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## Protestant Clerical Marriage Customs in 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>-Century Hungary<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract.*

In my study, I attempt to provide an insight into the marriage customs of preachers and pastors of the time. In many respects, the marriage customs of the Hungarian pastors did not follow the practice proposed by the Western Reformers, since the conditions in Hungary did not always allow for the application of this pattern. Thus, remarriage, multiple remarriages, but also a large age difference between husband and wife were not uncommon. There were practical reasons behind both. Due to the lack of sources, my research into domestic customs has encountered many obstacles and I could not aim for completeness in my work. Nevertheless, I tried to collect the most typical data from the surviving sources, which would give me a picture of the marriage customs of Hungarian Reformed clergymen and the characteristics and circumstances that shaped them.

**Keywords:** *marriage, protestant preacher, marriage customs, preacher's wife*

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In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the Protestant churches were being formed and organized, many things worked differently than today. The canons adopted by the synods sought to formulate the most necessary foundations and areas of church life and to lay them on common ground (as presented in an earlier study).<sup>3</sup> I looked at what led to the questioning of celibacy in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the marriage of preachers, and, as a result, the emergence of the role of the priestess. In formulating these, we have drawn on the canons of the Protestant synods, which formulate almost the same outlines for the marriage of contemporary priests and the conduct and life of their wives.

In my study, I will look for answers to the question of what aspects played a role in the marriages of Protestant priests in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and who, what kind of education, and what social class and status our preachers were generally looking for to marry. Furthermore, I will also look into the extent to which they adjusted their marriage and partner choice habits to the generally established ones, and to the habits of non-clericals.

What determined or rather justified their marriage (and remarriage)?

As with many contemporary issues, the biggest problem is the paucity of relevant sources. However, this does not prevent me from building a general picture based on the existing sources and records.

The Hungarian Reformation – and alongside it our Reformers and preachers – was greatly influenced by the Western Reformers and theologians, who did not only put their ideas on marriage on paper but also set an example. In general, they expressed similar ideas in their views on marriage, but, of course, they had different expectations for the marriage of ministers than for the average church members. This is important to emphasize because once the concept and practice of marriage had been outlined, they could not ignore the fact that a marriage could end in divorce. Therefore, this was also addressed. Luther formulated his views on marriage in general as follows: “Marriage is made up of these parts: 1. the natural desire of one for the other; 2. the procreation of children; 3. the living together and fidelity, that is, one keeping the faith of the other.”<sup>4</sup> According to him, the

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<sup>3</sup> BÁTORINÉ MISÁK, Marianna (2019): A papnéi szerepkör kialakulása, különös tekintettel a Tiszán inneni egyházvidékre. In: *Egyháztörténeti Szemle*. 2019, 1. 43–58.

<sup>4</sup> MAGYAR, Balázs Dávid (2017): Luther és Kálvin felfogása a házasságról és a családi életről. In: *Confessio*. 2017, 4. 80.

conditions for a happy life on earth are ‘health, a wife and children, and peace’ and ‘food and drink, that is, marriage’.<sup>5</sup> That is, in his view, the basic aims of marriage are: procreation and upbringing, physical and spiritual happiness and affection, mutual fidelity and support, the proper management of a common household, and lasting love/affection. The latter he considered to be an important matter to emphasize, since it was, in his opinion, a remedy for fornication. On divorce, Luther sometimes gave less than straightforward answers. He considered the following cases to be justifiable: adultery, physical incapacity, failure to fulfil marital obligations, and irreconcilable differences. However, as for the fact that the principle of marriage is objective, namely permissible in a general sense, he did not have the courage to say it.<sup>6</sup> Calvin’s thoughts and teachings also touch on this area of life. In 1546, he wrote his *Marriage Rules*, outlining the practice of marriage, calling it a covenant and an inseparable bond, tighter than the blood relationship of parent and child. He saw divorce as a highly subjective solution, which he also considered acceptable if certain legal facts were present. These included adultery, infidelity, and religious differences. Divorce, in his reading, was a remedy against the mockery of the marriage relationship wisely established by God. This did not mean, of course, that Calvin advocated divorce but rather that he sought to minimize it, and made it his heartfelt concern. Since he saw marriage as a covenant, it was also a covenant with God, which man could not and should not take lightly. In one of his sermons, he cited his marriage as an example of this when he said, “I am bound to my wife ... but in marriage, I am bound not only to my wife but also to the Lord Jesus Christ himself”. He thought it important to stress that husband and wife should live together in marriage like angels in paradise; he also confessed and saw that few men give thanks for marriage. And though husbands know well that without their wives they are only half men, “day after day they afflict their wives ... even though God created man to be a social being”.<sup>7</sup> The unfolding and spreading of the Reformation spirit soon became evident in Hungary. Ilona Tomisa writes that the spread of the new faith also disturbed the Catholic clergy, which was reflected in the fact that although the clergy still lived within the organizational framework of the Catholic Church, they followed Protestant practices in the performance

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<sup>5</sup> MAGYAR 2017, 80.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit. 81–82.

