

GREGORIAN CHANT IN THE PRACTICE OF THE SAXON UNITARIANS IN TRANSYLVANIA PART 1

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SUMMARY. This study investigates the function and adaptation of Gregorian chant within the liturgical and musical practice of the Saxon Unitarian community of 17th-century Transylvania. Focusing on the manuscript gradual MSU 1042 (Cluj, 1622), compiled by the Saxon cantor Lorenz Budaker under the episcopate of Valentin Radecke, the research situates the source within the broader framework of post-Reformation chant transmission. Although the repertoire exhibits stylistic and textual affinities with German Lutheran and medieval Hungarian models, it also demonstrates deliberate revisions consistent with Unitarian (Antitrinitarian) theological principles. Comparative analysis with contemporary Hungarian Unitarian sources reveals a strikingly independent evolution of the Saxon repertory, underscoring the bilingual and confessional diversity of early modern Transylvanian musical culture. Despite its limited number of chant items, the MSU 1042 gradual provides unique evidence for the persistence and contextual redefinition of Gregorian idioms within a heterodox Protestant milieu.

Keywords: Gregorian chant, Unitarianism, Saxon Unitarians, Transylvanian music culture, manuscript gradual

1. The Unitarian Church - the Saxon Unitarians of Cluj

The Unitarian (or, in contemporary terms, the Antitrinitarian Church) was founded in the last third of the 16th century, starting from Transylvania. The spiritual father and founder of Unitarianism in Transylvania was Francis David (Ferenc Dávid), who, after studying the question of the Lord's Supper

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and the simplicity of the rite, joined the Helvetic movement and first expressed his doubts about the doctrine of the Trinity in 1564. The new doctrines spread rapidly throughout the Principality of Transylvania, thanks to the support of Prince John Sigismund, who himself adopted the new confession. Soon, many pastors and large congregations embraced Dávid's ideas. This rapid flourishing came to an end with the death of János Zsigmond in 1571. István Báthory of Somlyai, who succeeded him as prince, immediately and forcefully began to suppress the Antitrinitarians. As a result, after a few decades, most noble families were discouraged from supporting them, and the number of adherents of the new church was reduced by about half. The study of these books shows that Hungarian Unitarians in Transylvania, like the Hungarian Lutheran and Reformed churches, sought to preserve and incorporate into their liturgy traditions inherited from the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, the number of Hungarian Unitarian gradual movements (Hungarian-language Gregorian chants) and the diversity of Gregorian genres remain considerably lower than in the Hungarian Evangelical and Reformed repertoire.

The apparently vivid and colourful liturgical map of the Middle-Ages is in fact based on stable centres with long, continuous traditions. Since the Unitarian denomination rejects the separate divine personhood of Jesus and the Holy Spirit—that is, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity—it soon became distinct from other Protestant churches in its organizational structure². The overwhelming majority of Unitarians were native Hungarian speakers, and the surviving Unitarian graduals, most of them manuscripts, are also in Hungarian. Today, nearly thirty manuscript graduals are known to have been in use by Hungarian Unitarians³. The study of these books shows that Hungarian Unitarians in Transylvania, like the Hungarian Lutheran and Reformed churches, sought to preserve and incorporate into their liturgy traditions inherited from the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, the number of Hungarian Unitarian gradual movements (Hungarian-language Gregorian chants) and the diversity of Gregorian genres remain considerably lower than in the Hungarian Evangelical and Reformed repertoire.

² For more information see: Kovács, Sándor. *Lapozgató. Az unitáriusok rövid története (Turning the page. A short history of the Unitarians)*. Ed. Hungarian Unitarian Church-Protestant Theological Institute, Cluj-Napoca, 2021. 15-28.

³ We are in the fortunate position that the number of sources cannot be considered definitive yet, since the systematic collection of sources in Transylvania really started only a few years ago. On the current state of the work, see: Kovács, Sándor. "Kéziratos graduálok az Erdélyi Unitárius Egyházban" ("Manuscript graduals in the Unitarian Church of Transylvania"). In *Református Szemle* 104/4, 2011, pp. 423–439., and see also: Hoppál, Péter. "XVI–XVII. századi kéziratos énekeskönyvek a Homoród- és Küküllő-menti unitárius parókiákon" ("XVI–XVIIth century manuscript hymnals in the Unitarian parishes of Homoród and Küküllő"). In *Magyar Egyházzene* IX, 2001/2002, pp. 427–430.

