
Some insights into the education of Hungarian pastor's wives in the 16th-17th centuries*¹

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Zusammenfassung: Die Schwierigkeit bei der Recherche zu diesem Thema lag in der Knappheit der Quellen. Selbst diejenigen, die verfügbar waren, lieferten nur sehr wenige Informationen. Unser Ziel war es, einen Einblick in die Alphabetisierung der Ehefrauen von Geistlichen im 16. und 17. Lange Zeit war die Möglichkeit, sich zu bilden, ein Privileg der Oberschicht. Im Gegensatz dazu ist bekannt, dass viele adlige Frauen und Herren im 16. Jahrhundert nicht schreiben konnten. Bis zum 17. Jahrhundert war dieses Defizit in den meisten Adelsfamilien aufgeholt, und auch das Bürgertum hatte bis dahin erhebliche Anstrengungen unternommen, um in Sachen Alphabetisierung aufzuholen, was in ihrem Fall auch die Fähigkeit zum Lesen und Schreiben einschloss. Die Töchter der unteren Gesellschaftsschichten bereiteten sich vor allem im Elternhaus, meist an der Seite ihrer Mütter, darauf vor, gute Ehefrauen, Hausfrauen und Mütter zu sein.

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Aufgrund der spärlichen Quellenlage konnten wir in den meisten Fällen nur den Namen der Frau des Predigers herausfinden. Glücklicherweise konnten wir in den Fällen, in denen wir in der Lage waren, die Abstammung, den sozialen Status und den Beruf der Eltern herauszufinden, auch feststellen, ob die Auserwählte eine Jungfer oder eine Witwe war. Die Herkunft, der soziale Status und der Beruf der Eltern lieferten einige Anhaltspunkte für unsere Diskussion über das Thema. In mehreren Fällen lieferten die Quellen eindeutige Informationen über die Ausbildung der Ehefrau, während wir uns in anderen Fällen nur auf Rückschlüsse verlassen konnten. In den Fällen, in denen uns Informationen zu unserem Thema fehlten, können wir jedoch sagen, dass es sich mit wenigen Ausnahmen um gebildete Frauen handelte, wenn auch nicht um gebildete.

Dies gilt umso mehr, als im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert bei der Wahl eines protestantischen Pfarrers nicht die Bildung seiner künftigen Frau im Vordergrund stand, sondern Weisheit, Lebenserfahrung, Frömmigkeit und die Tugenden einer Hausfrau, Mutter und guten Ehefrau. Und wenn all dies durch andere Kenntnisse ergänzt wurde, war das nicht nur für den Ehemann, sondern auch für die Kinder und ihre Umgebung ein Mehrwert.

Konzepte: Frauenerziehung, Ehe, Bildung, 16. bis 17. Jahrhundert, Protestantismus

Research on female education has attracted a lot of interest in recent years. As a result, several books and studies have been published, indicating how little attention has been paid to this area in the history of education for a long time. At the same time, the details that have already been uncovered are adding to our knowledge and giving us an even broader insight into the history and world of female education.

In my lecture, I use the results of previous research to investigate the social situation of pastor's wives, in the context of the times, and the resulting of their educational opportunities and literacy. There is little data on the marriages of Protestant pastors 16th and 17th centuries. Even less is known about the wives they chose. The difficulty of the research is that in most cases the sources have preserved little information other than the names of the wives.

First of all it is important that pastors in the 16th and 17th centuries didn't seek a high level of school literacy in their wives. Zsófia V. László begins her study, titled *Female Education and Book Literacy in the 17th-18th Centuries*,³ with a question posed by several pastors: *Who can find a wise woman?* It is true that these pastors lived in the 18th century, but their notion of wisdom is based on the conceptualization of earlier centuries. It was certainly not only sought by pastors in the 18th century but also in earlier ones. Besides wisdom of life, it was important that the chosen woman should be a good wife, a good housewife, and a good mother. She should support her husband in his activities, be an example of piety, and be an example in the congregation.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, education wasn't the privilege of all social classes in Hungary. At the beginning of his study *Women's Literacy in 16th-Century Hungary*,⁴ András Szabó states in relation to the upper social strata that literacy had reached the upper classes in Hungary by the 16th century, and by the middle of the century the vast majority of men of high rank could read and write well. The word 'vast majority' here refers to the fact that even among the nobility in the 16th century there were many men who couldn't read and write. István György Tóth, in his work *Since you yourself cannot write...*,⁵ declares that in this century, although most aristocratic men already knew how to write, there was still a mass illiteracy among the

³ V. László Zs.: *Nőoktatás és könyves műveltség a 17-18. században*. 2014., 95-125. p.

