

**The hymn material of 17th century Unitarian hymn books, and the
16th-early 17th century Protestant tradition of hymn singing**

Theses of Doctoral Dissertation

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I. Introduction

The subject of the present dissertation is the 118 hymns contained in the Unitarian hymn book published in Kolozsvár between 1602 and 1615 (RMNy 983). The purpose of the dissertation is to place these hymns within the tradition of 17th century Unitarian manuscript and printed hymn culture, as well as to provide additional information for the texts published in the 4th volume of the 17th century series of *Régi Magyar Költők Tára*.

Besides this internal comparison with the Unitarian tradition, another objective was to contrast the Unitarian version of the hymns with the Protestant hymn tradition, and to explore some of the seemingly tendentious changes occurring in the Protestant hymn tradition from the 16th century to the first third of the 17th century, and to draw the relevant conclusions.

The initial impetus for the present research was to test the database of 17th century Hungarian verse, which is currently a work in progress. For one of the fundamental points of RPHA 17 was that instead of singling out a main, or primary text as “the poem” which we deem to be particularly relevant for some reason, each textual variant would be recorded as an individual poem involved in a particular relationship with each other variants of the text, but at the same time capable of carrying certain individual marks as well, which will become clear in the case of almost all the songs pertaining to the corpus investigated here. My main purpose was to test whether the rule of RPHA 17 to individually record each of the textual variants was a sound principle, producing new results in exchange for the extra workload.

The basic research method applied here is a comparative publication of the different textual variants. This means that a modernised transcription of the textual variants of the 118 songs is provided in main text, and the comparison is carried out in the forms of footnotes highlighting the differences in earlier and some later printed and manuscript song books. The texts published together with their Protestant variants served as the basis of the analysis.

The selected material, the material of the Unitarian song book published in Kolozsvár between 1602 and 1615 seemed to deserve further research for several reasons. One of this is the general neglect toward the Unitarian hymn tradition in comparison to other Protestant denominations, which can be observed in monographs and articles investigating the hymn tradition, and the related collections.

On the other hand, there is a growing demand within the research on Unitarian church that besides the inquiries into the intellectual, cultural and philosophical background of the

movement, aspects of the rite, the service, and the organisation of the communities also be explored, and the material of the current research fits into this trend.

Based on a comparative analysis of the 118 hymns, the paper explores the rules governing textual changes within the Protestant song tradition, and tests whether such rules equally apply to the Unitarian material, and whether the Unitarian song tradition possesses any peculiarities in comparison to the Protestant tradition. Since the status of the hymn should also be investigated, sometimes tendencies pointing towards collective poetry have also been considered in the course of interpreting the changes affecting the hymns' texts.

II. Printed Unitarian hymn collections in the 17th century

This chapter offers a bibliographical description of the Unitarian hymn and funeral song collections, as well as the prayer-songbooks for private use which were published in the 17th century, and introduces certain pieces of new information besides the already known facts. The Unitarian hymn book RMNy 983, which was, according to scholarly consent, published between 1602 and 1615, is claimed here to have been published in 1616, based on arguments from print history and other contemporary external documents. Another claim is that this hymn book, as well as other editions of Unitarian hymn books are in several respects, like their structure, and the range of the songs included, connected to the Calvinist song book published in 1602 by Imre Újfalvi, and they also fit the requirements for hymn books as they were established in Újfalvi's famous preface.

In this chapter, I argue that the maculature RMNy 1615 is the fragment of a previously unknown Unitarian prayer/song book that was published in 1635. I also touch the dating problems concerning funeral song books, as in my opinion, the song book publishing practises of Unitarians help us in narrowing down the supposed time span of publication.

III. The printed and manuscript sources used for comparison

The majority of the texts discussed in the dissertation are already found in sources before the current document (that is, in sources before 1616). Therefore, the dissertation reviews those printed and manuscript sources, from the mid-16th century to the first decade of the 17th century, which contain a variant of the hymns discussed. Besides the review of critical evaluations and bibliographical information, this led to a number of new claims about some of the sources (mostly about the manuscripts).