There were few centers for Saxon Unitarians outside Cluj-Napoca⁴. At the time of the Reformation—and even into the 17th century—Cluj-Napoca was a bilingual city⁵. As Edit Szegedi observes: “The ritualized bilingualism or even trilingualism (Hungarian-German, Hungarian-Latin-German) played a fundamental role in the life of the city, being the visible foundation of its political structure and functioning”⁶. Transylvanian Unitarism, from its beginnings until the end of the 17th century, should be imagined as a motley collection of trends, groups, and subgroups, including many smaller, even geographically dispersed centers⁷. For at least a century and a half, several groups of “Nonadorantists” and more moderate “Socinians” comprised the church⁸, now known simply as Unitarian. By the first third of the 17th century, an intellectual dispute between the Nonadorantists and Socinians had intensified, making an internal split within the Unitarians a real danger. The Unitarian Church in Cluj was also internally divided⁹. It was in this tense context that Valentin Radecke, a Polish-born priest of the Cluj congregation, arrived in 1615 and soon became bishop of the Unitarian Church¹⁰. Radecke, originally from Danzig, had gained extensive experience in unifying the anti-Trinitarian movement in Poland, which was gradually consolidating from its extreme factions. This

⁴ For more on the Saxon Unitarians, see Keserű, Gizella. “Klausenburger sächsische Unitarier in 16/17. Jahrhundert”. In *Ein Entwurf = Radikale Reformation. Die Unitarier in Siebenbürgen*. Ed by. Wien, Ulrich, A. Brandt, Julianne. Balogh, András, Köln, Weimar, Wien, Böhlau Verlag, 2013. (Studia Transylvanica, 44). pp. 153–178.

⁵ For more information see Szegedi, Edit. “A reformáció Kolozsváron” (“*The Reformation in Cluj*”). In *Keresztény Magvető* 113/1, 2007, pp. 39–51.

⁶ Szegedi, Edit. “Valentin Radecius és az egyházi hagyomány legitimitása” (“*Valentin Radecius and the legitimacy of the ecclesiastical tradition*”). In *Keresztény Magvető* 117/3, 2011, pp. 287–296. p. 289.

⁷ For more, see: Szegedi, Edit. “A reformáció Kolozsváron” (“*The Reformation in Cluj*”). In *Keresztény Magvető* 113/1, 2007, pp. 39–51.

⁸ The so-called *Nonadorantist* view did not acknowledge any divinity of Jesus, and taught that he was not to be worshipped or invoked. The *Socinians* advocated worshipping and invoking Christ. For more, see: Balázs, Mihály. “Hitújítás és egyházalapítás között”. (“*Between the renewal of faith and the establishment of the church*”). In *Tanulmányok az erdélyi unitarizmus 16-17. századi történetéről*. Kolozsvár, 2016. (A Magyar Unitárius Egyház Kolozsvári Gyűjtőlevéltárának és nagykönyvtárának kiadványai. 8.), pp. 201–230.

⁹ See: Kovács, Sándor. *Lapozgató. Az unitáriusok rövid története (Turning the page. A short history of the Unitarians)*. Ed. Hungarian Unitarian Church-Protestant Theological Institute, Cluj-Napoca, 2021, pp. 67–80.

¹⁰ On the life of Radecke, see Molnár, Dávid. “Valentin Radecke, Radecke életpályája püspökké választásáig” (“*Valentin Radecke, Radecke's career up to his election as bishop*”). In *Keresztény Magvető* 121/1, 2015, pp. 22–39. And see: Molnár, Dávid. “Valentin Radecke, Radecke életpályája püspökké választásától plébánossá választásáig (1615–1622)” (“*Valentin Radecke, Radecke's career from his election as bishop to his election as parish priest (1615-1622)*”). In *Keresztény Magvető* 121/2, 2015, pp 155–191.

experience may have contributed to his invitation, which was significant both for Cluj and the broader Unitarian Church.

Upon his election as bishop, Radecke quickly set to work: he convened synods and meetings and published two collections of singable items—the first, a printed canonical¹¹ and the second a manuscript gradual. Both volumes are the first, albeit probably incomplete, books of the Antitrinitarian Saxons and form part of the bishop's efforts to consolidate the church. While the canonical contains no music, the gradual preserves a small but valuable amount of musical notation.

