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The Praise of Josephinism in the Czech-Language Work of Ladislaus Bartholomaeides*

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Abstract: Ladislaus Bartholomaeides published his *Rozmlauwání Josefa Druhého s Matěgem Prwnjm Korwýnus řečeným* [A Dialogue between Joseph II and Matthias I, Called Corvinus] in Prague in 1790, the year of the death of Emperor Joseph II. Employing the popular genre of posthumous dialogues, he drew parallels between the reigns of King Matthias I (Hunyadi) and Joseph II in Hungary, casting the latter's controversial decrees in a more favourable light. In his work, Bartholomaeides foregrounds a sequence of rulers — Saint Stephen, Louis the Great of Anjou, Matthias, Vladislaus II and Joseph II — who, in his view, shaped intellectual discourse in both Hungary and Bohemia. According to Bartholomaeides, all of these monarchs spoke either Czech or Slovak, with the latter serving as the language of their imagined conversation. This linguistic emphasis functions as a commentary on the eighteenth-century context and the complex ethnic relations between the Kingdoms of Hungary and Bohemia, which were linked by a personal union. As a Slovak intellectual, Bartholomaeides adopted Czech as the medium through which to advocate for the domestic policies and reformist agenda of the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II, King of Hungary and Bohemia. His unwavering support for the emperor and his effort to equate Joseph's reign with that of Matthias — one of the greatest kings of the Hungarians — reflect a broader pattern of loyalty among Slovak intellectuals to Joseph II.

Keywords: Ladislaus Bartholomaeides — eighteenth century — Josephinism — Czech and Slovak languages — Habsburg monarchy — intellectual loyalty

In the Kingdom of Hungary and in Transylvania from the turn of the eighteenth century, church-employed intellectuals perceived a significant shortage of secular scholars and sought to fill this gap. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, faced with an insufficient number and an inadequate composition of trained experts, the Catholic and Protestant clergy increasingly turned their attention to secular sciences and various crafts, alongside — or at times even in place of — dogmatics, polemical writing, and devotional literature. Hungarian literary historians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, following the lead of Andor Tarnai, refer to these successive generations of pastors as secularising church intellectuals.¹ The *oeuvre* of Ladislaus Bartholomaeides (1754–1825), a Lutheran pastor, historian and philosopher from Mártonháza (today Ochtina in Slovakia), offers a particularly clear example of this process of secularisation.²

1 TARNAI 1964; TARNAI – CSETRI 1981.

2 BARTHOLOMAEIDES 2013; RESTÁS 2015; RESTÁS 2023; BRTÁŇOVÁ 2022.

In the mid-eighteenth century, the Habsburg Empire, governed according to the principles of enlightened absolutism, sought to modernise its centralised state apparatus and enhance its efficiency. The management of both state and private economies required highly educated intellectuals with a modern, secular training.³ As the state introduced reforms, it increasingly confined the church within the framework of its secular institutions, thereby weakening the influence of the Papacy and the Jesuit Order. In 1773, Maria Theresa dissolved the Jesuits, placed church-run schools under state supervision, and expanded the network of state schools. Through this decree, she ensured that well-educated Jesuits either entered the secular clergy or pursued specific secular intellectual professions. Among the Protestant clergy, it remained characteristic for pastors to cultivate scholarly interests and to produce scientific works alongside their ecclesiastical duties. Not only intellectuals of ecclesiastical background, but also burghers and the lesser nobility became specialists in various scholarly fields or crafts.

With the accession of Joseph II to the throne in 1780, the process accelerated. As an uncrowned king, he was not bound to guarantee the preservation of the estates and their traditional rights. His Edict of Tolerance of 1781 authorised Lutherans, Calvinists, Unitarians, and Orthodox Christians to practise their religions freely. His Language Edict of 1784 sought to promote the unity of the Habsburg Empire by introducing German as a uniform official language. Although his modernising reforms, inspired by Enlightenment principles, were rational in intent, they completely disregarded the centuries-old order, traditions and customs of the empire's various lands and nationalities. His efforts were welcomed by a significant number of Protestant Josephinist intellectuals, predominantly of burgher or peasant origin, but not even they could support all his measures, reacting with dismay to some of them. The wave of demonstrative protests that accompanied the revocation of his decrees and his death produced an exceptionally forceful manifestation of the Hungarian nobility's national ideology.

