

Lessons from a Book in Alba Iulia Tamás Balásfi: *Epinicia*, 1616

Alinka AJKAY

Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Department of Hungarian
Literature and Language

ajkay.alinka@btk.ppke.hu

ORCID: 0000-0001-6399-4362

ABSTRACT

The only complete copy of Tamás Balásfi's *Epinicia Benedicto Nagi* known today is preserved among the old books at the Batthyaneum in Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár). This work was published in Pozsony in 1616. According to current knowledge, only three copies of this small volume, consisting of about forty pages, have survived. The copy in the Hungarian National Library is missing the entire first sheet (A), including the title page and dedication, as well as two pages from the end. This small book is particularly significant for the study of Péter Pázmány's controversial writings before his archbishopric, representing the final piece in a series of polemics (1614–1616) written against the Lutherans of Western Transdanubia. Pázmány became archbishop in 1616 and was either unable or unwilling to continue engaging in this controversy, leaving Tamás Balásfi to conclude the polemic on his behalf. At the end of this paper, I will provide a transcription of a missing part from the Budapest copy: the Latin dedication at the beginning of the book.

Keywords: Péter Pázmány, Tamás Balásfi, Catholic-Protestant controversy, polemics, theology, Catholic Reformation

The only complete copy of Tamás Balásfi's *Epinicia Benedicto Nagi* known today is preserved among the rare books at the Batthyaneum Library in Alba Iulia.¹ This work was published in Pozsony (present-day Bratislava) in 1616, printed by the Archbishop's printing house. As far as is known, only three copies of this slim volume, comprising around forty pages, have survived. The copy held by the Hungarian National Library is missing the entire first sheet (including the title page and dedication) and two pages from the end (Balásfi 1616). This

1 National Library of Romania, Batthyaneum, Alba Iulia, Title: B 3 IV.19.

modest book holds particular interest for the study of the life and work of Péter Pázmány, the preeminent Hungarian Baroque polemicist and later Archbishop of Esztergom.

Polemical works constitute a substantial portion of Pázmány's *oeuvre*. Nearly forty of his writings were published, encompassing twenty-six distinct works, as some were reissued multiple times by Pázmány himself. His polemical writings are best understood in relation to their intended audience and the specific works he engaged with in dispute. Each controversy typically unfolded as a series, with Pázmány responding to a particular work and often prompting further replies. One of his principal argumentative strategies was to always have the last word, leaving no challenge unanswered.

The *Epinicia* is part of a series of polemics directed against the Lutheran preachers of Western Transdanubia,² and it serves as the final piece in this series. In 1613, Pázmány published his *Kalauz* [A Guide to Divine Truth], a monumental work nearly a thousand pages long in its first edition. This edition (reprinted two more times during Pázmány's lifetime, in 1623 and 1637) incorporated nearly all of his earlier writings, making it Pázmány's most extensive, multi-thematic work. Following the publication of the *Kalauz*, he engaged in debates with those who challenged it. The *Kalauz* prompted Protestant scholars both to refute it and to articulate their own beliefs and principles in greater detail, often through translations of foreign works.

In 1614, the Lutheran preacher Imre Zvonarits of Csepreg translated Matthias Hafenreffer's *Loci theologici, certo methodo ac ratione in tres libros tributi* (Jena, 1601) (Hafenreffer 1614). (Hafenreffer was a Lutheran theologian at Tübingen.) Benedek Nagy, a schoolmaster from Kőszeg, wrote a preface (*Praefatio*) endorsing this work, and therein launched an attack on Pázmány's *Kalauz*, as Pázmány had previously written against Hafenreffer. Later that year, Pázmány published his response under the pseudonym Miklós Szyl (Pázmány 1614).

The counter-response arrived swiftly: in 1615, Benedek Nagy and Imre Zvonarits published their joint work, *Pázmány Péter Píronsági* (Zvonarits–Nagy 1615), a substantial volume that, in addition to theological arguments, contained numerous personal remarks. At the end of the book, readers find four Latin and three Hungarian satirical anagram poems targeting Pázmány and his *Kalauz*.