2. Manuscript gradual of the Saxon Unitarians

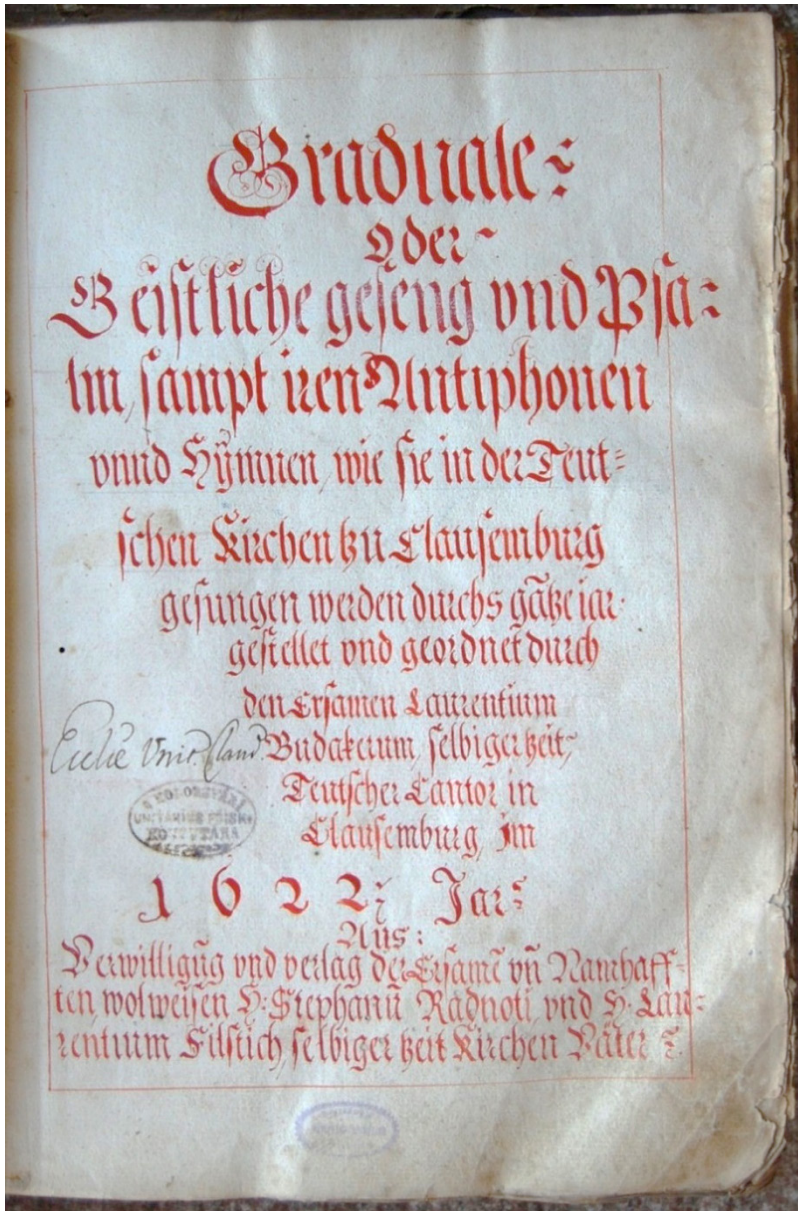
The source marked MSU 1042 is a manuscript in German, produced in 1622, for the use of the Saxon Unitarians of Cluj¹². As the title page of the gradual shows, it essentially contains the corrected hymnal of Valentin Radecke, produced in 1622 by the Saxon cantor Lorenz Budaker with the consent and agreement of István Radnóthi and Lőrincz Filstich, churchmen¹³.

¹¹ Valentin Radecius: *Geistliche Gesänge*. Ed. Clausenburg, 1620. RMNy 1225/1. For more information on this volume, see: Szegedi, Edit. "Valentin Radecius és az egyházi hagyomány legitimitása" ("Valentin Radecius and the legitimacy of the ecclesiastical tradition"). In *Keresztény Magvető* 117/3, 2011, pp 287-296.

¹² *Graduale oder Geistliche geseng vnd Psalm sampt ihren Antiphonen und hymnen...* Library of the Cluj branch of the Romanian Academy Ms. U. 1042. The source was first described by Adolf Schullerus. See: Schullerus, Adolf. "Zwei Graduale der Teutschen Kirchen tzu Clausemburg vom Jahre 1622 und 1659". In *Korrespondenzblatt des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde* XVIII/1–2, 1895, pp. 18–20. It was already stated in the first description of the manuscript that the main part of the manuscript could have been written in 1622, but parts of it were certainly written after 1622. The register of items dates from 1656.

