Hungarian medieval tradition to such an extent that the local medieval antiphonals begin with this item<sup>8</sup>. The popularity, prevalence and importance of the medieval Hungarian antiphon is also proven by the fact that almost all Hungarian Protestant gradual volumes have included it in their repertoire with a Hungarian translation, and in most

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seu Psalterium secundum ritum almae Ecclesiae Strigoniensis cum Antiphonario, (et) Hymnario, incerti auctoris (et) temporis, nisi quod Iacobi Schaller librarii Budensis ab initio in eo fiat mentio. p 2r.

<sup>7</sup> For all items see Dobszay, László. *Corpus Antiphonarum. Európai örökség és hazai alakítás (Corpus Antiphonarum. European heritage and its Hungarian Formulation)*. Budapest, Balassi Kiadó, 2003, pp. 51–54, 394–397., and CAO-ECE: *Corpus Antiphonarium Officii – Ecclesiarum Centralis Europae: A Preliminary Report*. Ed. László Dobszay and Gábor Prószék, Budapest 1988.

<sup>8</sup> This also means that if an antiphonal begins with this phrase, there is a good chance that it will be declared to have Hungarian provenance! For more information, see Dobszay, László. "A Breviarium Strigoniense jellegzetes pontjai" (The characteristic points of the Breviarium Strigoniense), *Ars Hungarica*, XVII/1, 1989, pp. 37-40.

sources, it is the first item of the Advent antiphon series maintaining the medieval use. The first vernacular record of *A diebus* is found in the Komjáti gradual of Gál Huszár<sup>9</sup>, and among our gradual sources, the Tornai, Ráday, Óvári, Batthyány, Spáczay, Patay, Apostagi, Kálmáncsai, Ajaki, Eperjesi, Öreg, Kecskeméti, Bélyei and Nagydobszai graduals pass on the chant with various textual adaptations<sup>10</sup>, but following the original medieval subject rather exactly.

Picture 1

AZON VR IESVS NAC EL  
ióveseről Veczernyere valo Diczeretec.

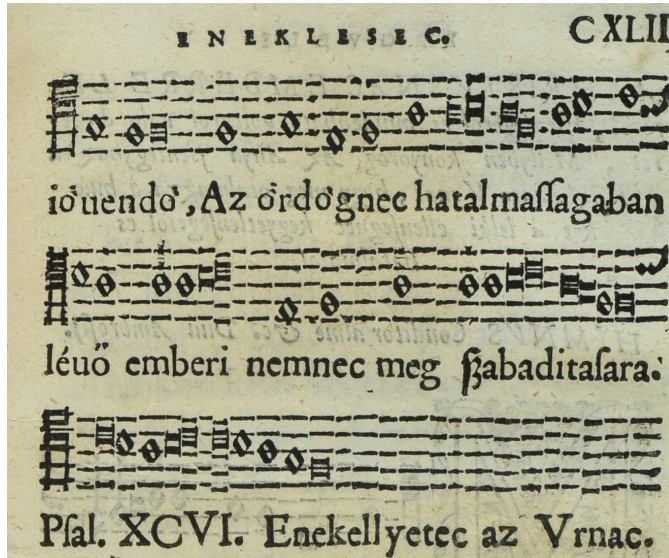
**R** Egen el mult időben , meg

értettűnc a ſent Prophetac által,

Hogy az Atya Istenec fia ez vilagra  
iöuendo

<sup>9</sup> Huszár, Gál. *A keresztyéni gyülekezetben való isteni dicséreték és imádságok, Komjáti 1574* (*Divine praises and prayers for the Christian congregation, Komjáti 1574*). RMK I. 332, RMNY 353.

<sup>10</sup> Régi időktől fogván hallottuk a prófétáknak szájából; Régi időktől fogván hallottuk mi a prófétáknak jövendő mondásukból; Régen/régi elmúlt időben/időkbén megértettük a szent próféták által; Régi elmúlt időktől fogván megértettük a szent prófétákból. For more details on the items see Ferenczi, Ilona. *A bölcsesség kezdete az Úr félelme: Magyar nyelvű antifónák 16-17. századi kéziratokban és nyomtatványokban, énekeskönyvekben és graduálokban* (*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: Antiphons in Hungarian in manuscripts and printed works, hymnbooks and graduals of the 16th and 17th centuries*). Musicology Institute, Eötvös Loránd Research Network, Budapest 2021, nr. 1049, 1050, 1051, 1052.



The antiphon in Hungarian from Gál Huszár's Komjáti Gradual-book f. 141v

Today we know of almost thirty handwritten graduals that were used by Hungarian Unitarians, and these books testify that the Hungarian Unitarians in Transylvania, like the Hungarian Protestant churches, tried to preserve and incorporate some of the Gregorian material inherited from the Middle Ages and translated into Hungarian into their liturgy. This repertoire is much more modest in quantity than that of other Protestant sources: the Unitarian manuscripts contain a total of twenty-five antiphons, and among them there is no Hungarian version of *A diebus*.