In 1616, Pázmány issued his rebuttal, *Csepregi szégyenvallás* (Pázmány 1616), printed in Prague under his own name. Throughout this text, Pázmány's anger is palpable; the somewhat patronizing yet jovial sarcasm that marked his earlier *Csepregi mesterség* is notably absent. Instead, he counters his opponents' points with rigorous theological arguments, supported by extensive annotations.

In 1616, the year Pázmány became Archbishop, he either could not – or chose not to – dedicate more time to this controversy. For

2 For more on the Debate of Faith, see Ajkay 2021, 69–82.

instance, he did not respond to the satirical poems mocking his name and the *Kalauz*; instead, this task was taken up by Tamás Balásfi, one of Pázmány's most devoted followers. Balásfi, born about a decade later than Pázmány in Cluj (Kolozsvár) and also from a Protestant noble family, eventually became Bishop of Bosnia, then of Vác, and later of Pécs. He lived and wrote in Pozsony until his death in 1625. An active participant in Pázmány's polemical struggles, Balásfi was entrusted by the newly appointed Archbishop with editing several of Pázmány's works.

In this West Transdanubian controversy, Balásfi published two volumes following Pázmány's polemical writings, ultimately concluding the debate. His first work, a nearly five-hundred-page rebuttal to the *Csepregi iskola* (Balásfi 1616), harshly critiques each Lutheran thesis, following Pázmány's approach and employing extensive annotations. This book, published in December, reflects Balásfi's knowledge of and reliance on Pázmány's earlier *Csepregi szégyenvallás* from the same year (1616). In his introduction "To the Christian Reader", Balásfi praises Pázmány, asserting that no one in the nation has done more, or more valuable, work for the defence of the Mother Church.

Balásfi's argumentation mirrors Pázmány's, adopting his style and even incorporating popular or amusing vernacular expressions, sarcasm, and vibrant language – albeit in a somewhat more forceful, even coarse, tone. He justifies his contribution by stating that it is beneficial to defend the truth from multiple perspectives. His primary goal is to demonstrate that the preacher in Csepreg, Imre Zvonarits, contradicts core Lutheran beliefs. Accordingly, he methodically refutes each point made by Zvonarits and Benedek Nagy.

While *Csepregi iskola* was primarily directed at Imre Zvonarits (as shown by the 36-page preface addressed to him), Tamás Balásfi's other book, published in 1616, was aimed at Benedek Nagy. Titled *Epinicia Benedicto Nagi*, this work is much shorter, around forty pages, and contains verse intended as mockery. Balásfi returned the favour for the satirical anagrams mocking the Archbishop by composing similar verses himself. The book includes fifteen Latin anagrams, forty-seven Latin epigrams, and nine Hungarian anagrams fabricated in the name and person of Benedek Nagy,³ as well as a Latin poem criticizing Lutheran followers of Hafenreffer in general.

In the Hungarian introduction for readers, Balásfi mentions that the Lutherans were planning to translate Pázmány's *Kalauz*, originally written in Hungarian, into Latin. Their aim was to send it to Wittenberg so that professors there could respond authoritatively. It was already widely known within Pázmány's circle that this translation was underway. While the identity of the translator of Pázmány's *Kalauz* into Latin remains uncertain (and the translation itself is not extant or known), we do know that Bishop István Klaszekovics received inquiries

3 The poems in Hungarian can be found in volume 8 of the 17th century series of the RMKT (Komlószi-Stoll 1976, 216-218).

from Erzsébet Czobor, wife of Palatine György Thurzó, about the progress of the translation, which was still incomplete as of February 1620. Hungarian students later brought it to Wittenberg in June of that year (Gyurás 1987, 392-393). In 1622, the Wittenberg professor Friedrich Balduin began composing a response, which was published in 1626 under the title *Phosphorus veri Catholicismi*. From Balásfi's introduction, we learn that one of the Latin translators of the *Kalauz* was indeed Benedek Nagy.