¹³ On the volume, see: Molnár, Dávid. "Valentin Radecke, Radecke életpályája püspökké választásától plébánossá választásáig (1615–1622)" ("Valentin Radecke, Radecke's career from his election as bishop to his election as parish priest (1615–1622)"). In *Keresztény Magvető* 121/2, 2015, pp. 176. And Molnár, Dávid. "...az nagy tengerből való folyóvíznek sebessége..." *Kolozsvári unitárius levéltári dokumentumok és nyomtatványok gyűjteménye Bethlen Gábor és I. Rákóczi György fejedelmek korából (1613-1648)* ("...the speed of the flowing water from the great sea..." *Collection of Unitarian archival documents and printed matter from the era of the princes Gábor Bethlen and György Rákóczi I. (1613-1648)*) = Publications of the Collecting Archives and Great Library of the Hungarian Unitarian Church in Kolozsvár: 7. Ed Kolozsvár, Hungarian Unitarian Church, 2015, pp 32.

Picture 1



Front page of the source MSU 1042

The musical notation on the 285 numbered pages is excellent, and the notation, with clefs and end-of-line custos is carefully executed. There is no musical deterioration typical of Hungarian Protestant graduals. The music of Lorenz Budaker, cantor of the Saxons, testifies to his solid musical training. Although the title might suggest that the majority of the material is native Gregorian chant, the gradual contains few Gregorian movements. The bulk of the volume consists of congregational hymns. The Gregorian chants in musical notation for use by the Saxon Unitarians are as follows:

2.1 Passion according to St. Matthew (ff. 197-f 241)

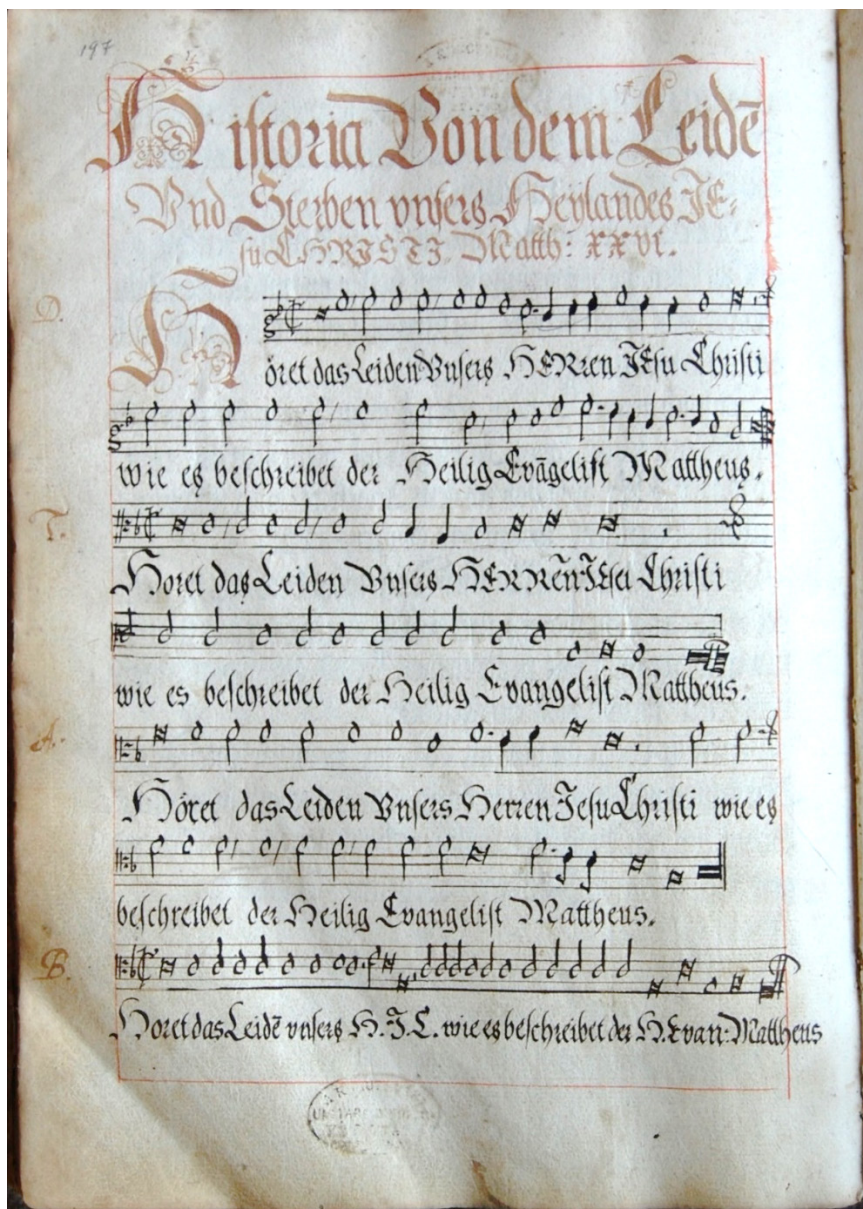
The model for this movement is presumably Johannes Keuchenthal's *Kirchen-Gesenge Latinisch vnd Deudsch...*, a Protestant hymnal compiled for German Lutherans and published in Wittenberg in 1573¹⁴. Keuchenthal's book was well known and used by the Transylvanian Evangelicals, as several copies can still be found in Transylvanian Lutheran libraries¹⁵. The Passion in musical notation is one of the basic elements of both the Hungarian Protestant graduals and the Hungarian Unitarian graduals, though it employs the minor formulas known from Hungarian medieval practice. The Saxon Unitarians, on the other hand, like the Saxon Lutherans, used the major formula set known throughout Europe¹⁶.