of rituals, the administration of the sacraments, and the denial of the creeds.<sup>8</sup> But beyond this, we can say that they also showed a change in their way of life. One result of this change was certainly marriage. Ilona Tomisa provides some examples as follows: Master Gáspár Szepetneki, a major canon of Veszprém in 1554, the parish priest of Szentadorján, Zala, said that he was a secret Lutheran. And about the priest from Söjtör, he says, “András is a parish priest, secretly Lutheran, makes public confessions, lives according to peasant customs, receives the Eucharist under both kinds, denies the reverend bishop in front of the people.”<sup>9</sup> Then, similarly, about the pastor from Récse, he notes, “He married solemnly in the peasant manner. For many years, he did not have a tonsure like the peasants. I cut it, ordered it to be worn, and accepted 1 Ft. as a lesson.”<sup>10</sup> As we can see, these sources date from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. But already from the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, we can find traces of the marriage of priests as a primary feature of the new way of thinking and living. Tomisa Ilona mentioned Johannes Kresling, who was reported in 1525 for his marriage by László Szalkay, Archbishop of Esztergom.<sup>11</sup>

The marriage customs of pastors were judged somewhat differently from those of the average person. Thus, it is obvious that divorce was not an option for them – for one thing because of their vocation. But in other respects, they also tried to draw the line. Swiss reformers and theologians also supported the marriage of clergymen, but they opposed, if not forbade, their remarriage.<sup>12</sup> They certainly tried to emphasize this in principle, but practice and necessity often contradicted it, since it is well known that some Swiss theologians and reformers also remarried after losing their wives.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, as it was important for John Calvin that the marrying parties should be as

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<sup>8</sup> TOMISA, Ilona (2012): *A reformáció hatása a 16–17. századi egyházi források tükrében*, 372. <https://nti.btk.mta.hu/images/evkonyv/2012/tomisailona.pdf> (last accessed on: 01.04.2020).

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit. 372–373.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 373.

<sup>11</sup> For more examples, see: BÁTORINÉ MISÁK, Marianna (2019): A papné szerepkör kialakulása, különös tekintettel a Tiszán inneni egyházvidékre. In: *Egyháztörténeti Szemle*. 20, 1. 43–58. <https://www.uni-miskolc.hu/~egyhtort/cikkek/szemle-19-1-43-58.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> ERDÉLYI, Gabriella (2018): „Nem leszen mostoha anya...” Érzelmi gyakorlatok egy 17. századi református lelkész mostohacsaládjában. In: *Történelmi Szemle*. 2018. 2. [http://real.mtak.hu/92226/1/erdelyi\\_gabriella\\_Alb.pdf](http://real.mtak.hu/92226/1/erdelyi_gabriella_Alb.pdf) 2020.01.21.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Bucer (1491–1551).

similar as possible in age and social status, the large age difference between the spouses was also considered a marriage barrier in the Geneva Church.<sup>14</sup> This did not mean, of course, that there were no exceptions since we know of some of them in terms of ethical considerations. The Lutheran preacher Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531) was 22 years older when he married the widow Wibrandis Rosenblatt (1504–1564), and the Strasbourg preacher Wolfgang Capito (1478–1541) was 26 years older when he married the widowed Wibrandis after Oecolampadius's death. After the plague had reached Strasbourg, Capito died, and Martin Bucer (1491–1551) lost his wife at the same time. To spare their children, after a short widowhood, Bucer married Wibrandis.<sup>15</sup>

In our country, the specific situation of preachers and pastors did not allow them to follow the Geneva model and proposal in every respect. Usually, remarriage – in some cases more than once – was typical, but also the fact that sometimes there was a large age difference between man and woman. There were several practical considerations behind multiple marriages. In addition to inheriting wealth, bringing up children, maintaining social status, organizing daily life, and keeping one's spiritual balance, the first and most important consideration was to provide a new and caring mother for the children who had been orphaned or left motherless. The extent to which the caring adjective has been redeemed by a remarriage has sometimes become apparent only during cohabitation. Otherwise, in Hungary, the rapid remarriage of widowed men was an accepted and common phenomenon.<sup>16</sup> While in secular practice it was more common for remarrying men to choose younger, first-time wives, Protestant ministers remarried widowed women with quite frequently. In many cases, they married the widow of a well-known pastor. However, it was also typical that pastors' wives and widows remarried with striking frequency, unlike laywomen. Of course, there was a strong reason behind this exercise. In those times, widowhood – especially in the case of pastors' wives – meant not so much independence but rather destitution, as they lost their homes and support together with their husbands. In this respect, Gabriella Erdélyi writes, “This is why in many places the custom developed that the new pastor, together

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<sup>14</sup> ERDÉLYI 2018.

<sup>15</sup> KOVÁCS, Barbara (2015): *2 titokzatos nő, akinek sokat köszönhet a reformáció.* <https://kotoszo.blog.hu> (last accessed on: 01.04.2020).