The item is missing from the Hungarian Unitarian repertoire, but the first of the seventeen antiphons of the German gradual manuscript produced in 1622 for the Saxon Unitarians of Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg<sup>11</sup> is a vernacular (German) translation of the *A diebus antiquis*: *Von langen zeiten her haben wir gehört aus dem munde der Propheten.*

<sup>11</sup> Graduale oder Geistliche geseng vnd Psalm sampt ihren Antiphonen und hymnen... (Gradual, i.e. congregational hymns and psalms with antiphons and hymns...) Library of the Cluj branch of the Romanian Academy Ms U. 1042.



The antiphon in the book of the Saxon Unitarians of Cluj/Kolozsvár f1

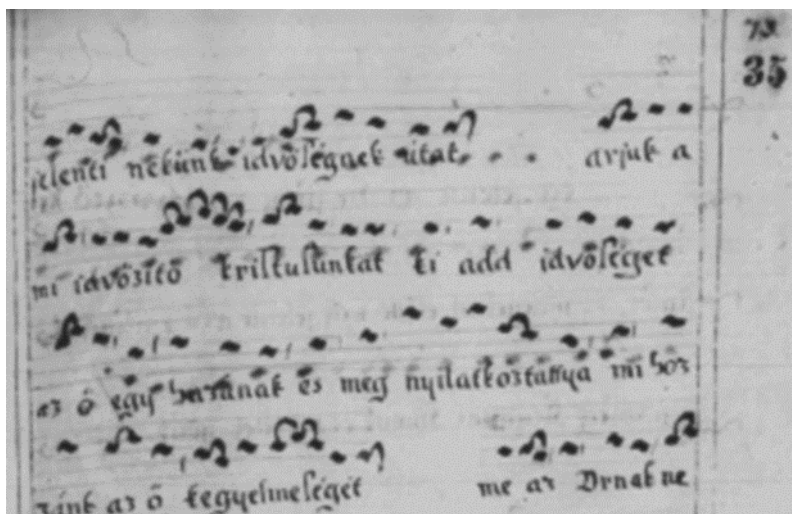
## 2. Dominum Salvatorem nostrum expectamus

The medieval antiphonals in Hungary thus begin the Advent with a fixed cycle of antiphons, repeated from Saturday to Saturday. In the first Vespers, the antiphon *A diebus antiquis* is followed by *Dominum Salvatorem*<sup>12</sup>. Similarly to *A diebus antiquis*, which opens the series, the antiphon *Dominum Salvatorem* can also be found in some Italian sources, but in a function different from the medieval Hungarian use. Out of the Protestant sources in Hungary, the Eperjesi, Öreg and Bélyei graduals contain the vernacular counterpart of the medieval antiphon in an almost identical form, with the incipit *Várjuk a mi üdvözítő Krisztusunkat*.

<sup>12</sup> The only exception is the Codex Albensis! Codes written after the 12th century follow this system without exception.