¹⁴ Keuchenthal, Johannes: *Kirchen-Gesenge Latinisch vnd Deudsch sampt allen Euangelien Episteln vnd Collecten auff die Sontage vnd Feste nach Ordnung der zeit durchs gantze Ihar Zum Ampt so man das Hochwirdige Sacrament des Abendmals vnsers HERRN IHESV CHRISTI handelt ... fur die Euangelischen Kirchen in Deudscher sprach gestellet vnd verordnet sind zusammen gebracht. Vnd jtzund erstlich. Wittenberg, 1573.*

¹⁵ Hermannstadt, Bibliothek des Brukenenthal-Museum: V III 770; Nationalarchiv Hermannstadt, Sammlung Brukenenthal: SA B J.J. II 1086.

¹⁶ On the history of the Hungarian Protestant Passion, see Bárdos, Kornél. "Harcok a passió éneklése körül Magyarországon" (*"Struggles over the singing of the Passion in Hungary"*). In *Theologiai Szemle* Ú.f. XIV, 1971, pp. 296–303. And Hoppál, Péter. "A magyar nyelvű passió írott, nyomtatott és hangzó forrásai" (*Written, printed, and audio sources of the Passion in Hungarian*). In *Socia exsultatione – A Rajeczky Benjamin születésének 100. évfordulóján tartott tudományos ülésszak előadásai*, MTA – LFZE Egyházzenei Intézet, Budapest, 2003, pp. 127–134. On the Hungarian Unitarian Passion tradition, see: Hoppál, Péter. "A hiányzó láncszem: a Bánffy-hunyadi Passió" (*"The missing link: the Bánffy-Hunyadi Passion"*). In *Magyar Egyházzene* V, 1997/1998, pp. 425–434. And: Hoppál, Péter. *A magyar protestáns passió (The Hungarian Protestant Passion)*. DLA doctoral dissertation, 2005, unpublished.

Picture 2



MSU 1042, f 197

Historia des Leidens Christi.

Disc. **D** Als Leiden vnfers Herrn Ihe su Chri-
 ft/ wie es beschreibet der heilige Euangelist
 Matthe us.

Ten. **D** Als Leiden vnfers Herrn Ihesu Chri-
 ft/ wie es beschreibet der heilige Euangelist Mat-
 the us.