<sup>16</sup> ERDÉLYI 2018.

with the office, ‘inherited’ the widow and children of his predecessor, who thus remained in their former home.”<sup>17</sup> The “proposal” was usually carried out according to the wishes of the time, which for pastors meant that a friend or fellow pastor would come along and propose to the prospective husband the girl or widow he had selected. In the following, we will trace these customs through the lives of a few pastors, mainly István Csulyak, Deacon of Miskolc. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide a domestic example from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as we have not been able to find any relevant sources. However, it is assumed that since the synods had already regulated the outlines of clergy marriages in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, similar customs developed and became common practice, which was not repeated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Gryneus Simon, returning from his journey to Wittenberg, married Spirensis Magdolna in 1523. His first wife must have died, because we can read later that his second wife, Catherine of Lombard, gave the 46-year-old professor a healthy son in 1539. This child became the first and only child of the reformer.

István Kis Szegedi was recorded as the most married Hungarian reformer. He married his first wife, Orsolya, during his service in Cegléd in 1548, and they went to Temesvár together. When they had to flee, however, his ailing wife died in Mezőtúr, so he went to Békés in 1552 with his daughter only, Katalin. He married Erzsébet, the widow of Pastor János Bereményi, in Tolna. Erzsébet proved to be an extraordinary companion and a caring wife. In her love for Szegedi, her duties as a housewife, and her role as the wife of the reformer, she was equally a perfect match. She also helped Szegedi in every way in his work as a preacher. When the reformer once almost drowned, she did everything to bring him back to life. When he died, Szegedi experienced it as a great loss. Nevertheless, shortly after Erzsébet died in 1570, he remarried at the age of 65, marrying Orsolya, the widow of Jakab Botach, a citizen of Ráckeve. The most important factor in his decision was his children, who needed a mother, as his marriage to Erzsébet had produced nine children. Only three were alive at the time, but they needed a guardian. His marriage to his third wife did not last long because of Szegedi’s death. He did not live to see the birth of their second child.

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<sup>17</sup> Op. cit.

The first to be mentioned in the 17<sup>th</sup> century is István Miskolci Csulyak, who was one of the rare pastors who married six times<sup>18</sup> during his life because he lost his wives due to various illnesses.<sup>19</sup> He met his first wife at the beginning of his teaching and pastoral career. “I consider it a sin against God and man to live without a spouse’, he began to court Judith, daughter of the Reverend György Szikszai, pastor of Zombor, and Mr Szentandrás and Péter Literátus of Zombor, the daughter’s brother, as I have received the daughter through their petition. On 11 December, I held the...”<sup>20</sup> Although he writes that the day after his engagement he moved his entire household to Szerencs to fill the pastoral post there offered by Zsigmond Rákóczi, this did not mean that Judit accompanied him. Neither Miskolci nor the morality of the time allowed them to live together before marriage. Until marriage, which took place on 25 February 1609, she continued to live with her parents. This is obviously what Miskolci himself is referring to when he talks about the wedding that took place in the parish of Zombor. This event, however, is important – namely, the celebration of the wedding of Miskolci Csulyak on 18 February.<sup>21</sup> His first wife died in May 1616. After a short period of mourning, he remarried. Afterwards, when we look at the wives he chose, we can see that all of them were widows.<sup>22</sup> The pastors in Hungary tried to follow the customs of the people and the congregation in which they served in their area, region, or congregation when it came to marrying and choosing their wives. István Csulyak from Miskolc served as a pastor in Hegyalja for about three decades. The men living there remarried within a few

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<sup>18</sup> NAGY, Iván (1860): *Magyarország családai czimerekkel és nemzedékrendi táblákkal*. Vol. 7. Budapest, Ráth Mór. 514; 1. Judit Szikszai, daughter of György Szikszai, pastor of Zombor, 1609–1616; 2. Anna Juhos, widow of a Debrecen landowner, August 1616 – April 1622; 3. Dorottya Seres, widow of Sárospatak, June 1622 – October 1622; 4. Katalin Szabó Gyulai, widow of András Turi, merchant of Kassa, 13 February 1623 – 15 November 1634; 5. Zsuzsanna Prágai of Sárospatak, widow of Mihály Suri, pastor, April 1635 – 1638; 6. Katalin Asztalos of Sárospatak, widow of István Dobrai, pastor, January 1639 – December 1645.

<sup>19</sup> ÁGOSTON, István (2005): Miskolci Csulyak Gáspár az első magyar nyelvű állattankönyv író. In: *Collegium Doctorum*. I, 1. 144. <http://dc.reformatus.hu/data/2014/03/12/dc2005.pdf> (last accessed on: 03.04.2020).

<sup>20</sup> RITÓÓK, Zsigmondné (1962): Miskolci Csulyak István. In: Klaniczay, Tibor – Stoll, Béla (eds.): *Régi magyar költők tára, XVII. század*. Vol. 2. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó. 291.

<sup>21</sup> Op. cit. 291.