In connection with the *Bölöni-kódex* (1615-21, S 30), an inquiry is made as to what kind of impact did the visitation by János Keserői Dajka, and contemporaneous (1619) events in Háromszék produce on the textual variants of the hymn. Until 1619, the scribe (who is, in my opinion, György Köpeczi) is reproducing consistently adorantist textual variants which might be suitable for all the Protestant denominations. From 1619, the codex is written by a new scribe, Zsigmond János Bölöni, who records textual variants representing the more radical non-adorantist Unitarian viewpoint, and in the same vein, even corrects the previously recorded hymns.

Based on still extant information, it is argued that the majority of the now unavailable *Vasady* codex (1614-15k., S 27) was clearly composed in the circle of the Kolozsvár Unitarian college.

In connection with the *Csonka antifonálé* (1607-32, S 143) I try to show with a number of examples that it must have been composed before the publication of the 1632 Unitarian hymn book, since in its structure, arrangement, and some textual variants, it is quite similar to the 1632 edition, but in certain textual variants, it relies on the earlier edition.

IV. Identical incipit and textological connections: the unique location of the sung hymn

Conventionally, the transmission of old Hungarian verse texts, and the connection between the different variants are mapped with the help of stemmas relying on Lachmannian principles. In the case of sung hymns, however, it cannot be neglected that continuous use rendered these texts subject to change, and this variability is much higher than in the case of texts transmitted only in written form. Therefore, when comparing the remaining printed and manuscript sources, the sung nature of these texts must be considered. A significant portion of the dissertation tries to show examples of how the texts of these hymns live in their variant versions within certain denominations, and sometimes, there is variation even within certain congregations. This is why I adopted Gabriella H. Hubert's method of networked relationships in the investigation of the textual tradition of the sung hymns, since the method takes into account the changes caused by the sung nature, and thus, probably offers an explanation for the greater variability.

V.Characterising the variants

The textual modifications of Protestant sung hymn tradition were examined from the aspect of apparatus (conventions regarding the titles and the song notations), as well as certain prosodic, poetical, rhetorical aspects. Generally, the tendentious changes show that by the 17th century, the printed tradition of sung hymns tries to employ a structure that is as clear as possible. Most of the changes affecting the texts are usually driven by the sung, tonal nature.

V.I. Changes regarding the apparatus and the paratexts of the sung hymn tradition

In my definition, paratext and apparatus covers primarily the titles and the song notations, but to a certain extent, I also took into account the structural divisions of hymn books.

As for the conventions regarding title-giving, I made a distinction between Psalm-type and non-Psalm-type hymns. In the case of the Psalm-type, in the mid-16th century it is customary that the titles in the hymn books often contain the numbering according to the Vulgata, together with the Latin incipit, but there is a palpable attempt on the editors' part in the latter half of the 16th century to change this to the Protestant numbering, and they often get rid of the Latin incipit, too. The first hymn volume containing complete Protestant Psalm numbering is the Unitarian hymn book dated between 1602-1615 (RMNy 983).

Hymns of the non-Psalm type are initially equipped with long titles referring to the occasion, function and the content of the song. This tends to get shorter by the end of the 16th century, and by the 17th century, more concise titles are dominant, and often, there is nothing else but the *Más [Else]* distinction between the songs.

Another observation is that – except for the Lutheran editions following unique German patterns – the structure of the song books are also simplified by the beginning of the 17th century. Probably the Unitarian version is the simplest of all: the 1632 song book contains even the Psalms in an alphabetical order, not in the ascending order of the Psalm number.

Besides the song notations, the Protestant song books from 1560-61, printed in Óvár, Kassa, Debrecen, still contained musical scores. The scores disappear from the editions during the century, but the song notations are also shaped tendentiously. It can be observed that already the song books published in Debrecen toward the end of century make changes to the earlier song notations, introducing versions which accord with the number of syllables in the given song. This is particularly true to the 1602 Debrecen edition by Imre Újfalvi, which also

eliminates secular references to beautiful histories (széphistóriák), which slowly vanish from song books. The 1632 Unitarian song book is clearly trying to follow these rules, and in the majority of the 118 songs, uses song notations with identical number of syllables as the song. Here I also mention that the 1632 edition makes numerous references in the song notations to those Psalms by János Thordai which in turn refer to the very same songs. Such cross-references were obviously intended to facilitate everyday use.