During the reign of Joseph II, Bartholomaeides likewise aligned himself with Josephinism. In 1790, the year of the emperor's death, he published *Rozmlauwánj Jozefa Druhého s Matěgem Prwnjm Korwýnus řečeným* [A Dialogue between Joseph II and Matthias I, Called Corvinus], which made his position explicit.⁴ Literary historians have long been familiar with Bartholomaeides' contributions to geography and the regional studies of Upper Hungary,⁵ but his interest in history, cultural history, and politics as well as his writings associated with these fields have only recently been assessed in detail by Erika Brtáňová in her edition of the above-mentioned work.⁶ This pioneering volume offers an eighty-page introduction to Bartholomaeides era, *oeuvre* and reception, and to the specific text itself, followed by a bilingual edition (in Biblical Czech and modern Slovak) with annotations and a biography of Bartholomaeides.

Bartholomaeides adopted the popular genre of the dialogues of the dead, originating with Lucian, but employed it not for satirical ends but for laudatory ones. By drawing parallels between the reigns of King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary and Joseph II, he sought to introduce Joseph II and his reforms to the Slovak public and promote their acceptance.

The historical tradition associated with King Matthias had remained vibrant for centuries — in Humanist historiography and at aristocratic courts, which embraced

3 On the intellectual aspects of these processes, see KOSÁRY 1980.

4 Both Slovak and Hungarian research into book history assumes that the book was printed in Besztercebánya (today Banská Bystrica in Slovakia) and that the Prague imprint on the title page was used only because of the sensitive nature of its subject. This assumption is supported by the fact that the author's other works were printed within the Kingdom of Hungary. Slovak scholarship, however, has also suggested that the author may originally have intended to publish the work in Prague.

5 BARTHOLOMAEIDES 2013.

6 BARTHOLOMAEIDES 2022.

such works,⁷ as well as among the lower classes, who preserved the memory of the folk hero through oral tradition.⁸

In the mid-sixteenth century, Hungarian Humanist philologists feverishly sought to locate writings from the reign of King Matthias. This wave of publications began with the representative Humanist Latin narrative of the five-hundred-year history of the Kingdom of Hungary, written by Matthias' court historian, Antonio Bonfini.⁹ The manuscript of Galeotto Marzio's collection of anecdotes about the Renaissance ruler, entitled *De egregie, sapienter, iocose dictis ac factis Matthiae Serenissimae Ungariae regis*, was discovered at Nyaláb Castle (now Korolevo in Ukraine) and published by the Humanist Sigismundus Gelous Torda in Vienna in the summer of 1563.¹⁰ In early modern Europe, these two works essentially constituted the principal sources of information on Matthias's reign. The history of Bonfini's repeated editions is well known; Galeotto also appeared in such representative collections of Hungarian historical sources as that of Bongarsius (Frankfurt, 1600).¹¹ In search of the direct source used by Bartholomaeides, the most significant fact in the history of Galeotto's reception is that in 1746, his work was included in the first volume of Matthias Bel's Viennese collection of historical sources under the same title as Bongarsius' work (*Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum*). Galeotto's text was issued here, with a preface by Bel, by Bel's disciple Johann Georg Schwandtner (1716–1791). In Bartholomaeides' dialogue, Joseph II himself mentions the existence of a book recounting Matthias' witty sayings and deeds. Although he does not name the author, Bartholomaeides is undoubtedly referring to Galeotto's work as published by Schwandtner. Bartholomaeides may also have learnt of it from Pál Wallaszky (Pavol Valaský, 1742–1824), a fellow pastor in the nearby parish of Jolsva (now Jelšava in Slovakia) and his predecessor as the dean of the Gömör diocese. Wallaszky has already published a monograph on literary life at the court of Matthias (*Tentamen historiae litterarum sub rege gloriosissimo Matthia Corvino de Hunyad in Hungaria*) in 1769. By 1785, he had also completed the first version of a synthesis of Hungarian literary history (*Conspectus reipublicae litterariae in Hungaria ab initiis regni ad nostra usque ad tempora delineatus*).¹²