The Hungarian copy lacks the Latin introduction at the beginning and two anagrammatic mocking poems at the end. The introductory dedication is addressed to György Hetesi Pethe, son of Baron László Hetesi Pethe, commander of the Upper Hungarian armies and chief bailiff of Torna County. László Hetesi Pethe played an instrumental role in Pázmány's election as Archbishop of Esztergom in 1616, and his wife, Anna Kapi, had requested that Pázmány write his *Imádságos könyv* in 1606. In 1616, György Hetesi Pethe was still a young man of great promise and would later marry Zsuzsanna Balassa of the Colony.

In the dedication, Tamás Balásfi expresses his high regard and friendship for György Hetesi Pethe, describing their shared admiration for Pázmány. Balásfi explains that he did not originally intend to engage in verse, as he saw no need to address the attacks on the Catholic Church and its esteemed leaders. Nonetheless, he decided to respond in kind so that "these fools" would not believe their criticisms held any weight. Balásfi's purpose was to prevent an "unskilled poet" and his ignorant supporters from taking satisfaction in their poems, which had targeted an unparalleled scholar like Pázmány. Thus, he counters with "poems for poems and anagrams for anagrams," not to provoke further attacks but to show that any opposition would be met with the same rigor in every genre. He suggests that Benedek Nagy will meet a fate similar to that of Péter Alvinczi, who also attacked Pázmány insolently and received a fitting rebuttal.

This statement underscores Balásfi's critical role as Pázmány's assistant during this period. The second controversy with Péter Alvinczi (the first occurring in 1609) coincided with Pázmány's disputes with Lutheran preachers in Western Transdanubia. In 1614, Pázmány published two treatises against Alvinczi (Pázmány 1614a; 1614b), leaving the printing and final revision of the second to Balásfi, as he was preparing for a trip to Rome. As a result, Balásfi was intimately familiar with these texts and concluded the debate with Alvinczi on Pázmány's behalf. Similarly, he closed the dispute with the Lutheran preachers of Csepreg, not only editing Pázmány's works but also contributing two of his own.

The introductory text sheds light on the chronological sequence of publications from that year, as Balásfi notes in the dedication, dated April 28, that "the real rejoinder" had already been prepared in Prague and would soon silence the "constantly shouting brat" (referring to Benedek Nagy). This indicates that Pázmány's second reply, *Csepregi szégyenvallás*, was published in the early months of 1616.

The Latin dedicatory letter is signed “Thobias Benedictus Eleemosynis Extitit Beatus”. While challenging to interpret, the initials TBEEB can be deciphered as *Thomas Balásfi Electus Episcopus Bosniensis*, or “Thomas Balásfi, Elected Bishop of Bosnia”. The Hungarian initials BTBP similarly stand for *Balásfi Tamás Bosnian Püspök* (Bishop) (Frankl [Fraknói] 1868, 159). Pázmány used a similar notation in his work against Calvin’s *Institutio* (Pázmány 1609), with the abbreviation S.T.D.P.P., which stands for *Sacrae Theologiae Doctor Petrus Pázmány*. His work *Öt szép levél* (printed in 1609), written against Péter Alvinczi, appeared with the same notation.

The following text is entirely absent from the Budapest copy. Vilmos Fraknói previously referenced the Alba Iulia copy, but he too only knew of it second-hand, based on another’s account (Frankl [Fraknói] 1868, 158-159). Every component of this small book is significant: the poems are vital to the history of lyric poetry in Hungarian and Latin, while the preliminary texts offer insight into the religious debates of the period. Tamás Balásfi’s role is particularly noteworthy in Pázmány’s early controversies, as he was the only known figure to actively participate in these debates alongside Pázmány. The Archbishop’s trust in him was evident, as he entrusted Balásfi with the final press-editing of his own text. Given the rarity of the Alba Iulia publication, it is valuable to present the missing portion here in transcription.

{A2:} SPECTABILI, AC MAGNIFICO IVVENI,
DOMINO, GEORGIO PETHE, DE HETES, DOMINO,
IN ORMOSED, SZADUARA, RUSSO, KIS TAPOLCZIAN, ET
EBERHARD, DOMINO, ET TANQUAM FRATRI DILECTISSIMO:
foelicitatem precatur a Domino.

