

GÁBOR PETNEHÁZI

**AMID HUMANISTIC LITERATURE AND POLITICAL PUBLICATIONS
THE POLITICAL SPEECHES OF FARKAS KOVACSÓCZY (1540-1594) AND HIS DIALOGUE
ON GOVERNING TRANSYLVANIA**

PHD DISSERTATION THESES

ADVISOR: LÁSZLÓ SZÖRÉNYI

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Faculty of Arts
PhD School for Literary Sciences
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Farkas Kovacsóczy was a key figure of Transylvanian political life in the Báthory era between 1578 and 1594. He was a humanist orator, and the author of dialogue on the governing of Transylvania, which according to the scholars is one of the first Hungarian political scripts. Although his oeuvre may not seem to be so exponent from a European perspective, it certainly is significant in Hungarian terms.

The dissertation deals with The Dialogue of Kovacsóczy and three of his speeches written while being a student in Padua and I also try to clarify some of his biographical misunderstandings. The twofold title - humanistic literature and political publications ó is trying to depict the interpretational duality into which his speeches and dialogue so smoothly fit. During my analysis I will focus on traditional humanistic rhetoric, and in the case of the dialogue on the tools of fictional literature. On the other hand I also considered what the political language, speech and type of discourse was at the given time in Europe, and what were the trends in Eastern Europe, especially in Hungary and Transylvania that give us an accurate reflection on the political environment and practice back then.

By the term publication I mean a broad category that incorporated all, so called *litterae* at the time that is today on the edge of literature or is not even considered as part of it, and that is about actual, mostly political news and issues. This kind of early modern literature or publication is so strongly attached to humanism that it is impossible to separate them for two reasons. On the one hand the Latin literary language used by humanists and the related literary styles are the very bearers of this early publication (that is not the least limited to prose, but can be lyrical too, for at the time political sketches or ironic poems were very popular); on the other hand humanistic public, i.e.:

res publica litteraria is the natural environment and audience for whom these are written and by whom it is spread.

The political literature of humanism in Hungary almost completely lacks those major theoretical doctrines that were most common in Italy or Western Europe. The same applies on the works of Kovacsóczy; his texts are mostly practical, and could be interpreted primarily based on their actual political aims. Of course this does not imply that these texts do not relate to antique, humanistic or pre-modern political literature. The further interpretation is dealing with the philological and historical examination of the above mentioned connotations. The tertiary level of research is about the peculiar nationalistic elements of the texts and highlighting the ideas about national independence that has been in the spotlight for some time due to scholars and can be contrasted with the protestant national historical views that make huge impact on contemporary Hungarian identity as well.

The introductory part that includes the introduction of the oeuvre of Kovacsóczy, the historic sources and specific literature is followed by the biographical part in which I investigate five areas. We have limited information about his origins and birth year but it seems to be quite clear that Kovacsóczy's father, who was a land owner, arrived from Pozsega County, Slovenia to Kolozs County, Transylvania where he married the daughter of a local smallholder. Lajos Szádeczky, the only monographic of Kovacsóczy assumed his year of birth was 1540.¹ I accept this approximate year based on his *dedicatio* to Ferenc Forgách in his speech that was published in 1571. In the second part of the biography I deal with Kovacsóczy's years serving Ferenc Forgách, the bishop of Várad, my source being the manuscripts of ÖNB, Vienna. After the ominous splitting

¹ Lajos SZÁDECZKY, Farkas Kovacsóczy chancellor 1576-1594, Budapest, Franklin, 1891.

up with the court in Vienna, Forgách went to Transylvania visiting Padua on his way. In Transylvania he became the follower of Zsigmond János, Prince of Transylvania and later the chancellor of another, István Báthory. Kovacsóczy started his studies in Padua at the time (1567-68) and he gained his title as a professor doctor in 1575. In the subchapter about the Padua years I try to provide an overall picture about the importance of the Padua environment that contributed to his chancellorship later on. The existing records of his university exams are luckily still available and could provide sufficient information on his studies. Based on these data and the list of his tutors it is clear that Kovacsóczy studied medicine, rhetoric and philosophy. In the latter his masters were the famous Giacomo Zabarella next to the Platonist and eclectic fan Francesco Piccolomini who were well known professors among Transylvanians who studied in Padua. At the same time when he was studying there, there were quite many Hungarians learning in Padua: protestant orators, or men who later became bishops (Demeter Hunyadi, György Enyedi for instance), not to mention aristocrats, humanists, and the Kovacsóczy-like ambitious gentry, who wished to get a decent job in court administration.