⁴ Szabó A.: *Női művelődés a 16. századi Magyarországon*. 2014. id. 2024.05.14.

⁵ Tóth I. Gy.: *Mivelhogy magad írást nem tudsz...: az írás térhódítása a művelődésben a kora újkori Magyarországon*. 1996., 118. p.

nobility. The explanation for this is that the seal was the main means of authenticating various documents. The modern idea that the signature was important alongside the seal was slow to spread among the nobility. On the other hand, nobles in the 16th and 17th centuries were more skilled in the use of the sword than the pen.⁶

The fact that a man was unable to write obviously didn't mean he was uneducated. At the same time, the question arises: if this was the case with men, how important was female education and literacy during the period? From antiquity onwards, girls from the upper strata of society had several opportunities to become literate, almost all of which were closed for girls from the lower strata.⁷ In the subject of female education and literacy, István György Tóth makes some important observations as well. Among other things, he notes that in the 16th century almost all men of high rank were able to write, meanwhile for women it was still a serious problem.

In opposition to the Middle Ages, illiteracy wasn't taken for granted among the women of the upper strata, and they were increasingly expected to be able to write.⁸ And although literacy wasn't yet taken for granted as well, its absence was excused by most of them. But there were exceptions. In the first half of the 16th century, Benedek Komjáti, at the request of Katalin Frangepán, wife of Gábor Perényi, translated the letters of Apostle Paul to Hungarian in 1532, which was published in Krakow in 1533.

We can find out several things from the dedication of the work. On the one hand, we know that he translated the work at the request of Katalin. On the other hand, we found out that she could read and write, which is why she needed the translation and was interested in the explanations and commentaries of the biblical text.

Another example is Orsolya Kanizsai, the wife of the aristocrat Tamás Nádasdy. According to the practice of the time, the noble

⁶ Ead.

⁷ For more information see Misák M.: „Minden iskolába járó leány gyermektül...” Református nőnevelés a 16-19. századi Felső-Magyarországon. 2019., 22-28, 45-57. p.

⁸ Tóth I. Gy., 1996. 139. p.

ladies, as well as their husbands, mostly dictated their letters to scribes, but the personal ones were written by their own hand. From the letters, it is clear which ones were written by noble ladies and which ones were dictated to the scribes. In most cases, we can deduce from the handwriting. Orsolya Kanizsai wrote most of her letters to her husband herself, but it often happened that she was ill and found it difficult to write. Another time she was in a hurry, and as writing wasn't only hard work but slow as well, she dictated to the scribes.⁹

This suggests that, although they had acquired the knowledge of reading and writing, they practiced reading much more often than writing. Therefore, their lack of skill and practice was initially reflected not in their wording, but in the quality and quantity of their writing. The fact that some families educated their daughters did not mean that other families didn't. It merely meant that they put more emphasize to reading, and didn't consider writing to be important. István György Tóth mentions a letter which shows that in Croatia, for example, it wasn't even common to teach girls to read.

Widow Andrásné Tarnóczy Borbála Kerhen wrote a letter dated 18th of August in 1556 in reply to Tamás Nádasdy, in which she excuses herself by saying that in Croatia, where she grew up, it wasn't customary to teach girls to read and write. Mrs. Tarnóczy certainly had a problem not with writing in Hungarian, but with the art of writing in general, even though her husband was a literate man. Mrs. Tarnóczy's explanations were intended to make Tamás Nádasdy to understand that she came from a good family and that if literacy had been a social expectation, she would certainly have been taught by her parents.¹⁰

In the 16th and 17th centuries, compulsory education, or popular education, was unknown anywhere in Europe, including Hungary. Although schools were still mostly for boys, monasteries, court schools, and private tutors introduced the girls of the upper classes to the most important sciences. Neither the Middle Ages nor the early modern period have known the kind of elementary education that is

⁹ Tóth I. Gy., 1996. 140. p.