NON fuit vnquam, animus meus, Nobilissime
Iuuenis, cum Tricone isto, et valde rudi Koezegiensi
Magistello, carminibus altercandi, praesertim vero,
cum foeces istas hominum, quae in dehonestandam
Ecclesiam Catholicam, turpandosque viros
sapientissimos, irritis conatibus effunduntur, tantum
illis nociturae, quantum sordes aliae, Solaribus
radijs, naturae meae, quodam quasi ductu, mirum
sit, quam facile semper contempserim. Sed quoniam
tam altis, et crassis, ignorantiae tenebris, Lutherus, et
Calvinus, haeredes suos inuoluerunt, vt vel ea, quae
et virgis, digna sunt, et verbere, si tamen ab illis, in
nos, quocunque impu-{{A2v:}}dentiae, mendaciorum,
et fraudum genere, confingantur, et conscribantur,
apertae statim veritatis nomine, pulcherrimae artis
laudibus, publicatione, honore, quin et munere
ornanda, et compensanda censeantur a Lutheranis,

et Calvinistis: ad quae si taceamus non quia pueriles illorum ineptias, tyrocinia, et nugas contemnamus, sed quia respondere illis nesciamus, arbitrantur, atque ita qui stulti sunt, magni sibi videntur sapientes.

Ne itaque plus illi, quam nos, vel de solis profundiorum disciplinarum corticibus, habere videantur, (nihil enim habent illarum succi) quo, ego, hoc est, corticum nomine, voces, et verba intelligo, et orationem, siue solutam, vt vocamus, siue certis metrorum legibus colligatam, quae similitudine quadam sicut corticibus arbores, earumque medullae obducuntur, ita humanam ambiunt rationem, eiusque quasi medullam, et vitam, omnes disciplinas: ea tamen vicissim dissimilitudine, vt non sicut arbores corticibus insunt, ita Philosophia, vel Theologia dictioni, et scriptioni, sed illarum domicilium in spiritualibus animae facultatibus est constitutum: scriptis autem, et oratione tanquam instrumentis vtimur sensus nostros explicandi: ne inquam insulsus Literator, et Poetaster Paedagogus, magno scilicet {A3:} Anagrammatum, aliorumque suorum carminum artificio, quibus doctissimo, atque incomparabili viro, Petro Pazmany insultat, in voluptatem suam gaudeat, ne inter pares suos, aequae atque ipse est, commodos ad lyram, in vulgo scilicet Praedicantico, inter applaudentes ipsi, nobisque obmurmurantes Magistras, et Praedicantissas, inter dignas operculis patellas, gloriatur, habet pro carminibus carmina, habet Anagrammata pro Anagrammatibus, non quia illis, quibusdam quasi irritamentis, homulum Epicureum, frustra in nos furore suo debacchantem, in maiorem rabiem velim exacuere, sed quo exemplum capiat, nihil nobis esse facilius, quam omni liberalium artium, artificiorumque genere praestare et Lutheranis, et Calvinistis, et quo verbosa doctrinae simulatio, hac quoque ratione castigetur. An, non ita pridem, locutuleius ille antea, iam vero victus, et mutus Alvincius, simili propemodum insolentiae genere, non obganniuerat Pazmanio? responsum accepit pro conuicijs, non conuiciantis, sed qui ostenderet, quam parui apud nos negotij esset, et quam triuiale, verba verbis connectere, etiam si subiicienda sint metrorum legibus quam apud aduersarios quedam quasi summa est omnis illorum doctrinae: rerum enim, quarum cognitionem non habent, inopiam, verborum {[A3v]:} pompis, quamuis ne illis quidem accommodatis, ad praecepta eloquentiae, tegunt, et dissimulant.

Fit itaque cum hoc ludibundo Paedagogo, quod factum est, cum indocto Praedicante Cassouio, vt, quam in verbis, victoriam quaerunt, Pazmanianae Philosophiae, atque Theologie mancipia, Lutheranismi, et Caluinismi Administri, etiam verbis confusi, conuincantur, et pro pari culpa, imparibus opinationibus, ad rauim vsque ad rixas, ad pugnos, et pugnas, inter se dissidentes, parem quoque poenam experiantur, quam si non luerent, fierent in profunda barbarie, quotidie insolentiores.