<sup>22</sup> ERDÉLYI 2018.

months of the death of their wives so that the household could have a new mistress and a mother for their children. Miskolci Csulyak followed the same custom. This is supported by an Internet source, which states, "... according to the former custom, the second marriage was most often contracted within a few months after the first, especially if there were children left after the deceased, as they needed a guardian".<sup>23</sup>

"At last, when I had been in mourning for some time, as I could no longer remain a widow because of my children and the household, on the one hand, at the encouragement of my friends, and, on the other, as my circumstances urged me to do so – although I knew that a second marriage is rarely fortunate..."<sup>24</sup> – with these words, he recalls the event when he went with his pastor Jakab Náprádi to visit and propose to his second wife. While he had found his partner in his previous wife, his second wife gave him little pleasure. The wedding took place on 3 August 1616, but already "... on 22 December, I began to experience that sometimes the spring of married life is cold, and I felt it as long as I lived married to her; with her coldness, had I not been a stoic, she might well have killed me. My two daughters felt that the love of a stepmother is only on the tip of her tongue, but not in her heart."<sup>25</sup>

Before her third marriage, she did not spend much time mourning. This marriage was happy but short-lived because his wife, Dorottya Seres, the widow of István Szabó, a citizen of Patak, whom he married in June 1622, died in October of the same year.<sup>26</sup> His mourning was short after that, too, although there were no children left in the house, and he buried his two daughters from his first marriage before his wife. At the beginning of February 1623, through Péter Alvinczi, he proposed to the widow of András Thuri, a merchant from Kassa, the daughter of Ferenc Szabó of Gyula, Katalin. "The beginning of my marriage with this companion was sweet, for she was 28 years and three months old, but this sweetness, which she had scarcely tasted in the former lips, suddenly turned to bitterness..."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> HERPEI, János (1965a): Adatok Medgyesi P. Pál életéhez. In: Keserű, Bálint (ed.): *Polgári irodalmi és kulturális törekvések a század első felében, Adattár a XVII. századi szellemi mozgalmaink történetéhez, Herepei János cikkek I.* Budapest – Szeged. 374.

<sup>24</sup> RITÓÓK 1962, 292–293.

<sup>25</sup> Op. cit. 293.

<sup>26</sup> Op. cit. 294.

<sup>27</sup> Op. cit. 294–295.



This latter remark indicated that his wife had suffered greatly from various illnesses from which she had not recovered. And although Miskolci did his best for her and took her to many doctors, she died on 15 November in 1634.

“After three months and a week of widowhood (...) I began to think again of bringing a new wife into my house...”<sup>28</sup> This time he asked the widow of Pastor Mihály Suri, with the intercession of István Tolnai, Mrs Zsuzsanna Prágai from Sárospatak. On 7 March 1635, he received the reply that „... Zsuzsanna Prágai is not afraid of marrying me; she wishes to marry me”.<sup>29</sup> The wedding took place on 24 April. Unfortunately, he did not enjoy his marriage for long. Everything went well for two years until, in the third year, his wife fell ill, and, although she got better from time to time, she never fully recovered. On 20 May 1638, „... having lived with me three years, one month, and two days in holy wedlock...”,<sup>30</sup> she died. “By the way, when the sun, the eye of this world, was looking on the year 1639, I, being then fed up with the domestic cares of widowhood, began again to think of the help of a careful wife so that I might be better fitted to manage my public and private affairs.”<sup>31</sup> This time he shared his thoughts with Ferenc Szécsi, the pastor of Bodrogkeresztúr, and asked him to inquire about the woman of his choice, the widow of the late István Dobrai, pastor of Sárospatak, Katalin Asztalos, who had been bearing the burden of widowhood for five years. On 18 January 1639, Szécsi „... brought me the joyful news of the marriage. I, who have been taught by time that delay is no evil, have chosen January.”<sup>32</sup>

Looking at István Csulyak’s marriages in Miskolc today, one could say that he was not lucky in this respect. He always lost his wives to illness. However, if we are to analyse his marriages, it is important to note first that he was aware of the views, suggestions, and prohibitions of the Genevese on marriage, since we know from his autobiography that “I spent three whole years and eight months in Heidelberg...”<sup>33</sup> At the same time, knowing this, we can conclude that he refuted almost all the views of the

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<sup>28</sup> Op. cit. 298.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Op. cit. 299.

<sup>31</sup> Op. cit. 299–300.

<sup>32</sup> Op. cit. 300.

<sup>33</sup> Op. cit. 290.