¹⁰ Ead. 139. p.

in operation today. At that time, school attendance was an option, not a universal expectation for all, even if education was intended to reach as many children as possible.¹¹ The education of people's children consisted almost exclusively of religious instruction.¹² It wasn't until the end of the second half of the 16th century that 'education' reached girls and women from the lower social strata. Even then, however, most of them weren't introduced to literacy but were taught religious knowledge orally. Yet they tried to reach everyone in this respect. If we can speak of popular education in this period, we can do it only in this sense. Basic religious knowledge provided a specific kind of education but also conveyed the moral standards of the time. However, it wasn't the schoolteacher's job to pass on this knowledge, but the pastor's. Education took place within the church.¹³

András Szabó writes in his earlier mentioned study,¹⁴ that with the spread of the Reformation, education became more and more common, and reached the bourgeoisie as well.¹⁵ As an example, he mentions the school set up by Johannes Honterus in Brasov in the 1540s, where girls were taught to read and write, sing, and study catechism. Then he notes by comparison, that the rest of the Kingdom of Hungary is about a hundred years behind.¹⁶ In the 17th century, however, the education of girls took a new turn in Hungary. The education of girls of upper strata also changed throughout Europe. Court life demanded new literacy, created new responsibilities, and the print revolution created new readers.¹⁷ At the same time, there was a growing emphasis on the education of the girls and women of the lower classes. Teachers, preachers, pastors, and noble ladies took up the case of female educating from this strata.

¹¹ Dienes D.: *Mínthogy immár schola mestert tartanak... református iskolák Felső-Magyarországon 1596-1672.* 2000. 21-22. p.

¹² Mészáros I.: *Népoktatásunk 1553-1777 között.* 1972. 28-31. p.; Bavinck, H.: *A keresztyén pedagógia alapelve.* 1923. 94. p.

¹³ Dienes D., 2000. 22. p.

¹⁴ Szabó A., 2014. 71-78. p.

¹⁵ Ead. 72. p.

¹⁶ Ead.

¹⁷ Ead.

Among the noblewomen of the 16th century, Péter Bornemisza recorded that Borbála Somi, the wife of László Bánffy, not only read the Bible every day but also taught the noble girls and servant girls in her court.¹⁸ We know that Mrs. Kata Várday also maintained a „school” in her court. From the next century, Zsuzsanna Lorántffy’s name should be mentioned for the same reason. In addition to her similar activities, she asked her court priest Pál Medgyesi to prepare a spiritual reading book for her servants.¹⁹ She did much for the education of girls not only at her court but also on her princely estates.²⁰

The beginnings and operation of girls’ education are best traced through church visitation records.²¹ In these we find records, broken down by congregation, of how pastors carried out the work of educating girls. In the 17th century, thanks to the Puritan pastors, this activity boomed. The Puritans went from house to house teaching women and girls the alphabet.²² Through their activities, they focused on the formation and development of personal piety, based on the reading of the Bible. By teaching women the alphabet, they promoted individual Bible reading. This definitely didn’t mean the mass literacy of women from the poorer classes. However, reading was no longer a privilege of the upper classes, even if few of them had acquired this skill. This is why reading in small or large communities was of great importance in our time. Although very rudimentary, this practice could be called teaching, because the information acquired by hearing meant already knowledge.

In the 17th century, opinions were divided even on the establishment of girls’ schools in the Hungarian areas of the country. While Albert Szenci Molnár considered it important,²³ Péter Pázmány only

¹⁸ Bornemisza P.: Egykötetes prédikációskönyv. 1584, 1980. 1144. p.

¹⁹ Medgyesi P.: Lelki Ábécé, [1940].

²⁰ Tamás E. (szerk.): Lorántffy Zsuzsanna album. 2000. 59. p.

²¹ For more information see Misák M., 2019. 65-67, 76-79, 166-193. p.

²² Makkai L.: A magyar puritánusok harca a feudalizmus ellen. 1952. 95. p.