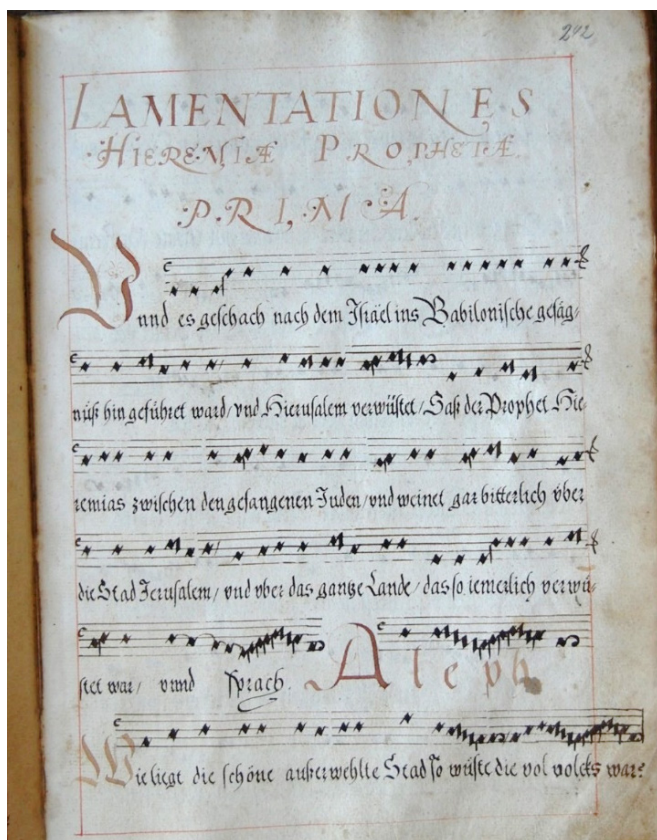
Euangelist. **S** Nd es begab
 sich/da Ihesus al le diese rede volendet hatte/sprach
 er zu seinen Jüngern: **Ihesus.** Ir wiss-
 set/

Keuchethal, 186v

2.2 Lamentations (ff. 242-f 285)

The first nocturnal readings of the triduum sacrum matutinum-laudes follow a different formula set from other Hungarian Protestant sources¹⁷. The skeleton of the Lamentation melodies is identical in all Hungarian-language Lutheran, Reformed, and Unitarian sources, and closely resembles the medieval Hungarian formula set. The melody of the Saxon Unitarian source, however, is related to a German Protestant pattern.

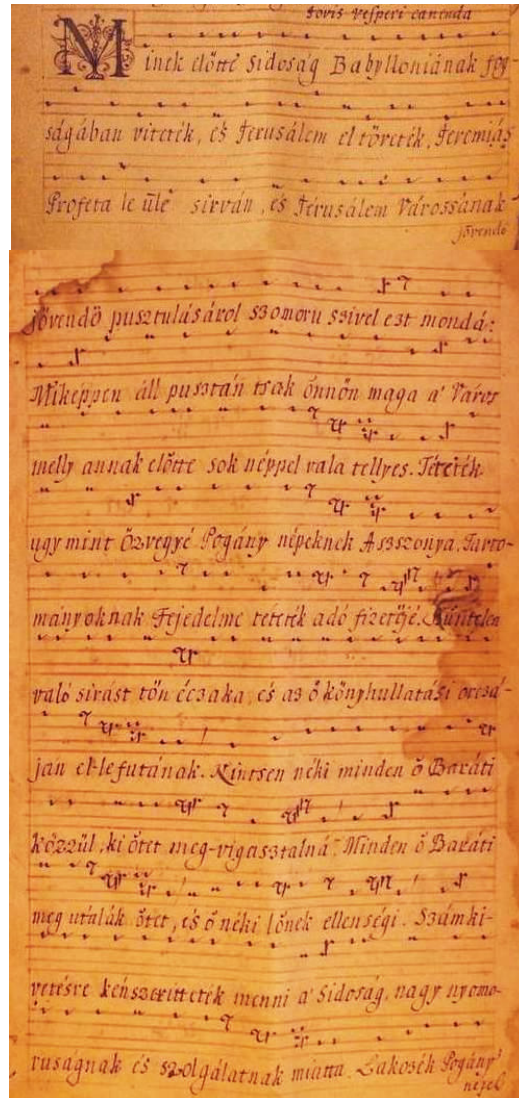
Picture 4



MSU 1042, f 292

¹⁷ For more information, see: Papp, Anette. *Nagyheti lamentációk a protestáns hagyományban* (Lamentations of Holy Week in the Protestant tradition). Egyházzenei Füzetek V/C-3. Ed. Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Egyetem Egyházzenei Kutatócsoport és a Magyar Egyházzenei Társaság, Budapest, 2015. And Szabó, András. "A lamentáció". (*The Lamentation*). In *Református Szemle* CIV/4, 2011, pp. 411–416.