Genevese. They did not recommend remarriage, yet he remarried several times. Gabriella Erdélyi writes that this was in line with the expectations of the time, and Miskolci Csulyak was strictly a practical matter and understood remarriage as such, and most of the time it became hard after only one or two months. And the fact that they did not pay much attention to the year of mourning, and after two or three months they chose wives again, all of whom were chosen from their social milieu with great awareness – is surprising only to a man of today. Miskolci, as a pastor in Liszka, followed the custom practised by the Reformed adherents of the region, and he chose the daughters and widows of the small-town citizens and pastors of the region, recommended to him by his pastoral colleagues and friends.<sup>34</sup> All the choice of wives was guided by practical considerations. And although the considerations and expectations were always the same, sometimes the choice did not seem to be a lucky one. Even though a sense of doom had struck him before his second proposal, he remarried, and his second wife was a painful experience. In this respect, Gabriella Erdélyi notes that because of the experience he had with his second wife, he tended to have extremely high expectations towards the third wife.<sup>35</sup> However, this did not discourage him, as the orphaned children, the housewife left without a household, and the absence of a helping partner acted almost as compelling forces. But even if there were no children – according to Gabriella Erdélyi – , the pastor remarried after a few months of widowhood. What is more, Miskolci himself said that his pastoral duties were a much more overwhelming burden during his widowhood. The purpose of marriage, in his own words, was “to make me more fit to manage my public and private affairs”.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, remarriage was also key to the fact that in the early modern period, both husbandhood and fatherhood were important elements of men’s social esteem and concepts of a stable government. For Reformed pastors, marriage and family formation, the fact that they were practising like their parishioners reduced their status as outsiders in the communities.<sup>37</sup>

But Calvin also considered it important, apparently especially in the case of ministers, that the parties to be married should be as close in age and social standing as possible.

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<sup>34</sup> ERDÉLYI 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> Op. cit.

While the second condition, concerning the same social class, seemed to be fulfilled in the case of Miskolci Csulyak, the one concerning the age difference was not. This was already evident in their first marriage. According to Gabriella Erdélyi, Miskolci was thirty-four years old when he married for the first time, and his wife was seventeen.<sup>38</sup> Although the author also notes that at the time of his fifth marriage, there was a twenty-year age difference between him and his twenty-eight-year-old wife, this calculation is not entirely clear. After all, if the marriage took place in 1635, and Zsuzsanna Prágai was twenty-eight years old and Miskolci, born in 1575, was sixty, the age difference was much greater. All this is merely a correction on our part, which does not change the fact that there was always a large age difference between the pastor of Liszka and his wife. His last marriage took place at the age of sixty-five, for the same reasons we have already mentioned.

What is similar between the marriage practices of Protestant pastors in Hungary and the West is what Gabriella Erdélyi writes about, that is, many pastors married the widows of their deceased colleagues. There was a reason for this, often preceded by the example of their Western colleagues. When Pastor Martin Bucer of Strasbourg married for the second time – to the widow of a close colleague who was left alone with four children –, he justified his decision because he wanted to care for the orphans and bring them up as his own.<sup>39</sup> The first determinant in the marriage of pastors to widows was their desire to embrace the widow and orphans, and certainly their skill in the role of priestess. István Csulyak from Miskolc married widows from his second marriage onwards. The same phenomenon can be found in the marriage of István Geleji, a soldier, who in 1624 married the widow of István Milotai Nyilas, the Reformed Bishop of Tiszántúl and later a Transylvanian court preacher, Katalin Bácsi. Geleji was then thirty-five years old. Katalin Bácsi was a gracious and respectable matron. They had no children, a fact that was an extremely sore spot for István Geleji Katona for the rest of his life.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> *A protestáns vallásos irodalom és egyházi szónoklat*. <https://www.arcanum.hu/hu/online-kiadvanyok/MagyarIrodalom-magyar-irodalomtortenet-1/magyar-irodalomtortenet-pinter-jeno-5116/3-a-magyar-irodalom-a-xvii-szazadban-AAC/a-xvii-szazad-kozerdeku-irodalma-B07/a-protestans-vallasos-irodalom-es-egyhazi-szonoklat-B75/> (last accessed on: 01.04.2020).

In addition to the above-mentioned reasons, the fact that pastors mostly remarried widows may also have been due to the decrees of the synods that met in Hungary in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In this connection, the first Synod of Erdőd stated, “Let those priests who are unable to live unmarried be ever more diligent to not to marry a dishonest person, but either a virgin or a respectable widow.”<sup>41</sup> István Csulyak’s first wife, Judit Szikszai, was a pastor’s daughter, but she could not read or write. This is interesting from the point of view that at that time the education of girls, especially through the work of the Puritans, was already advanced.<sup>42</sup> However, it seems that some pastoral families did not consider it important for their daughters to master even the art of reading. While writing was not of great importance, they tried to teach reading to as many as possible, since the aim was to read the Scriptures, which was essential for the exercise of personal piety. However, it should also be noted that the attitude and work of the Puritans aroused strong opposition from pastors, especially in our region, including István Miskolci Csulyak.

Judit Szikszai was taught by her husband, Miskolci, whom she recalls as follows: “I taught her to read Hungarian writing very well in a little more than one year.”<sup>43</sup> This was not the most important aspect of her choice, since when Miskolci recalled the qualities of his first wife in his autobiography, he mentioned both her good and bad sides:

This wife of mine abounded in womanly virtues, but she excelled in modesty beyond description, so much so that it became a fault. ... In the performance of her duties, she was diligent, a faithful keeper of the house, baking bread, cooking, needle-painting, making [and] tailoring clothes, sewing, running the kitchen, making pies as if she had been brought up in the capital and not in the village. She was studious, eager to learn, sticking to her things, not lavish, a caretaker of her husband, dutiful, pious, upright, generous, etc.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> First Council of Erdőd, 1545, Article IX.