²³ Szenci Molnár A.: Imádságos könyveczke, mellyben szép háláadásoc és áhítatos könyörgésoc vadnac: kinec-kinec akarmelley renden, mindenemű állapattyában és szükségében, naponkint elmondásra hasznosoc és alkalmasoc. 1621. 5. p.

recommended home education.²⁴ For a long time, there were still differing opinions about the education of women, which was obvious to contemporaries. It is no coincidence that after Albert Szenci Molnár expresses his wish for the establishment of girls' schools in Hungary in the preface to his *Prayer Book*, he is aware that not everyone agrees with him. That is why he later remarks that „... literacy is harmful to the female animal.”²⁵

Despite the different opinions, the bourgeoisie is also beginning to catch up in the field of education. However, we must distinguish between Hungarian-speaking and German-speaking bourgeois women and girls living in Hungary. István Monok, in his study titled *The female book-owner, the female reader in the 16th and 17th Centuries*,²⁶ describes women who acquired books through some means, such as inheritance. Examining the sources, he agrees, first of all, that there are no records of books by girls and women who lived as serfs or servants in the period. Those whose names appeared among the book-owners were almost exclusively German bourgeois women and Hungarian noblewomen.²⁷

According to András Szabó, it is no coincidence that among the Transylvanian Saxons, we find a large number of books in the estates of women.²⁸ Both Monok and Szabó mentions several examples, including the widows of preachers. We don't read similar records of Hungarian-speaking preachers or their widows, but we do read that they enthusiastically spread the knowledge of reading and writing among the daughters and sisters in their families and their environment. In other words, if they didn't leave books to their wives or daughters – or perhaps there are no sources – they contributed to the development of women's education and literacy by teaching them to read and write.²⁹

²⁴ Tarnóc M. (vál.): Pázmány Péter prédikációi. 1987. 345. p.

²⁵ Szenci Molnár A., 1621. 5. p.

²⁶ Monok I.: A női könyvtulajdonos, a női olvasó a 16-17. században. 2014. 79-94. p.

²⁷ Monok I., 2014. 80. p.

²⁸ Szabó A., 2014. 72. p.

²⁹ Ead.

Based on the above mentioned, the starting point in the study of the literacy of pastors' wives could be social affiliation. However, this doesn't necessarily provide a clear picture. After all, if I start from there, I don't always get real information. We know that the pastors in Hungary tried to follow the customs of marriage and choice of wife of the people and congregations of the region, the district, in which they served. Remarriage was common,³⁰ sometimes several times, most often remarrying widows. What is more, in many cases they married the widow of a fellow pastor. The large age difference between pastors and their chosen wives was equally common. The reasons behind remarriages were practical, such as inheriting wealth, bringing up children, conservation of the social status, organizing daily life, and keeping one's spiritual balance. Even more important was the need to provide orphaned, motherless children with a new and caring mother.

Among those mentioned in András Szabó's study, the widow of the pastor of Segesvár, who inherited her husband's library,³¹ is of interest to us. It is a Saxon example, and the books were in Latin. The information is nevertheless relevant. For, although I don't assume that the widow could read Latin, I do assume that she could read. Gáspár Heltai's wife is known not only to have been able to read and write but also to have become a printer and publisher.³² It's not known whether she absorbed the basics of education from childhood or as an adult, but she was a highly educated and clever woman.

Péter Bornemisza is recorded as having married several times. According to István Nemeskürty, he had four wives. The first, whose name is unknown, he probably married during his student years in Vienna. The second was Erzsébet Gyótay, the third – also unknown – he was married to for a very short time, perhaps only a year. This third wife must have been his wife around 1575, as in Volume III. of the *Postillas* he writes of the deaths of several of his wives. In addition to Erzsébet Gyótay, he mentions the daughter of Poltári Soós but doesn't mention which wife she has had.³³

³⁰ Erdélyi G.: „Nem leszen mostoha anya...” Érzelmi gyakorlatok egy 17. századi református lelkész mostohacsaládjában. 2018. id. 2024.05.14.

³¹ Szabó A., 2014. 72. p.

³² Ead. 75. p.

³³ Nemeskürty I.: Bornemisza Péter származása. 1958. 503. p.