Offero itaque tibi, non aequandum generi tuo, aut indoli, sed quod amore metitus sum tuo, munusculum, amore inquam tuo, plane et in me, et in illum singulari, quem sordentes istae Muscae, sibimet ipsis nociturae, et consumpturae semet ipsas, tanquam Candelam, in haeresum tenebris lucentem, et nimium stulte, et impudenter circumuolant. Ex quibus, ridiculus hic Soce, cui subiectis carminibus, nasturtium porrigo, sub nominibus

puerorum, quibus ille perdendis, operam suam diuendidit, ex carminificina sua, turpissimorum quorundam carminum sordes, in Solem Pazmaniani nominis effudit, cuius splendore, et calore, etsi vel nullo purgante {[A4]:} consumerentur, refundendae tamen fuerunt statim in Latrinam, vnde profluxerunt, vt iusto rerum ordine, foeces quoque, suo redderentur receptaculo.

Ridebis, et quidem non indigne, sat scio, bene carminatum, hunc carminificem, nescientem quo se vertat sub verberibus: sed virgis istis flagella succedent, Pragae iam comparata, quibus, Bone DEVS, quam fortiter, quam egregie castigabitur, clamosus, et insolens Verbero, nullam vel hiscendi amplius securitatem quocunque perfugio, reperturus.

Tu interim, et me, et illum cuius causa vapulat malus Soce, dilige, et magnum, optimumque Parentem tuum, cuius viua imago esse debes, totis viribus imitare, vt Vir ille, magnis dignitatibus ornatissimus, quem, fidei Catholicae constantia, et Zelus, morum grauitas, virtutumque omnium abundantia, singulariter vero, maximis in rebus probata fidelitas, Sacrae Caesareae, Regiaeque Maiestati, tam charum fecit, te, non tantum nominis, et opum suarum, haeredem esse gratuletur, sed et omnis virtutis; imo vero, Familiae quoque tuae, tantique Patris, memoria, te succrescente, et superstite, tuorum etiam {[A5]:} meritorum monumentis, et incrementa capiat, et ad

seram vsque posteritatem propagetur. Vale. Posonij
die 28. April. Anno Domini 1616.

Tui

Amantissimus

Thobias Benedictus Eleemosynis

Extitit Beatus.

Summary

In conclusion, the text and study presented above contribute significantly to the limited knowledge available on Tamás Balásfi's *Epinicia*. Although item 1118 of the RMNY (*Régi magyarországi nyomtatványok* [Bibliography of Old Hungarian Printed Works]) notes that the only complete copy of the work is located in the Alba Iulia and cites some missing parts from the Budapest copy, the Pázmány monographer Vilmos Fraknói and, following him, Károly Szabó also discuss the volume held in the Batthyaneum. However, for the broader Hungarian scholarly community, only the incomplete copy in the National Széchényi Library in Budapest is digitally accessible via the oszk.dk and Hungaricana RMK (*Régi Magyar Könyvtár* [Old Hungarian Library]) collections. For this reason, the availability of the full text of the Alba Iulia volume is particularly significant.

Bibliography

- Ajkay, Alinka. "»Morgók nyelveskedése« – Pázmány és a nyugatdunántúli evangélikusok" [»The Murmur of Discontented Men« – Pázmány and the Lutheran Preachers of Western Transdanubia]. *A dialógus formái a magyar régiségben* [Forms of dialogue in Old Hungarian literature], edited by Farmati Anna and Gábor Csilla, Egyetemi Műhely Kiadó – Bolyai Társaság, 2021, pp. 69-82.
- Balásfi, Tamás. *Csepregi iskola, kiben, az Lutheranus es Calvinista praedikátoroknak tanusagokra, es teuelegésekből való ki térésekre, az Csepregi szitok szaporító morgó Praedikátort, az igaz hűt ellen, és Pázmány Péterre való hazugságiértis, az igaznak ióra tanító ostorául Iskolázza* [Csepreg School, in which the Author, in Order to Educate Lutheran and Calvinist Preachers and to Deflect Them from Their Creeds, Educates the Preacher of Csepreg with the Scourge of Truth for Lying Against the True Faith and Against Péter Pázmány]. Pozsony, 1616a.
- . *Epinicia Benedicto Nagi, alias Soce Ludi Köszeghiensis, sui nescio, sibimet nocenti, vetulo, sed nimium rudi, ignaro et diabolari Paedotribae, cantata*. Pozsony, 1616b.