<sup>42</sup> For more on this, see: MISÁK, Marianna (2009): „Minden oskolába járó leány gyermektül...”: református nőnevelés a 16–19. századi Felső-Magyarországon. Sárospatak, Hernád.

<sup>43</sup> RITÓÓK 1962, 291.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

However, as for his second wife, he had a very different opinion of her after her death:

I had foretold her long ago that she would not escape God's judging right hand because she had treated me, innocent as I was, with disrespect while she lived with me, and had more than once scolded me. ... This wife of mine was to me a true Xantippe, and to my daughters a perfect stepmother, with whom I lived six years and as many months without children, barren but rich in sighs, I think God willed me not to grieve at my fate but to remain bound in these bitter bonds of marriage within my bounds, and learn well what is sweet and what is bitter.<sup>45</sup>

She had ten children from her six marriages, but seven of them died in childhood. His son Gáspár was born to his fourth wife, Kata Szabó from Kassa, on 5 April 1627 in Miskolc. This day was the second day of Easter in that year.<sup>46</sup> Although the life of István Csulyak of Miskolc, and with it his marriage customs, is the most detailed that has survived, we have tried to find as many sources as possible to examine the lives of other pastors as well.

Sources report two marriages of Pál Medgyesi – although Károly Császár in his book titled *The Life and Work of Pál Medgyesi*<sup>47</sup> knows of only one, whom he mentions by name.

János Herepei knows that Medgyesi was married before he entered the service of the Prince and arrived in Váradi in 1638.<sup>48</sup> This wife probably died in late 1638 and Medgyesi remarried. His first marriage took place in Szinyérváralja, perhaps because his first wife lived there, while his second wife, Erzsébet Fodor, was a girl from Szászváralja whom he married on 3 May 1639.<sup>49</sup> In connection with the latter, Herepei knows that

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<sup>45</sup> Op. cit. 294.

<sup>46</sup> ÁGOSTON, István (2005): Miskolci Csulyak Gáspár az első magyar nyelvű állattan-könyv író. In: *Collegium Doctorum*. I, 1. 144. <http://dc.reformatus.hu/data/2014/03/12/dc2005.pdf> (last accessed on: 03.04.2020).

<sup>47</sup> CSÁSZÁR, Károly (1911): *Medgyesi Pál élete és működése*. Budapest.

<sup>48</sup> HEREPEI 1965, 374.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

she was the daughter of István Fodor from Szászvár, who, according to János Kemény, was one of the envoys sent by Rákóczi to Lipppa in 1636 to negotiate peace with the Turkish Pasha in Buda and then attended the Diet of Medgyes on 29 January 1658 as envoy to Szászváros.<sup>50</sup>

This extremely important information tells us a lot about Erzsébet Fodor's origins and social status. Although it is a fact that in many cases the most relevant factor in the choice of pastors was not the origin or the education, their privileged position and their responsibilities may have been a different basis for their choice. Medgyesi was the court priest of the prince. We know nothing about his first wife except her place of residence. This is, however, not the case of the second one: she came from a Saxon family, his father being in the service of Prince György Rákóczi. She certainly not only possessed all the virtues of a woman but also had a good education. What else we know about her is that, just like his previous wife, she also gave birth to a child conceived from Medgyesi.

Much less is known about István Csulyak of Miskolc's son Gáspár (1627–1699)<sup>51</sup> than about his father. A few sources give us some insight into the events of his life, which we can trace back to show that he married twice. His first marriage to Sára Szentjóbý took place during the period when he was pastor of the parish of Ónod (1658–1665). After the death of his first wife, he remarried to Zsuzsa Makay.<sup>52</sup> From his marriage, seven children were born, four sons and three daughters.<sup>53</sup> There is almost no data on his wives in the sources, so unfortunately we do not know their social status, age, education, or position.

Another prominent representative of Hungarian Puritanism was János Tolnai Dali,<sup>54</sup> who also chose a wife from a clergyman's family. In his study titled *Fragment of*

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<sup>50</sup> Op. cit. 396.

<sup>51</sup> He was born in Miskolc in 1627. He studied in Sárospatak, Utrecht, and Franeker. Between 1658 and 1665, he served in Ónod, from 1665 to 1673 in Bodrogkeresztúr, then he was a priest in Szilágysomlyó, and later, from 1686 in Nagybánya. From 1691, he was in Magyarigen. From 1695, he was deacon in Székelyudvarhely, where he died in 1699.

<sup>52</sup> ÁGOSTON 2005, 145.

<sup>53</sup> NAGY, Iván (1860): *Magyarország családai czimerekkel és nemzedékrendi táblákkal*. Vol. 7. Budapest, Ráth Mór. 514.

<sup>54</sup> He was born in Nagyvárád in 1606. He was educated in his native town and then in Gyulaféhérvár. From 1631, he spent his years in peregrination in the Netherlands and England.