Kovacsóczy's route to the court was more or less secured at the time of his doctorate. Nevertheless his letters from 1575 prove that he was not so sure about his career after the election of István Báthory as Prince of Transylvania because of the political situation. István Báthory, Prince of Transylvania and the old Kaiser Maximilian both desired the Polish throne that became available in 1574. Maximilian at the same time tried to conquer Báthory's Transylvanian rule by the help of Gáspár Bekes, who rebelled against Báthory. Of course Báthory triumphed, and we find Kovacsóczy in Krakow by May, 1576. The letter he sent to András Dudith, the reputable humanist, his

earlier patron, who was at the time staying in Wroclaw as the agent of the Emperor is existing proof of this. In this very letter he is trying to invite the addressed to the court of Krakow, and at the same time sending a sort of peace offering to the Kaiser from Báthory. As we know, the message reached its target, for Dudith attached this letter to the usual reports and sent them to Vienna immediately, mind you, he never answered it himself.

Between 1576 and 1578 Kovacsóczy was working as secretary of the Hungarian Chancellor in Krakow under his former Paduan schoolmate, Márton Berzeviczy, who also came from the circle of Forgách. With Berzeviczy being away most of the time, we soon find Kovacsóczy the secretary and one of the most confidential devotees of the king, according to the resources, who was given an important role in the enthronement that was organised by Báthory. The successor to be was his nephew, István Báthory junior, whose studies in Padua were followed by Kovacsóczy in 1572-73. In 1578 Báthory sent Kovacsóczy home to Transylvania and made him chancellor there with the intention of keeping an eye on his nephew, and being his advisor, the young prince to be was given the ancient family land and fortress at Somlyó. At the same time he was also supposed to keep his intention for the throne against the wife of Kristóf Báthory alive and make sure that the marriage between him and the daughter of the Swedish King would occur soon which would have been the basis of inheriting the Polish throne. Unfortunately these plans fell through when Báthory junior got married to his choice of love. From 1581 onwards Kovacsóczy found himself in the impasse of an infant prince, the Jesuit mission that was supported by the king, and last but not least the protestant orders.

In the last part of the biography I depict the relation of the chancellor and the Transylvanian Jesuits based on Jesuit resources, focusing on the charges (conspiracy and corruption) that were claimed by István Szántó Arator after the expel of the order in 1588. Kovacsóczy was considered a potential convertible majesty by the the friars of the order (Sunyer, Possevino) in the beginning of the mission and did everything they possibly could in order to win him for their cause of Catholicism. Kovacsóczy handled these attempts with polite Nicodemism: he accepted the books but finally he refused to catholicise openly for which he was accused of insincerity. Based on his role in the actions of 1588 it became possible to conflict the Jesuit resources. There was a personal disagreement between the chancellor and Friar Szántó because the latter threw out the former's children from mess once for which he was questioned after the expel by the general of the order. Szántó compensated this with claiming Kovacsóczy one of the chief ringleaders of the conspiracy, visualised by himself, that lead to the expel of the order.

The following chapter of the dissertation is about the interpretation of Kovacsóczy's three Paduan speeches.

The first one was published in Venice, in 1571 with the title: *De laudibus illustrissimi Stephani Batorei creati vaivodae Transylvaniae*. This speech is the most sophisticated masterpiece of his life that makes a much larger impact on Hungarian political thinking, then the Dialogue. It is an example of one of the earliest claims for Hungarian independence bearing the signs of renaissance virtues and humanistic national rhetoric which unite in the person of Báthory, of course. Its main goal must have been to represent Báthory's Princeship. It depicts Báthory's virtues as a catalogue of traditional Ciceronian politician. It focuses on two specific merits: Báthory's "traditional"

Hungarian military virtue that resembles Spartan attributes and the so called *modestia* that is being illustrated by a unique biblical example as Báthory is hesitating in accepting the throne ó the parallel being the behaviour of Moses and Saul. At the end of the catalogue of virtues he expresses his hopes for the Prince's success in *Opening the gates of Janus and being able to sleep sound;*² which means that national sovereignty is only possible through military action. Sleeping sound refers to the two neighbouring two great powers, getting rid of the impasse of which is the interest of the nation. Another significance of this speech is his illustration of Hungarian history. In his determination *necessitas* and *fortuna* are the two omnipotent forces. States are bound to grow old and therefore they cannot exceed their very own limit in time and space.