Picture 5

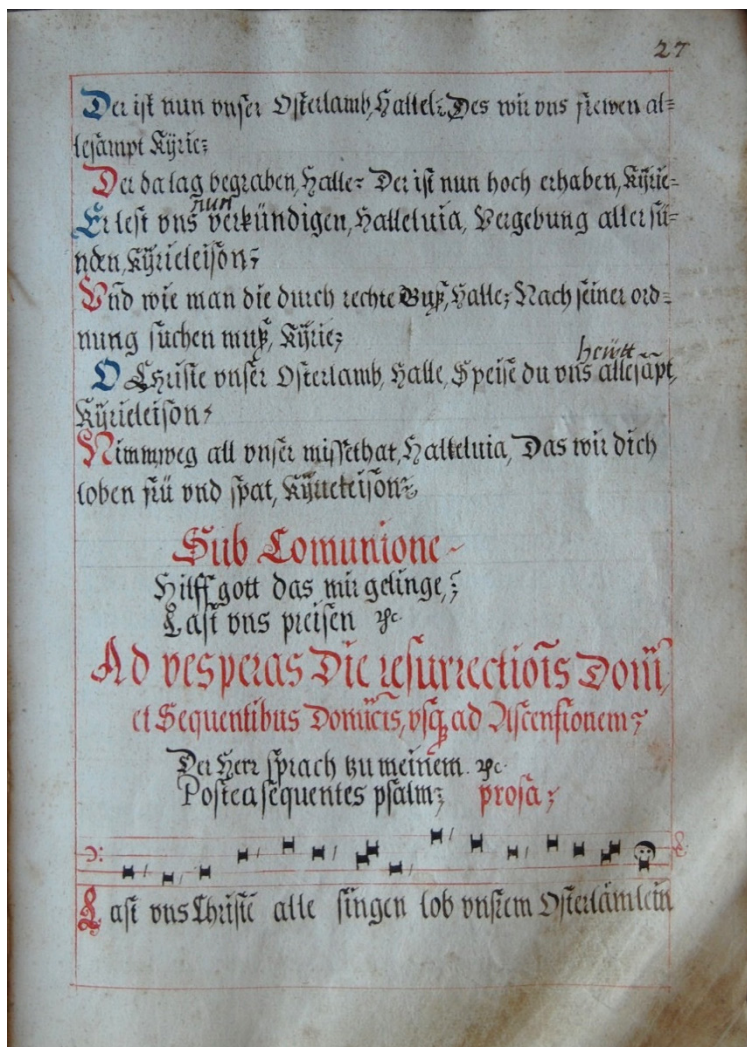
Mihály Kozma's Passionale¹⁸ 26v–27r

¹⁸ Source for Hungarian Unitarian use, made by Mihály Kozma in 1747 in Kolozsvár/Cluj.

2.3 Last uns Christen (ff. 27–f 30)

A German version of the Easter sequence *Victimae Paschali laudes* is also found in the Saxon source. The model—although this movement appears in most Hungarian Protestant sources—can also be found in German Lutheran sources.

Picture 6





MSU 1042, f 27–28

2.4 The Largest Material of the Source: The Antiphons¹⁹

The Saxon Unitarian source contains 17 antiphons, which constitute the most valuable native Gregorian material in the manuscript. A detailed analysis of the antiphons, and their comparison with Hungarian Protestant, Hungarian Unitarian, German Lutheran, and medieval Hungarian and Polish

¹⁹ For an analysis of the antiphons, see the following study.

sources, has already been undertaken in previous studies²⁰. Comparatively, the MSU 1042 antiphons reveal a distinctive pattern of adaptation. Whereas Reformed and Lutheran antiphons generally rely on medieval templates—either directly or with modest textual adjustments—the Saxon Unitarian editors exhibit a high degree of independence.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that although MSU 1042 contains few Gregorian chant movements with musical notation, the study of these movements provides valuable insights into the musical practice and religious expression of the 17th-century Unitarian Saxon community in Cluj.

To be continued.

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²⁰ Papp, Anette. "Az MSU 1042 jelzetű forrás antifóna anyaga" ("*The antiphonal material of the source MSU 1042*"). In *Keresztény Magvető* 123/2–3, 2017, pp. 177–200. See Part 2 for a revised version of the study.

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