It is interesting that Nemeskürty knows Erzsébet Gyótay as the second wife, while András Szabó knows her as the fourth.³⁴ Similarly, János Major speaks of her as the fourth wife in his study titled *The buried Bornemisza datas*,³⁵ and also József Fitz in his study titled *The History of Hungarian Printing, Publishing and Book Trade*.³⁶ Since most researchers also mention that this wife survived the preacher, it is unlikely that Nemeskürty's statement is correct. János Major also knows that before Bornemisza married her, she was a widow, because her husband Helmeczy died.³⁷ At the beginning of his study, Nemeskürty makes a fictional interview with Bornemisza about Erzsébet Gyótay.³⁸ We can learn from it that Erzsébet Gyótai could read. We also learn that she taught not only her own family members but also others much older than herself. And since she loved to listen to and read the Bible, she was certainly deeply religious. We also learn that Erzsébet Gyótay's two letters have preserved, which proves that she wasn't only able to read but also to write.³⁹ Opinions also differ about Erzsébet Gyótay's relationship to Pál Máriássy, the vice councillor county of Szepes. While Nemeskürty can't find family relationships,⁴⁰ János Major⁴¹ and József Fitz⁴² both know Pál Máriássy as Bornemisza's brother-in-law. This fact suggests the origin and affiliation of Erzsébet Gyótay.

³⁴ Szabó A., 2014. 72. p.

³⁵ Major J.: Eltemetett Bornemisza adatok. 1965. 467. p.

³⁶ Fitz J.: A magyar nyomdászat, könyvkiadás és könyvkereskedelem története, 2., 138. p. id. 2024.05.14.

³⁷ Major J., 1965. 467. p.

³⁸ Ead. 466. p.

³⁹ Ead. 467. p.

⁴⁰ Nemeskürty I., 1958. 4kk.

⁴¹ Major J., 1965. 467. p.

⁴² Fitz J., 138. p.

Among our Hungarian reformers, István Szegedi Kis⁴³ is mentioned as the Hungarian reformer who married the most. He married for the first time during his service in Cegléd in 1548. He occupied the post of Temesvár together with Orsolya. In 1552 he moved to Békés only with his daughter, as his wife died in Mezőtúr. He remarried in 1553, marrying the widow of Pastor János Bereményi,⁴⁴ Erzsébet, in Tolna. Erzsébet proved to be a helper who was equal to her husband in both her love for him and her duties as a housewife. She helped her reformer husband in all his activities. When she died in 1570, the Reformer suffered a great loss, but he remarried within a short time, at the age of 65. His third wife was Orsolya, widow of Jakab Botach, a citizen of Ráckeve. The decision to remarry was motivated by the orphaned children left by Elisabeth. Because of Szegedi's death, this marriage didn't last long.⁴⁵

Thanks to the autobiography of István Miskolci Csulyak, we have more data on his wives. We know them by name, their origin, and their social status. However, there is little data on what kind of education these women had, or whether they were educated at all. First of all we mention his student years in Debrecen. Between 1591 and 1594, he taught the daughter of his landlord, Balázs Szabó, to

⁴³ Thanks to Máté Skaricza, his biography is now well known. He was born in Szeged in 1505. He represented Zwingli's tendency among the Helvetic reformers. He studied at the Universities of Vienna, Cracow and Wittenberg, the latter with a doctorate in 1543. He returned home in 1544. He spent most of his life in exile, working mainly as a rector and preacher in Turkish occupied territories (Csanádon, Gyula, Cegléd, Temesvár, Mezőtúr). In 1552 he was ordained pastor in Tolna by Mihály Staraeus. From 1554 he was a priest in Lasov and in the same year he became superintendent of the new diocese of Baranya. From 1558 he was a preacher in Kalmansk. Between 1561-1563 he was in Turkish captivity in Pécs and Szolnok. He was replaced by the merchant Ferenc Mező on the condition that he would become pastor in Ráckeve (1564). He worked here until his death and from here he also served as superintendent. He died in Ráckeve on 2 May 1572. His theological works were published in Geneva and Basel.

⁴⁴ János Bereményi was a pastor in Tolna before Mihály Sztárai. He died of plague in 1552. His wife Elisabeth was left a widow with two children.

⁴⁵ Faragó B.: Szegedi Kis István. 1909. 421-403. p.

read and write Hungarian in one year.⁴⁶ From Katalin Péter's book titled *Private Life in Old Hungary*,⁴⁷ we know that Balázs Szabó was a merchant. The girl was the daughter of his second wife, the widow of György Nyomoka. Unfortunately, the girl's name is unknown, but we know that she became a wife of a preacher, namely István Decsi.