The second speech was published with the title: *Oratio in discessum Martini Berzevicei Pannonii ex studio Patavino in patriam* in Padua, 1572. In this Kovacsóczy is bidding farewell to the earlier mentioned Márton Berzeviczy, having completed his studies in Padua, and he also describes his experiences his West European peregrination. At the end of his speech he encourages the addressed to serve his country with the quotation from Petrarch that also appears at the end of *The Prince* of Machiavelli. Kovacsóczy's speech was a sort of covering letter, recommending both writer and subject in reaching their political ambitions. Berzeviczy and Kovacsóczy used the pathetic, humanistic rhetoric of serving the sweet motherland in order to move up the career ladder: that 'sweet motherland' might as well have been either the Monarchy on the Danube, the centre of which was Vienna or the relatively precarious Transylvanian Princeship of Báthory. Of course their attitude in this might have been entirely different from each

² *Multa tua summa prudentia atque praestantissima virtus nobis pollicetur, inter alia autem illud, fore ut te adnitente templum Iani aperiatur, hoc est, ut omni meti liberati, securi in utranque aurem altum dormiamus.*

other that explains the controversy of the tight homeland linked to the elevated homeö country idea which affected most educated humanists. They were both noblemen: for Berzeviczy, who was landprince in Upper Hungarian Sáros County it seemed to be obvious to orient toward the Kingdom, while Kovacsóczy, on the other hand, although he originated from Slavonia on his father's side, he counted as Transylvanian landprince on his mother's, so it was clear for him that his homeland is Transylvania.

The third speech was published in Venice in the autumn of 1573 with the title: *Ad illustrissimum dominum Stephanum Batorem de Somlío vaivodam Transilvaniae*. Similarly to the others this was written with a purpose too: in the summer of 1573 István Báthory decided to call back his nephew from Padua after his three years learning there without gaining any title whatsoever. According to Kovacsóczy's speech the reason of this was none other but young Báthory's lack of interest in sciences. Obviously the matter was very delicate, for as we have seen earlier, Báthory had very high hopes and plans for his nephew. The old prince charged Kovacsóczy with monitoring the young man's studies which he obviously failed to do so. Therefore the reason of the speech was none else but to clear young Báthory and his tutor from under the claim of laziness.

Kovacsóczy delivered the task perfectly well: in his excellent writing he operates with the characteristic clichés of Stoic philosophers that was a rather shallow tool in humanistic terms: all men are destined to fulfil their lives according to their deeds, character and; if they fail to do so they will never be happy and successful. Young Báthory is more interested in military issues than books, and he should not be held up in this but should be encouraged in doing so. Finally he uses patriotic rhetoric saying that

the young man is a true Hungarian bearing the ancient virtues of Hungarian soldiers, thus he is entitled to bring fame and success to his family and country.

After explaining the speeches I attempt to depict their national rhetoric that bears Machiavellian elements, as a peculiar early modern national ideology that might have been an alternative for the protestant national identity of the yeomen. The three most significant elements of the researched early modern Hungarian patriotism and national identity were so far: 1. the idea of ancient Hun relations that developed in the Middle Ages as a common myth of origin for the Hungarian Nation of Nobility (and the related ancient military virtues cited by Kovacsóczy many times); 2. struggle against the Turks followed by success in defeating them and the related idea of *propugnaculum Christianitatis*; and 3. similarly to other European nations, the idea of the chosen nation: in parallel with the biblical Jews, who are entitled to reverse the deterioration of the country as a majestic plan of a cosmic vision. In Kovacsóczy's writings this latter is missing, instead of the chosen nation we find only fortuna and *necessitas*. This kind of modern secularisation is a key element in Machiavelli's works as well, whose impact on Kovacsóczy is obvious. This kind of Machiavellianism paired up with humanistic patriotism must have been typical of the small group of administrative elite of Transylvania. The odd deeds of history are that this very elite which was educated in Padua, was demolished by Zsigmond Báthory, who was preparing for the war against the Turks together with his yeomen, who were the bearers of early national ideas and did not only incorporate all three of the above mentioned attributes but also passed them on to the following generations.

The last part of the dissertation is dealing with the analysis of the Dialogue. The specific literature in the topic gave very little attention to the genre itself. According to Tibor

Klanczay's famous lines, the Dialogue is *the first original political tract in Hungary*. On the other hand, Béla Köpeczi mentions that: *this dialogue is not some kind of a humanistic game that has no other aim but to illustrate an abstract theory according to the highest intellectual quality of the given era. It also differs from those humanistic writings the author of which provided unbiased political advice and recommendation from unimportant positions to princes*. This chapter questions these lines. The first claim is that the genre of the Dialogue is simply dialogue, which indeed was the most peculiar, popular and versatile genre of renaissance literature, the roots of which go back to the Middle Ages and Petrarch. There is only a ballpark number as to how many early modern dialogues there were altogether, but it is most certain that there were more than a thousand. After summarising the directions and types of this ever so popular humanistic genre I move on to explain the ideology of the dialogue.