Although Bartholomaeides refers to Galeotto's work without naming the author, he never quotes it or recounts any of its stories. The characteristics that he employs in the portrayal of Matthias are not derived from Humanist literature; during the seventeenth century, Humanist writings about Matthias had been transformed into popular genres, including calendars. A recurring item in the chronological compilations printed in calendars was the claim that on the very day when King Matthias died in Vienna, namely on 6 April 1490, his lions in Buda also perished. This story originates in Bonfini's text, but by the eighteenth century, it had become so widespread that it may well have circulated orally. The figure of King Matthias appears in South Slavic oral traditions, as well as in Czech, Slovak and Ruthenian epic poems and tales. Folklore has essentially preserved stories of Matthias travelling around the country in disguise and becoming involved in various instructive and humorous episodes — motifs that are entirely absent from the works of Bonfini and Galeotto. Hungarian literary historians have yet to trace the precise origins of these narratives, which can only be documented from later folklore collections. This popular tradition may lie behind a story in Bartholomaeides' dialogue that resembles the Hungarian folk tales known collectively as 'the cantor of Cinkota'

7 RITÓÓKNÉ 2002.

8 KRÍZA 2000; KRÍZA 2007.

9 BONFINI 1936–1976.

10 MARZIO 1934.

11 BONGARSIIUS 1600. Among his other publications, it is worth noting that in 1611, Johannes Bocatius, known as a Humanist poet and practitioner of *ars historica*, published Galeotto's work in Kassa (now Košice in Slovakia), which was subsequently reprinted in Vienna in 1723. In 1783, this Latin Humanist text also appeared in Hungarian translation in the second volume of the collection *Magyar könyv-ház* ('Hungarian Library'), edited by the former Jesuit János Molnár.

12 BÁTORI 2014; BÁTORI 2015.

(*cinkotai kántor*),¹³ or the tale of the Ottoman envoy frightened by cannonballs during the siege of Wiener Neustadt. The presumed origin of these popular elements drawn from oral tradition can be traced in another of Bartholomaeides' stories as well. He claims that the place in Liptó County where King Matthias — who, he says, maintained good relations with his Slovak subjects — hunted and feasted was named King's Mountain (Kráľová hoľa, Király-hegy, Slovakia) after the ruler. Kráľová hoľa, situated at the watershed of the rivers Váh, Hron, Hornád and Hnilec, is of exceptional significance in Slovak historical tradition and has inspired numerous authors. It is, for instance, the setting for Andrej Sládkovič's (1820–1872) *Detvan*. According to Slovak popular belief, Matthias himself carved his name into stone there, while another tradition speaks of this carving as a humorous Latin inscription (*Hic fuit Matthias rex, comedit ova sex*). In any case, no such inscription has ever been found. What is certain, however, is that Slovak folk tradition regarded King Matthias as its own, and the memory of the ruler remained vivid. All this provided a suitable foundation for Bartholomaeides' aim of establishing Joseph II in the Slovak public consciousness as a ruler comparable to Matthias — a benevolent monarch who sought the welfare of his subjects.

There is a story in the dialogue whose origin can indeed be traced back to Bel, although not to the *Scriptores*, but to another of his undertakings. In their series *Notitia Hungariae novae historico-geographica*, which served as the principal model for Bartholomaeides' description of Gömör County (1806–1808), even providing its title, Bel and his associates compiled the geography, history and statistics of the counties of the Kingdom of Hungary and included historical data related to Matthias. The story of King Matthias' acquaintance with Miklós Toldi derives from this source. According to the consensus of Hungarian historical tradition, the famously strong Toldi was a knight of King Louis I the Great; this is how his life and deeds were recorded in an epic poem by Péter Ilosvai Selymes in the sixteenth century and in an epic trilogy by János Arany (1817–1882) in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁴ However, the 1742 volume of Bel's *Notitia*, devoted to Nógrád County, preserves an alternative tradition, according to which Miklós Toldi was a knight of King Matthias.¹⁵ Bartholomaeides undoubtedly drew on this source; consequently, his Matthias recounts the story of the hero who lifted a long stake as though it were a light stick as a deed of one of his acquaintances.