The events were reported by István Miskolci Csulyak himself long after they happened. „*I taught her to read and write Hungarian within a year.*”⁴⁸ We find the same note only in later correspondence with Judit Zombori. „*I had my wedding with Judit in the parish in Zombor. I taught her to read the Hungarian script very well in a year and some time*”.⁴⁹

Judit was the daughter of the pastor of Zombor, whom István Miskolci Csulyak began to court while still a rector in Tarcál. He took up the rectorship in July in 1607, after several years of peregrination, when he returned home and visited his familiars at home. During these visits, he preached and ranted everywhere, and was passed from congregation to congregation, and families to families, through which he obviously got to know the girls he could marry. Among them, he chose Judit.⁵⁰ It is striking that Judit was a pastor's daughter and couldn't read. This is also interesting because we know that from the 16th century the pastors in many places in Felső-Magyarország were involved in the work of educating women, even if only at the level of catechesis. In my earlier research on whether there was a girls' education in Zombor, I found no record.

However, since church visitation records were usually problem-centered, a missing record doesn't necessarily mean that the pastors didn't catechize. After all, if there was no problem in this area in the congregation, in many cases it wasn't mentioned by the church visitor. Based on this, I would say that Judit's father either did his job very

⁴⁶ Szabó A., 2014. 72. p.

⁴⁷ Péter K.: *Magánélet a régi Magyarországon*, 2012. 1-180. p.

⁴⁸ Péter K., 2012. 26. p.

⁴⁹ Ead. 28. p.

⁵⁰ Ead. 26. p.

well, so there is no record, or for some reason – because there was no one to teach, or because of opposition from parents, or because of dissent – he didn't start, and didn't practice it for his own daughter. I suspect, however, that this isn't the case. Even if he didn't catechize in the church, he certainly introduced his own children to the most important religious knowledge. Moreover, in the 16th and early 17th centuries, the experience of personal piety didn't presuppose school literacy. To live and deepen piety, as in most places, most parishes were content with communal gatherings where either the head of the family or a student read.

Thus, for the girls brought up in pastoral families, reading was obviously not even an option at that time, and writing even less so, as these weren't the primary skills. And this wasn't only the case in pastoral families, of course. For, as the age demanded, much more emphasis was placed on educating and training girls to be skillful at housework, to be good wives and good mothers. She should be deeply religious and support her future husband in every way. Presumably, these were also the main factors in Miskolci's choice, because when he remembered his first wife in his autobiography, he didn't mention her lack of literacy. Rather, he emphasized her womanly virtues, such as diligence, fidelity, housekeeping, and being a good wife.

At the same time, Miskolci's known to have taught his own daughters, Judith and Zsuzsanna, to read and write. It's noteworthy that he didn't entrust them to a local teacher, but took care of them himself. He taught his daughter himself to read and write. The reason may be that Miskolci sought solace in teaching his daughters after his second marriage had failed.⁵¹ His second wife was Anna Juhos, the widow of a landholder from Debrecen, whom he married in August in 1616. Their marriage grew cold after two months or so after the wedding, and they lived together as strangers until she died in 1622.⁵²

Anna Juhos was the sister-in-law of Máté Szepesi Laczkó. We can assume that she could read and write, so there was no need for Miskolci to teach her. So he taught her daughters, who were just old

⁵¹ Péter K., 2012. 30. p.

⁵² Ritoók Zs.-né (ford.): Miskolczi Csulyak István. 1962. 293. p.

enough to be taught.⁵³ We also have accurate information about his other wives, as far as their names and status are concerned. Dorottya Seres was a widow from Sárospatak. Katalin Gyulai Szabó, was the widow of a merchant from Kassa, András Turi. The last two were pastors' widows. Zsuzsanna Prágai, the widow of Mihály Suri, a pastor from Sárospatak, and Katalin Asztalos, also the widow of István Dobrai, a pastor from Sárospatak.

Thanks to János Herepei, the biographies of several pastors have survived. The data he has compiled is also of great help in my research, as it publishes of marriages as well. He writes about János Dajka Keserői⁵⁴ that, although he was from Bihar County, he finished his schools in Debrecen and got married in the same city. His wife was Erzsébet, daughter of András Béldi, a citizen of Debrecen. His name is also mentioned in the noble letter given to Keserői by Prince Gábor Bethlen. In addition to the two sons mentioned in the letter, they later had a son and a daughter, Nicholas and Elizabeth.⁵⁵

We don't know how large a family István Milotai Nyilas⁵⁶ left behind. About his widow, Kata Bátsi Szegedi, the shafar recorded that on 14th of September in 1624, Mrs. Milotai's properties were escorted by soldiers from Szatmár. Two days later, she had transported her

⁵³ Péter K., 2012. 30. p.