In my opinion the changes of the apparatus can be explained by the fact that by the 17th century, it was not only the chanter and the choir who held a book in their hands, but more and more members of the congregation, too, and thus editors had to strive for simplicity, as it was important that the believers quickly find the song based on the said incipit, and that the song notation refer to some already known song.

V. II. Variation of hymn texts: some observations

The comparison of the specific texts of hymns shows that certain poetical-rhetorical features (like the number of strophes) are prone to change in a given edition or manuscript not only within one denomination, but even within the same congregation.

V. II. 1. The colophon

Changes concerning the colophon are discussed at the beginning of the chapter because the conventional closing strophe of old Hungarian poems is, in fact, a transitional space between paratextual elements and the other, more organic elements of the main text. A number of examples are used to illustrate the process during which, by the end of the 16th, beginning of the 17th century, the classic form of colophon referring to the authorship, or the location, the date, and the author of the poem, gradually give way to a new type of strophe set containing a summary of the hymn. In certain cases, this strophe set includes doxology, whereas in Psalms, it usually contains a strophe referring to the Psalm. Popularity and the regular singing of the texts make the referential aspects disappear.

V. II. 2. The persona of the singer: Sg.1 and Pl.1.

One unique feature of sung hymns is that they are collectively performed in the church by believers. It does not, however, directly follow that all these songs would use the 1st person plural form (*we*), representing the community, since the majority of Psalms contain David's

song and/or prayer, which are uttered in the 1st person singular. With a number of Unitarian textual variants I try to illustrate the attempt at transforming the whole collection of Psalm songs into 1st person plural, which was probably an attempt at reinforcing the communal nature of the texts. These variants, however, do not endure within the tradition.

V. II. 3. The use and the role of acrostics in the hymns

Based on my observation, it is claimed that the mnemotechnical use of acrostics in sung hymns is surprisingly rare. Most of the songs appear in the tradition with an already corrupted acrostic, and no attempt at a reconstruction can be identified, even though the editors, printers, copiers involved are well-versed in the use of acrostics.

V. II. 4. Replacing, removing and inserting strophes in the variants of hymn texts

A number of reasons may lie behind the removal and insertion of strophes in different sources. First, in the case of removals, there is an obvious inclination to abridge and simplify the text, but on the other hand, there are examples where a new strophe is inserted because its dogmatic content is in line with the religious principles of the given denomination, while sometimes strophes undermining the same principles are removed.

V. II. 5. The change of rhyme and rhythm in the hymns

It might be a logical assumption that just like acrostic, rhyme and rhythm might be thought of as another support for the memorisation of the song and a facilitator of singing, however, these features again reveal rich variation within the extant sources. A number of examples show that sung hymns often contain texts without rhymes and feature great variation in the number of syllables.

The chapter also discusses the formulation of the *szava-sava-tava-java* rhyme group, in which the hymns have also played a role.

V. II. 6. Changing sense in the hymns: corruption, emendation, modification

The dissertation only lists a number of examples illustrating the different reasons and the different manifestations of changes affecting sense of the text in the hymns.

VI. Dogmatic differences in the Unitarian material

Since in terms of dogmatic content, the Unitarian variants show the greatest distance from the Calvinist and Lutheran hymn variants, the dogmatic features of the Unitarian sources are discussed in a separate chapter. Based on a comparison of printed and manuscript variants, I have come to the conclusion that neither the Complaint of Dézs, nor other bans led to either the mitigation or the radicalisation of the dogmatic content of the hymn books, and no universal set of Unitarian dogmatic and theological rules has come to emerge, and there is no universal hymn tradition of such a nature either.

The communal distribution and the variability of the texts are, on the other hand, illustrated by the fact that manuscript variants often provide a variant representing a different stance than any of the printed versions, even though the copier obviously relies on the printed tradition. It is an important fact, however, that generally, Unitarian printed editions feature less radical variants than the manuscript sources.