Bartholomaeides was not the first to draw a comparison between Matthias and Joseph II. The first Hungarian periodical, the *Magyar Hírmondó* [Hungarian Herald], printed in Pozsony (today Bratislava in Slovakia), published in one of its March 1784 issues a poem in which József Péczeli the Elder (1750–1792), a Calvinist pastor from Komárom, paid tribute to Joseph II on St Joseph's Day. According to Péczeli, the ruler — who worked for the good of the Hungarian people and did not shun the lower classes — himself remarked that the news of his efforts to eradicate harmful practices and promote beneficial ones would soon be spread by word of mouth, just as people then spoke of the deeds of Matthias: *Meg mondtá, hogy Mátyást így veszi ki szánkából* (He said that Matthias would thus be taken from our lips). Indeed, in terms of praise, gratitude and blessings, the two kings were already regarded as one: *Két ilyly jó Királyok szívünkben nem férnek* (Two such good kings cannot fit into our hearts).

However, before we become captivated by the image of a monarch who is equally beloved by his Hungarian and Slovak subjects, it must be noted that the language question is addressed in a highly unusual way in Bartholomaeides' dialogue — from a Hungarian perspective, one might even call it offensive and provocative. At the beginning of the dialogue, when the former rulers of the Kingdom of Hungary (St Stephen, Louis I the Great, Matthias Corvinus, Vladislaus II Jagiełło and

13 JÓKAI 1992, pp. 51–53, anecdote No. 70.

14 ILOSVAI 1979; ARANY 1951.

15 BOROVSKY 1911.

Joseph II) are seeking a common language in which to converse, it is Matthias himself who suggests to Joseph — who would rather speak German — that they all speak Slovak (*slowensky*) instead.

When considering Bartholomaeides' view of the languages of the Carpathian Basin, the following context must be taken into account. Until 1844, Latin served as the official language of the Kingdom of Hungary. In Bartholomaeides' dialogue, however, Joseph II declares that he dislikes speaking Latin and regards German as more suitable for continuing the conversation. This view reflects the historical struggles of Josephinism for empire-wide modernisation, most notably the 1784 decree prescribing the use of German. This measure was sharply rejected by the counties of Hungary, and even Josephinist intellectuals could not fully support it. In the dialogue, Matthias likewise remarks that although he himself speaks German, the other rulers participating in the conversation do not. In 1790, a significant proportion of the Hungarian nobility and intelligentsia — including those with Josephinist sympathies — began to protest against the use of German and demanded the official adoption of Hungarian. After Joseph's death, this discontent grew into a national demonstration. The issue was kept alive by figures such as Bartholomaeides' contemporary in Upper Hungary Ferenc Kazinczy, who moved from Josephinism towards the radicalism of the Jacobin movement. Nevertheless, it was only after the turn of the century that Kazinczy produced a work of epistemic significance — also intended as a political statement — arguing for the full suitability of the Hungarian language for the conduct of official state affairs (1808).¹⁶ In Bartholomaeides' fictional dialogue from 1790, however, no one even considers speaking Hungarian or proposes its use. Among the Slavic-speaking and Slovak-identity intellectuals living in the northern territories of the Kingdom of Hungary, the promotion of Hungarian provoked feelings of aversion similar to those aroused by German among the Hungarian-identity population. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Protestant population of Slovak identity in northern Hungary unanimously used the Czech language of the Kralice Bible as the medium of written public communication; on the other hand, within the Catholic Church, there were growing efforts — beginning with Péter Pázmány's initiative in the early seventeenth century — to employ an orthography reflecting the local Slovak language.¹⁷ In the Czech-language dialogue of the Lutheran Bartholomaeides, the rulers ultimately agree to converse in the '*slowensky*' language.