The theory of dialogue is created in Padua, the environment familiar to Kovacsóczy. From among the theoretical works I highlight Carlo Sigonio's *De dialogo liber*, and Sperone Speroni's *Apologia dei dialogi* that were written in 1562 and 1574 in order to prove that everything that is defined as the requirement of the genre can be found in Kovacsóczy's script. His work follows the dialogue tradition of Erasmus and Lucian. The bucolic frame and names of participants quote Erasmus's *Colloquia*. Another typical attribute of Erasmus and political necessity is the fact that Kovacsóczy is doing his best to keep a distance from his work through his dedications. The two main characters: Eubulus and Philodacus are listing the drawbacks of the institution of regency and – unlike the claims of academics so far – do not consider the questions of state forms nor do they mention that the committee of government should rule in Transylvania. Not that it is necessary of course as at the time of the publication of the Dialogue in 1584 a

government body was in power, which involved Kovacsóczy, that suffered the constant attack of the orders, demanding a regent from István Báthory. So, the dialogue was a kind of an answer given to these requests in August, 1584. It is also clear as we can see it in Kovacsóczy's dedication to Pál Gyulai that there was an earlier version of the script which was read in Niepolomice by Gyulai, who inherited Kovacsóczy's place as Hungarian secretary in Poland. In the meantime in January and February, 1583 there were negotiations in Báthory's hunting castle in Poland with the attendance of Kovacsóczy about the establishing of a three member regency in Transylvania. The first version of the dialogue must have been written for this occasion and was probably more specific about the state forms and a lot more open on the subject of a multi-member regency committee than the final version that was published in Kolozsvár a year and a half later. For this self censoring reason one can see that the script does not contain real state philosophical theories and therefore cannot be compared with any other political writings of its age.

In the very last part of the chapter, that is mostly about the background of the Dialogue, as a result of the above mentioned I outline only those basic theories on a conceptual level that early modern political literature inherited from the antiquities (*honestum-utile; otium-negotium; fortuna-necessitas*) and are visibly illustrated in the Dialogue. Finally I mention -on a contextual level- three possible politico-philosophical circles to which the dialogue can be connected through the person of Kovacsóczy as well: 1. the heterodox immigration of Italy, which was the first and foremost propagator of Machiavelli and modern political literature due to Perna Printing house in Basel, and that had rather good connections in Poland and Transylvania; 2. the immediate effects of Venetian state philosophy which Kovacsóczy obviously came across with in Padua; 3. the political

philosophy of Poland that depended on the previous two and which affected the political thinking of Transylvania as well. These three circles supply a wider context to the dialogue, the strictly practical approach and autonomy of which is therefore beyond dispute.

PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

- ❖ Machiavellizált Erasmus? Kovacsóczy Farkas dialógusa = *Classica, Mediaevalia, Neolatina* 5, szerk. Havas László, Tegyei Imre, Debrecen, 2010, 71-80.
- ❖ Színlelés és rejtőzködés, információ és dezinformáció a késő-renaisszánszban Kovacsóczy Farkas padovai beszédein keresztül = *A varázsgyortól az interkonfesszionális kommunikációig ó információ-történeti metszéspontok bölcsészeti megközelítésben*, szerk. Tóth Zsófia Anna, Szeged, 2011, 108-114.
- ❖ Bevezetés = Rotterdami Erasmus, *Ankril és a házasságról*, szerk. Petneházi Gábor; ford. Benedek Noémi, Gellérfi Gergely, Kasza Péter, Petneházi Gábor, Szabó Ádám, Széles Ágnes, Szeged, Lazi Kiadó, 2011, I-XVI.
- ❖ Erasmo Machiavellizato? Il dialogo di Farkas Kovacsóczy, in: *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Upsaliensis: Proceedings of the Fourteenth International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies*, ed. Astrid Steiner Weber, Leiden, Brill, 2012, 835-845.
- ❖ Kovacsóczy Farkas kéziratok feljegyzései és a XVI. századi Mátyás-hagyomány. Elveszett históriák énekeink nyomában, *Itk* 116 (2012), 281-299.
- ❖ Bevezetés = Rotterdami Erasmus, *Beszélgetések a keresztény vallásról*, szerk. ford. Petneházi Gábor, Szeged, Lazi Kiadó, 2012, I-XVII.