VII. Texts only known from Antitrinitarian sources

VII. 1. The Psalms of Miklós Bogáti Fazakas within the Unitarian tradition

In this chapter, I discuss those Psalms of Bogáti Fazakas which were included in the printed Unitarian hymn corpus. Based on statistical evidence, I claim the falsity of the general critical observation according to which the popularity of Bogáti Fazakas's Psalms was constantly waning. The hymn book from 1602-1615 contains 12 Psalms by Bogáti Fazakas, and 11 of these are included in the 1632 hymn book as well. The only Psalm to disappear uses a metric form that is unique in 16th-17th century literature, and which is thus difficult to sing, and also, its text contains elements not fitting the official views of the Unitarian church concerning contemporary music accompanied by instruments. In my opinion, it is this, and not the declining popularity of Bogáti Fazakas, that led to the disappearance of this Psalm.

VII. 2. és VII. 3. Polish Psalm translations in the Unitarian tradition, and some anonymous Psalms only known from Unitarian sources

The hymn book composed between 1602-1615 contains several translations of Jan Kochanowski which are only transmitted within a Unitarian environment. I argue here that the Psalms are featured in a position within the Unitarian hymn book where the Calvinist hymn book of Imre Újfalvi, published in Debrecen, usually contained Psalms by Mihály Sztárai. These, on the other hand, are virtually absent from the Unitarian material. Based on a poetical-rhetorical analysis of the Kochanowski translations supplanting Sztárai's Psalms, I

cite a number of examples revealing that most of the anonymous Psalms only featured in Unitarian collections share some of the poetical-rhetorical features (like the unique use of the acrostic, or the anaphoric/cataphoric structure, elisions) of the Kochanowski translations. Either these can be attributed to the same author, or the existence of a unique composition technique, emerging in the environment of Unitarian colleges can be assumed.

VIII. The Balassi tradition in the early printed and manuscript material

A significant portion of the dissertation tried to show that the principal reason for the textual variance of the hymns is to be located in the attempts at fixing and systematising the tradition, but at the same time, the sung nature also causes a number of changes.

Since the Unitarian song books contain the earliest printed Balassi-variant, it was necessary to take a look at the early Balassi tradition (before the printing of *Istenes énekek*), which showed the same tendencies of variation.

The early variants of *Ó, én kegyelmes Istenem...*, *Pusztában zsidókat...*, *Bocsásd meg, Úristen...*, and *Adj már csendességet...* were compared to the later variants included in the printed edition of the *Istenes énekek*, and it turned out that the sources from the first three decades of the 17th century contain such variants turned into collective, sung poems which are not featured in any of the subsequent editions of the *Istenes énekek*. Therefore, they cannot be regarded as a source of these.

I also tried to point out that the majority of the scarcely available sources are directly or indirectly connected to the Chancellery operating in Kolozsvár in the first third of the 17th century, and to the Unitarians of Kolozsvár. Therefore, it might be a legitimate supposition that the *művelt, irodalomkedvelő férfiú* [cultivated man in favour of literature], who received several texts by Balassi (and Rimay?) was János Petki, but later these texts began to live their own life, they were disclosed, became popular, and the Unitarian congregation sung it, and sung it to the level of de(con)struction.

IX. Summary, further research possibilities

Although the dissertation examined only a small portion of the tradition (118 sung hymns), already this proved that the cooperative research group involving Szeged–Budapest–Pécs–Kaposvár made a wise decision when choosing variants as the basic recording unit of the database. Since the majority of 16th-17th century verse literature is either theological in nature,

or popular as sung hymn, the previously drafted changes will probably be reflected in those texts as well. Therefore, considering the many instances when texts leave behind the typical features of old Hungarian poetry, it would be not only difficult, but sometimes probably irrational to choose a main text.

The birth of RPHA 17 will hopefully lead to surveys where the different variants of hymns can be examined on a much larger scale based on variants deemed as equally relevant, and which pay close attention to the medial peculiarities of the texts, and consider the sung nature an important factor contributing to the variability of the text, which in turn might lead to the identification of tendencies applying to the larger corpus.

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