*the Library of János Tolnai Dali in Sárospatak*,<sup>55</sup> Dénes Dienes writes that Tolnai owned the book *Theologia naturalis reformata* by Paulus Voetius, published in 1656. He received this volume as a gift from Sámuel Geleji, who in the dedication refers to himself as a beloved brother-in-law (i.e. a relative). From this, we learn that János Tolnai Dali married the daughter of Gáspár Geleji, pastor of Szikszó, Dean of Borsod, sister of Samuel Geleji, who was also the niece and nephew of István Katona Geleji, Bishop of Transylvania. There is no record when the marriage took place. We know very little about this marriage, not even the date of the event. Perhaps Tolnai did not spend much time courting either. However, his choice is interesting in any case, if only for the fact that although Tolnai's puritanical thinking and principles made him unpopular among conservative clergymen, he married the daughter of a conservative-minded pastor. In his decision, mutual interest rather than a difference of principle and theology likely played the main role. While Tolnai's long peregrination and the fact that he was marrying the daughter of a dean gave him prestige, for Geleji Gáspár, it may have been a consideration that he could marry his daughter off to a man who had travelled abroad and had a good network of contacts.

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It was in the latter place that he became acquainted with Puritanism. In 1638, he returned to his homeland, where he was first entrusted with the administration of the school in Sárospatak by György I. Rákóczi. Because of his reputation as a Puritan, however, he could only take up his post in the spring of 1639, after he had given an undertaking to refrain from Puritanism in his teaching. However, he refuted this in his inaugural address, and later both his behaviour and his innovations were met with disapproval in conservative church circles, forcing him to leave the head of the college at Patak. He still did not give up spreading Puritan ideas, so he was suspended by the synod of Tokaj in February 1646, and then finally removed from his office of dean by the Synod of Satu Mare in June 1646. From 1646, he lived for three years at the court of Sigismund Rákóczi, and in 1649, through the intercession of Princess Zsuzsanna Lorántffy, he was again appointed rector of the college in Sárospatak. At her suggestion, the princess invited Comenius to the school in Patak, where he and Tolnai Dali directed the educational work of the college. Tolnai Dali was the head of the school until 1656. In the same year, the synod of Gálszecs abolished the earlier synodal decisions that had adversely affected him, and Tolnai became pastor of Tarcal, where he remained until his death in 1660.

<sup>55</sup> DIENES, Dénes (2011): Tolnai Dali János könyvtárának töredéke Sárospatakon? In: Imre, Mihály – Oláh, Szabolcs – Fazakas, Gergely Tamás – Száraz, Orsolya (eds.): *Eruditio virtus et Constantia II.: tanulmányok a 70 éves Bitskey István tiszteletére*, Debrecen, Debreceni Egyetemi K. 469–479.

The life of István Pataki<sup>56</sup> is traced in a study by Sándor Előd Ősz titled *Unknown Pastoral Library from the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century*. In the spring of 1675, he took up his pastoral post in Radnót and married in September of the same year. He married Judit, daughter of Gáspár Miskolci Csulyak, then a pastor serving in Szilágysomlyó, who paid a visit to the Princess on 6 October.<sup>57</sup> In 1681, he changed his place of service and became a pastor in Kolozs. In 1686, he lost his wife. After his wife's death,<sup>58</sup> he remarried on 8 October 1686 to Kata Böszörményi Nagy, a bourgeois girl from Kolozsvár.<sup>59</sup>

Regarding Peter Dengelegi, János Herepei notes that he married while still studying abroad. "While studying in Holland, he got married and came home with a wife."<sup>60</sup> However, due to the death of his wife, their marriage lasted only three years.<sup>61</sup> In his opinion, it is likely "... that after this, already in 1629, the priest was ordained to the priesthood, as on 7 February 1634 he was already as a pastor of Alvinc."<sup>62</sup> He later held several other important positions in the church. He was the Dean of the Diocese of Enyed, and later he gained the priesthood of Enyed and the trust of the Transylvanian clergy. He was even elected to the diocesan General Notary. He died probably in early 1648.<sup>63</sup> As we can see, he ran a good course, as Herepei reports. However, we do not read that he remarried after the death of his wife. Nor does the author say that they had children who needed a mother, so he certainly never remarried.

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<sup>56</sup> We do not know the exact date of his birth, but he was born sometime around 1650. He died between January 1705 and May 1707.

<sup>57</sup> ŐSZ Sándor Előd: Ismeretlen lelkészi könyvtár a 17. század végéről. In: Református Szemle. 2011, 664.

<sup>58</sup> She died on 23 April 1686.

<sup>59</sup> ŐSZ 2011, 665.

<sup>60</sup> HERPEI, János (1965b): Dengelegi Péter. In: Keserű, Bálint (ed.): *Polgári irodalmi és kulturális törekvések a század első felében, Adattár a XVII. századi szellemi mozgalmaink történetéhez, Herepei János cikkei I.* Budapest – Szeged. 304.

<sup>61</sup> Op. cit. 305.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.