⁵⁴ Reformed pastor, bishop of the Transylvanian Reformed Diocese from 1618 until his death, ecclesiastical writer, court priest of Prince Bethlen Gábor. He was probably born in Érkeserű. He completed his higher education in Debrecen from 1600. He studied in Wittenberg, Marburg and Heidelberg. As a bishop he did much to consolidate the Reformed Church, especially in defending it against the influence of Unitarian ideas. He died on 18 May 1633 in Gyulafehérvár.

⁵⁵ Herepei J.: *Adatok Keserői Dajka János életéhez.* 1965. 82. p.

⁵⁶ Reformed bishop. Born in 1571 in Milota, Satu Mare County. 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, 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 Satu Mare, and from 1614 bishop of the diocese of Tisztántúl. On 24 June 1618 he resigned his episcopal office and went to Gyulafehérvár to become court preacher to Prince Gábor Bethlen. He died there in 1623.

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 that she left behind in Szatmar. The fact that the transport of the widow's belongings was accompanied by soldiers and that the shafar 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 didn't have to wear the widowhood for long time. Soon after taking office, István Geleji Katona,⁵⁷ a court priest, married her.⁵⁸

We have much less information about István Csulyak's son Gáspár⁵⁹ (1627-1699) than about his father. What certain is that he married twice. His first wife was Sára Szentjóby, whom he married during his pastorate in Ónod (1658-1665). His second wife was Zsuzsa Makay.⁶⁰ Seven children, four sons, and three daughters, were born of his marriages. The names of his wives aren't mentioned in the sources.

The life of István Pataki⁶¹ is traced in a study by Sándor Előd Ősz titled *Unknown Pastoral Library from the late 17th Century*. In the

⁵⁷ Transylvanian Reformed bishop, church writer. Born in 1589 in Gelej. He was educated in Abaújszántó, Gönc, Sátoraljaújhely and Sárospatak, and then, with the support of Gábor Bethlen, he studied for 2 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 a Reformed bishop of Transylvania. He died in Gyulafehérvár on 12 December 1649.

⁵⁸ Herepei J., 1965. 70. p.

⁵⁹ 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, after being exiled from there, he was a priest in Szilágysomlyó, later from 1686 in Nagybánya, from 1691 in Magyarigen. From 1695 he served as deacon in Székelyudvarhely. He died there in 1699.

⁶⁰ Ágoston I.: Miskolci Csulyak Gáspár az első magyar nyelvű állattankönyv író. 2005. 145. p. id. 2024.05.14.

⁶¹ 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.

spring of 1675, he took up his pastoral post in Radnót, and married in September 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 6th of October.⁶² 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,⁶³ he remarried on 8th of October in 1686, to Kata Böszörményi Nagy, a bourgeois girl from Kolozsvár.⁶⁴

Sources report two marriages in relation to Pal Medgyesi. Although Károly Császár in his book titled *The Life and Work of Pál Medgyesi*⁶⁵ 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 Várad in 1638.⁶⁶ 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 3th of May 1639.⁶⁷ In connection with the latter, Herepei knows that she was the daughter of István Fodor from Szászvár, who, according to János Kemény, was one of the envoys sent by Rákóczi to Lipa in 1636 to negotiate peace with the turkish Bassa in Buda, and then attended the Diet of Medgyes on 29th of January in 1658 as envoy of Szászváros.⁶⁸

These are extremely important informations, which tell 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 wasn't 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, unlike the second. She

⁶² *Ősz S. E.*: Ismeretlen lelkészi könyvtár a 17. század végéről. 2011. 664. p.

⁶³ She died in 23 April 1686.

⁶⁴ *Ősz S. E.*, 2011. 665. p.

⁶⁵ Császár K.: Medgyesi Pál élete és működése. 1911. 1-121. p.

⁶⁶ Herepei J., 1965. 374. p.

⁶⁷ Ead.