- Borsa, Gedeon et. al., editors. *Régi magyarországi nyomtatványok II, 1601–1635* [Bibliography of Old Hungarian Printed Works II, 1601–1635]. Akadémiai Kiadó, 1983.
- Frankl [Fraknói], Vilmos. *Pázmány Péter és kora, I.* [Péter Pázmány and His Era]. Ráth Mór, 1868.
- Gyurás, István. “Pázmány Kalauzának latin fordítása és a wittenbergi válasz.” [The Latin Translation of Pázmány’s *Kalauz* and the Response from Wittenberg]. *Pázmány Péter emlékezete* [Memory of Péter Pázmány], edited by Lukács László et al., Editrice Detti, 1987.
- Hafenreffer, Matthias. *Az szent irasbeli hitvnk againak bizonyos moddal es renddel, harom könyvekre valo osztasa* [The Division of the Doctrines of Our Holy Scriptures, in a Certain Manner and Order, in Three Books]. Translated by Zvonarits Imre, Keresztúr, 1614.
- Komlowszki, Tibor, and Stoll Béla, editors. *Bethlen Gábor korának költészete* [Poetry of the Age of Gábor Bethlen]. Régi Magyar Költők Tára (RMKT) [The Poetry of Old Hungarian Poets]. Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976.
- Pázmány, Péter. *Az nagi Calvinus Ianosnac hiszec egi Istene* [The Great John Calvin’s Creed], Nagyszombat, 1609.
- . *Az calvinista prédikátorok tüköre* [The Mirror of Calvinist Preachers], Vienna, 1614a.
- . *Az igazságnak győzedeleme* [The Triumph of Truth], Pozsony, 1614b.
- . [Miklós Szyl]. *Csepregi mesterség, azaz Hafenreffernek magyarrá fordított könyve eleiben függesztet leueleknek, czegéres czigánysági, és orczaszégyenítő hazugsági* [Mastery of Csepreg, i. e. the Immeasurable Lies of the Letters Appended to the Front of Hafenreffer’s Book Translated into Hungarian]. Vienna, 1614c.
- . *Csepregi szégyenvallás. Az az reovid felelet, melyben az Csepregi biusagoknak, Köszegi tóldalékit, verőfényre hozza* [Confession of Shame from Csepreg. A Short Reply, in Which He Reveals the Additions to the Vanities of Csepreg]. Prague, 1616.
- Zvonarits, Imre, and Nagy Benedek. *Pazman Peter pironasagi. Az az: azokra az szitkos karomlasokra, es orczatlan pantolodasokra, melyeket Szyl Miklos neue alat Hafenreffer tudos Doctornak könyve eleiben függesztet leuelek ellen, all-orczassan ki bocziattot vala: derek felet. Melyben, nem chak az csepregi Mestersegnek neuezet nyelues czielcziaipasi, torkaban verettetnek, de meg az ő Cziauargo Kalauzaanak, csintalan fártellij, es hazug czigansagijs rövid bizonyos ielekből, mint egy vilagos tükörből, ki nijlatkosztatnak, Irattatot az együgyűeknek Hasznokra, es Az mi magunk artatlansaganak tiszta mentsegere.* [Péter Pázmány’s Shameless Claims]. Keresztúr, 1615.

Author's profile

Alinka Ajkay is an habilitated associate professor at the Institute of Hungarian Language and Literature at Pázmány Péter Catholic University. Her main research interests include 18th and 19th-century Hungarian literature, the process by which Hungarian became an official language, the intertextuality of poetic forms, the history of 19th-century Hungarian lyric poetry, the life and works of Péter Pázmány, Pázmány's treatises, and 17th-century religious controversies.