Herepei notes about András Kiséri Gyöngyösi,<sup>64</sup> a pastor in Kolozsvár, that since the congregation provided him with an extraordinary salary, he had no financial problems. However, this was of little comfort to him after the loss of his wife<sup>65</sup> and child. But Herepei says it is not impossible that, following the custom of the time, soon after the death of his spouse, perhaps in the same year, he brought a wife to the house again.<sup>66</sup>

We do not know how large a family István Milotai Nyilas<sup>67</sup> left behind. About his widow, Kata Bátsi Szegedi, the steward recorded that on 14 September 1624, Mrs Milotai's properties were escorted by soldiers from Szatmár. Two days later, she had transported her belongings to Gyulafehérvár. Herepei knows that after Bishop Milotai's death, his widow must have been given a job at the prince's court, so she had all her properties transported to Fehérvár, including those she left behind in Szatmár. The fact that the transport of the widow's belongings was accompanied by soldiers and that the steward included the cost of the transport in the court expenses is proof of the fact that she was employed by the court. In his opinion, the bishop's widow had gained a position of trust. She did not have to bear the widowhood for a long time.

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<sup>64</sup> His date of birth is unknown. Reformed pastor, later deacon. He studied in Debrecen. On 17 June 1614, he enrolled at Heidelberg University. After returning home, he served as a pastor in an unknown place for a while, and from about 1619 in Kolozsvár. There he held the office of dean until his death. He died in Kolozsvár on 28 December 1622. He tried unsuccessfully to win over his church, the one in the main square.

<sup>65</sup> His wife died on 13 June 1621.

<sup>66</sup> Herepei, János (1965c): Milotai Nyilas István. In: Keserű, Bálint (ed.): *Polgári irodalmi és kulturális törekvések a század első felében, Adattár a XVII. századi szellemi mozgalmaink történetéhez, Herepei János cikkei I.* Budapest – Szeged. 70.

<sup>67</sup> Reformed bishop. He was born in Milota, Satu Mare County in 1571. In 1599, he went abroad, and in 1601 he enrolled at the University of Heidelberg. He returned home in 1603. First, he was a teacher in Debrecen, and then, from the summer of 1605, he was a pastor in Nagykálló, and from the spring of 1607 in Szatmár. From 1611, he was Dean of the Diocese of Szatmárnémeti and from 1614 Bishop of the Diocese of Tisztántúl. On 24 June 1618, he resigned from his episcopal office and went to Gyulafehérvár to become court preacher to Prince Gábor Bethlen. He died there in 1623.

Soon after taking office, István Geleji Katona,<sup>68</sup> a court priest, married her.<sup>69</sup>

Little is known about the relevant events in the life of Márton K. Szilvási.<sup>70</sup> Herepei himself says that it is not known whether he had a family and whether he had children. And although he is uncertain about this, it seems likely that he left his teaching post in Gyulafehérvár to get married and exchanged it for the priesthood in Bánffyhunyard. As for his children, he notes that if they stayed, they certainly mingled with the men of the church.<sup>71</sup>

Summing up the above, it is very interesting to gain an insight into the marriage customs of the preachers and pastors of the time. Due to the lack of sources, our research encountered many obstacles, which is why we could not strive for completeness in our work. Nevertheless, the examples we have presented do give an insight into these customs. It can also be observed that in some cases pastors followed the same customs as those in the area where they were bound by their place and time of ministry. And although the Genevese had established a certain order and found it good – and it would have been good if they had followed them in our country as well –, the conditions in Hungary did not allow for the application of this pattern in all cases. Consequently, it was not uncommon to remarry, to remarry more than once, but large age gaps between husband and wife were also not uncommon. Behind both, there were practical reasons.

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<sup>68</sup> Transylvanian Reformed bishop, church writer, born in Gelej in 1589. He was educated in Abaújszántó, Gönc, Sátoraljaújhely, and Sárospatak, and then, with the support of Gábor Bethlen, he studied for two years at the University of Heidelberg. In 1618, he became professor and director of the college in Gyulafehérvár. From 1619, he was the tutor of the prince's younger brother, István Bethlen, and accompanied him once more to Heidelberg in 1621. After the death of Zsuzsanna Károlyi (1622), he became court priest to Gábor Bethlen. From 1633 until his death, he was Reformed Bishop of Transylvania. He died in Gyulafehérvár on 12 December 1649.

<sup>69</sup> HEREPEI 1965, 70.

<sup>70</sup> Reformed pastor. After his studies in Germany, he studied abroad, in Heidelberg, and after his studies at home, he enrolled at the universities of Heidelberg and Marburg. In the autumn of 1619, he returned home and became the headmaster of the school in Gyulafehérvár and then pastor of Bánffyhunyard. There, in early 1623, he was elected Dean of the Diocese of Kolozsvár. From 1633 to 1638, he was Dean of the Diocese of Szilágy. He died in 1638.

<sup>71</sup> HEREPEI, János (1965d): Szilvási K. Márton. In: Keserű, Bálint (ed.): *Polgári irodalmi és kulturális törekvések a század első felében, Adattár a XVII. századi szellemi mozgalmaink történetéhez, Herepei János cikkei I.* Budapest – Szeged. 234–235.

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