What exactly does the '*slowensky*' language proposed by King Matthias for their conversation signify? Matthias refers to it as the language of his beloved '*Liptóer*' people — i.e. his followers in Liptó County (who, as shown above, lived at the foot of Kráľová hoľa). This implies that it must be a regional Slavic language spoken in Lower Hungary (the western part of the northern region of the historical Kingdom of Hungary). At the same time, Matthias demonstrates his own knowledge of this language by noting that he learnt it during his captivity in Bohemia, used it with his first, Czech wife, and long entertained ambitions for the Czech throne. This language — Czech — was also familiar to Vladislaus II Jagieľlo, who ruled a Czech–Hungarian personal union. For him, therefore, the simple words '*dobře, dobře*' suffice to express agreement. This casual usage, albeit highly unusual at the Hungarian royal court, had already been recorded in the sixteenth-century chronicle of Gáspár Heltai¹⁸ (an abridged and adapted Hungarian version of Antonio Bonfini's Latin work), and it was from this that Vladislaus acquired his common epithet in Hungarian historiography (*Dobzse Ulászló*). Louis I the Great accepts the proposed language on the grounds that, after the Hungarian crown, he also acquired the Polish royal throne towards the end of his life. In other words, the supporters of the chosen common language describe it simultaneously as

16 AJKAY 2018.

17 KÄFER 1959; KÄFER 2001a; KÄFER 2001b; KÄFER 2009; KÄFER 2016.

18 HELTAI 1981.

a Slovak regional language and as a Czech and Polish literary vernacular. Joseph, too, accepts the use of the proposed language. For him, however, it is not a matter of personal attachment but of practicality, because members of the Habsburg ruling family were consistently taught as many languages of the empire as possible well into the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, the most interesting statement is yet to come. It is made by King (Saint) Stephen I, the founder of the Kingdom of Hungary, the perennial point of origin for the Hungarian noble estate, and the embodiment of Hungarian national sovereignty. Although he does not name it explicitly, Bartholomaeides clearly alludes to the spirit of the *Admonitions*, a work attributed to Stephen, which teaches respect for the country's linguistic diversity and emphasises its contribution to the stability of the realm.¹⁹ What Stephen I says in the dialogue — namely that non-Hungarian speakers ('*Slowáci*') perhaps supported him even more than his own Hungarian kinsmen — echoes the Slavophile strand in the long-running debate over the primacy of the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Hungary, a debate that had been intensifying from the seventeenth century and gained particular prominence in the eighteenth. In the dialogue, Saint Stephen declares that in his actions, he did not follow the traditions and morals of his Hungarian ancestors but instead embraced what was truly worthy and praiseworthy in German and Slovak traditions. Within the logic of the dialogue, it is thus entirely natural that he speaks the proposed Slavic language — whatever its precise nature may be.

Joseph reinforces the value judgement expressed and followed by Stephen by noting that, during his own mother's reign, it was observed that the laws of Saint Stephen had themselves been adapted from Frankish legislation. With this remark, we reach the pivotal statement of the dialogue, which defines Bartholomaeides' position and his interpretation of all the foregoing. The scholar who established this textual relationship during the reign of Maria Theresa is not named in the dialogue. It was, of course, the Jesuit Károly Péterffy (1700–1746) who, in 1741, in his seminal work on canon-law history examining Hungarian church synods and legislation,²⁰ concluded that Saint Stephen's laws had been created by closely adopting the decisions of the synod of Mainz of 847. At this point, what matters is neither the identity of the discoverer nor the fact that contemporary international scholarship soon confirmed his finding.²¹ What is significant is the person who — also during the reign of Maria Theresa, in 1764 — was the first to use this philologically recognised historical fact to make a statement about current politics. In so doing, he provoked such a scandal that, at the request of the Hungarian estates, the empress was compelled to ban his Latin-language work, and he himself ceased to be a political force in Hungary. The Hungarian estates' appeal — made as they were preparing for a diet and centred on the state's reliance on the freedom of the estates as codified in István Werbőczy's secular-decree — was invalidated by the former Jesuit Ádám Ferenc Kollár (1718–1783), a member and later head of the court library.²² He achieved this by demonstrating that the founding king had acted not on the basis of national traditions, but solely on the basis of principles and legal provisions chosen by his own will, as a single, sovereign legislator.²³ The

19 HAVAS 2004.

20 PÉTERFFY 1741–1742.

21 Beginning in 1747, the work *Vita Sancti Stephani regis Hungariae*..., which had been compiled by the Dutch Jesuit Jan Stiltinck (Joannes Stillingus, 1703–1762), incorporating Latin and Greek sources, was printed on several occasions in Hungary — in Győr, Kolozsvár (today Cluj-Napoca, Romania), and Kassa — as a representative publication marking the examinations of Jesuit students.