⁶⁸ Ead. 396. p.

came from a Saxon family, his father being in the service of Prince György Rákóczi. She certainly possessed not only all the virtues of a woman but also a good education. What else we know about her is that just like his previous wife, he also gave birth to a child to Medgyesi.

Dénes Dienes' study „*Fragment of the Library of János Tolnai Dali in Sárospatak?*”⁶⁹ tells us that János Tolnai Dali⁷⁰ was the brother-in-law of Sámuel Geleji. For Geleji refers to himself as a beloved brother-in-law (relative) in a book recommendation he received from him. Sámuel Geleji was the son of Gáspár Geleji, a pastor of Szikszó, and Tolnai married his sister. He became related to the Transylvanian bishop István Geleji Katona, whose niece was that girl.⁷¹

We know very little about this marriage, not even the date of the marriage. Perhaps Tolnai didn't spend much time courting either. However, his choice is interesting in any case, if only for the fact that

⁶⁹ Dienes D.: Tolnai Dali János könyvtárának töredéke Sárospatakon? 2011. 469-479. p.

⁷⁰ He was born in Oradea in 1606. He was educated in his native town and then in Gyulafehérvár. From 1631 he spent his years in Peregrine in the Netherlands and England. 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.

⁷¹ Dienes D., 2011. 474. p.

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 to a man who had travelled abroad and had a good network of contacts.

Although the number of sources, and therefore the number of examples presented, is limited, they nevertheless provide an insight into the chosen topic. The Reformation also revised the institution of celibacy on the basis of the *ad fontem* principle. As a result, in the first half of the 16th century, not only in the West but also in our country, reformers and preachers who followed and supported the movement of reformation were already favoring family life. In addition to choosing their wives carefully, they tended to choose them according to the customs of the region and area where they carried out their ministry.

The possibility of becoming literate at this time depended on which social class the person belonged to. In the case of women and girls of the nobility, and later of the bourgeoisie, we can already speak of school literacy in our period. The efforts of the Reformation, however, also tried to involve the poorer class of women in education, which at that time was only manifested in the transmission and acquisition of religious knowledge. It was a long time before school education was opened up to them, and this was only partly facilitated by the activities of the Puritan clergy. These efforts, however, are certainly indicative of the trend which we will see developing more widely in later years.

The sources presented here provide insights into the social status of pastors' wives. Some of them came from a very high social class, such as the second wife of Pál Medgyesi, whose father was an ambassador in the service of György Rákóczi. The widow of István Nyilas Milotai was given a position of trust at the princely court after her husband's death. The fourth wife of Bornemissza was a relative of

Pál Máriássy, deputy bailiff of Szepes. But there are also women who came from landowning, merchant or middle-class families.

The high position of the parents, the high office they had obtained, the prestigious relatives, the aspirations of the upwardly mobile middle class, and the above-mentioned facts suggest that they received a good education in the parental home, which included not only religious education but also school education. Since there is little information on this point in the documents, we cannot say with absolute certainty that our assumption is true for each of the wives, nor, for the same reason, can we say the opposite. Only in the case of Bornemisza's wife do we have sure information that she could read and write. Of course, we don't think that either Medgyesi, Milotai, Bornemisza or Heltai would have chosen wives because of their education.

Coming from a different social class also meant a different education. For a while we've read about István Miskolci Csulyak's first wife that she couldn't read and write, his second wife may have had these skills, as may those of his subsequent wives who were merchant widows. But literacy didn't mean that one was a good wife. We see an example of this in the life of István Miskolci Csulyak. He found much more pleasure in Judit, his first wife, who brought from her parent's home a culture that was of great help to her husband than his second wife's familiarity with her notable relatives and her literacy.

The fact that a wife lived as a member of the lower social class didn't mean that she had no education. Lack of literacy wasn't the same as illiteracy. The 16th and 17th centuries placed the greatest emphasis on the practice and experience of personal piety. For most individuals or families this didn't require school literacy. According to the demands of the time – and this applied to all social strata – the primary tasks of women were outlined around the role of wife, mother, housewife. It's another thing to say that the options for preparing for this have diversified. In this respect, however, parents also tried to ensure that the daughters of the lower social strata received a good education. And perhaps we cannot speak of literacy

in the case of many wives of this age, but we can safely say that they were all gracious and cultured women.

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