Picture 3

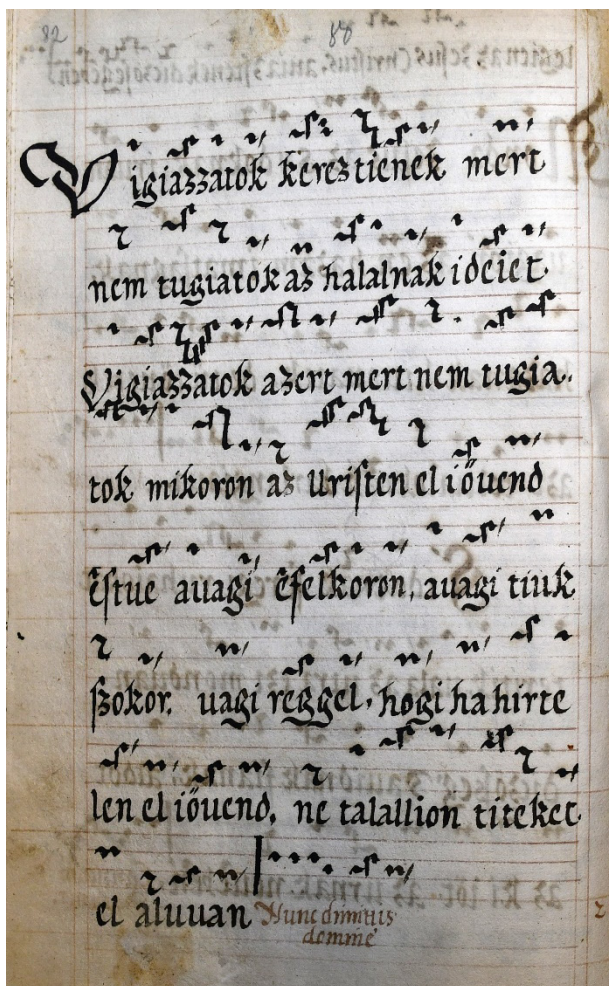


Eperjesi graduál f. 35

### 3. Vigilate ergo nescitis

Every medieval Hungarian source gives the *Vigilate ergo nescitis* as the canticle antiphon of the Compline in the first two weeks of Lent. Although this antiphon is also mentioned in other foreign sources<sup>13</sup>, the text and melody variants of the Hungarian sources are unique, and contrary to the Hungarian custom, the foreign sources assign it to various Complines of the ecclesiastical year except for Lent. The unique, highly expressive domestic 2<sup>nd</sup> mode melody has been included in the most important gradual sources, and retaining its original Hungarian liturgical function, it is one of our most ornate vernacular chant pieces. The Hungarian Protestant application of *Vigilate ergo nescitis*: *Vigyázzatok keresztyének* can be found in the Tornai, Ráday, Óvári, Batthyány, Spáczay, Patay, Kálmáncsai, Eperjesi, Öreg, Kecskemét, Bélyei and Nagydobszai graduals.

<sup>13</sup> See: *A Database for Latin Ecclesiastical Chant. Indices of chants in selected manuscripts and early printed sources of the liturgical Office*, <http://publish.uwo.ca/~cantus/>



Spáczay graduál f. 80

#### 4. Simon, dormis?

The 8<sup>th</sup> mode antiphon *Simon, dormis?* intended for Holy Week, usually as a canticle antiphon for the Lauds of Good Friday or the Vespers of Holy Thursday, is a popular and abundantly documented item throughout Europe. The medieval Hungarian practice gives the piece as the Magnificat antiphon



of the Vespers of Holy Thursday, and the melody carrying the longer text passage is a 5<sup>th</sup> mode formation which is possibly a local composition. Its vernacular counterpart (*Simon, aluszol?*) is found only in the Öreg graduál.

Picture 5

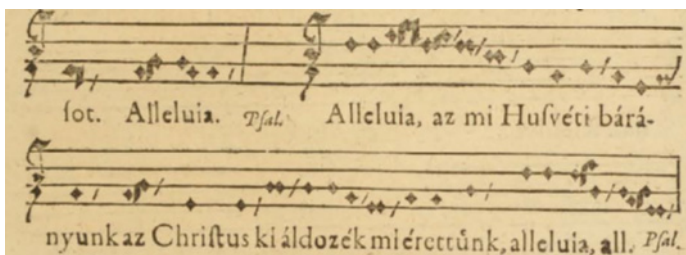


Öreg graduál p. 463

### 5. Alleluia, Pascha nostrum Christus est

According to the foregoing research, the *Alleluia, Pascha nostrum Christus est* Easter antiphon can only be found in medieval Hungarian sources. Similarly to the previous item, this antiphon can only be found with the Hungarian text in the Öreg graduál.

Picture 6

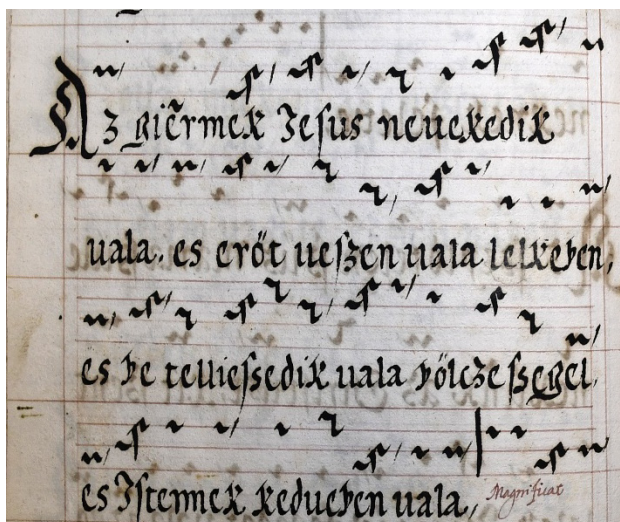


Öreg graduál p. 466

## 6. Puer Jesus proficiebat

The *Puer Jesus proficiebat* antiphon is not uniform even amongst medieval Hungarian sources: the Pauline books contain a melody in the 1<sup>st</sup> mode, several of our diocesan sources (in line with the version which is abundantly documented throughout Europe) contain a melody in the 6<sup>th</sup> mode, and finally, in a singular source we find a 2<sup>nd</sup> mode melody<sup>14</sup>, which has not been documented in any other codex so far. Like our medieval Hungarian sources, the Protestant graduals do not have a uniform melody variant of the item either. We get the 6<sup>th</sup> mode antiphon in the Eperjesi gradual (f. 47v). However, the Eperjesi gradual also gives a 4<sup>th</sup> mode type antiphon (f. 44r) to the Hungarian text of the *Puer Jesus proficiebat*, a solution that has not been documented so far in any other medieval source or in any domestic gradual. Finally, the translation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> mode chant, which is specific to a Hungarian medieval source, can be found in the Spáczay gradual.

Picture 7



Spáczay graduál f. 297

<sup>14</sup> Str-1: Antiphonal (so-called "Budai") from the second half of the 15th century, from Esztergom. Pozsony/Bratislava, Archiv Mesta EC Lad. 6.

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