22 For the debate on the Slavophile convictions and political activities of Ádám Ferenc Kollár, see DÜMMERTH 1966; DÜMMERTH 1967; SZIKLAY 1967.

23 KOLLÁR 1764. This was the first scholarly monograph on Saint Stephen in the modern sense, written in the spirit and with the expertise of the Bollandists. Kollár's work does indeed refer to the Frankish synodal origin of Stephen's laws, but without mentioning Péterffy by name. The direct source that Kollár consulted was, in fact, a more recent edition of earlier publications of the synodal decisions, the *Concilia Germaniae* series by the Cologne Jesuit historian Hermann Joseph Hartzheim (1694–1763), which makes no reference to their application in Saint Stephen's Hungary but merely publishes the Frankish texts.

absolutist ideal, which he had been commissioned to elaborate by political actors in Vienna, was wholly incompatible with the Hungarian nobility's appeal to their historical rights. Kollár and his colleague, the Lutheran József Benczur (1728–1784), a teacher in Pozsony, were repeatedly tasked throughout their careers with similar assignments — namely to promote Habsburg political interests through their work as historians and archivists. Kollár became one of the most effective ideologues of imperial patriotism, a doctrine that transformed the historically eminent leaders of the empire's various national communities into heroes who, although not ethnically Austrian, were recast as Austrian in the imperial sense: instead of representing their homeland and origin, they embraced dynastic interests and endorsed Austrian-German political measures with unwavering loyalty.²⁴ A striking feature of the conception shared by Kollár and Bartholomaeides was its radicalism: it included Saint Stephen, the founder of the Hungarian state, among such heroes.

Notwithstanding this, Kollár's personal identity presents a more complex picture than that of an imperial patriot serving the ideology of the Austrian state. He revealed his Slavic identity only rarely — in a rather peculiar way, for instance, in the notes to his edition of the Humanist text *Hungaria* by Miklós Oláh (Nicolaus Olahus).²⁵ Yet this Slavic identity was the driving force behind his persistent insertion of elements pointing towards an Austro-Slavic conception beneath the idea of an Austrian-dominated imperial unity and the absolutist means of centralisation that supported it in Vienna. These notions of a Slavic-tinged ideology, mediated through August Ludwig Schlözer of Göttingen, exerted an influence that reached as far as Herder, who famously envisaged the death of the Hungarian nation and the dissolution of the Hungarian ethnic group in the surrounding Slavic sea. In 1773, Kollár's Vienna-based *Allergnädigste privilegierte Anzeigen* published an entire series on the history of the languages used in Hungary — Latin, German, Slavic and Czech, to which Hungarian was added only in 1775. Concerning Hungarian, he immediately clarified that it had never in fact been a language suitable for national or state use, a role that had always been fulfilled by Latin.

The fact that Bartholomaeides' dialogue does not — even briefly — entertain the possibility that the Hungarian kings might use the Hungarian language in their conversation is clearly the result of Kollár's influence. This influence may have reached Bartholomaeides through his teacher in Késmárk (today Kežmarok in Slovakia), Benczur.²⁶ Consequently, Bartholomaeides' view — as reflected in the colourful medley of the dialogue — is striking: at a time when even the suitability of the Hungarian language itself was still regarded as a hypothesis to be demonstrated rather than an established fact, he believed that the *slowensky* language was perfectly adequate for rulers to conduct their conversations. In his opinion, moreover, this was not a novel proposal but rather a fundamental principle inherent to the Hungarian state from its foundation by Saint Stephen. Slavic intellectuals of the period, inclined towards Austro-Slavism, regarded the Vienna-induced weakening of the estate-based Hungarian polity as an opportunity for the strengthening of the nationalities living within the kingdom and for the public use of the Slovak language.

24 At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Joseph Hormayr was already the leading ideologue of imperial patriotism; his *Archiv* (1824) included a German-language excerpt of Galeotto's eulogy of Matthias.

25 OLAHUS 1938.

26 DÜMMERTH 1966, p. 404.

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