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## INTRODUCTION

### THE PASSION CYCLE OF THE OBSERVANT FRANCISCAN SCHOOL OF CSÍKSOMLYÓ

*The Franciscan heritage.* In Hungary, the Jesuit and the Piarist school theatre stopped performing religious, especially devotional pieces, right in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; only Franciscan schools kept the tradition: fully, in the Observant Franciscan monastery of Csíksomlyó (in South-East Transylvania, Romania), and partly in Minorite schools. (See data in: Kilián 1994; Staud 1984-1988; Staud-H. Takács 1994; Kilián-Pintér-Varga 1992.) About half of the published Hungarian Minorite dramas, as well as the data, of the 18<sup>th</sup> century focus on devotion, thus they belong to the complex genre of mystery plays. These allegorical mysteries, morality plays, parables, and passion plays recall the medieval tradition. The fact that the Minorite passion plays are very similar in view, aspect, and purpose to those of Csíksomlyó, might call our attention to a special Franciscan heritage. (The bulk of Minorite texts come from the Transylvanian Kanta, not far from Csíksomlyó, so a mutual influence is plausible. This mutual contact is still to be justified, though we have some proofs already: in a Minorite passion play we found the text of a Csíksomlyó fragment. See: *Minorita iskoladrámák* [Minorite School Dramas], No. 5.)

As opposed to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Catholic school theatre repertoire, Csíksomlyó plays were written in verse (i.e., the more archaic form), and only some plays of the very last years switch to prose.

*The manuscripts.* The manuscript collection of the Observant Franciscan monastery at Csíksomlyó includes an extremely interesting drama corpus. The dramas were copied in three large volumes between 1774 and 1780: *Liber exhibens actiones parascevicas ab anno 1730 usque ad annum 1774 diem Aprilis 27* (containing 48 dramas between 1721–1774), *Actiones Comicae* (1773–1780, with 7 dramas), and *Actiones Tragicae* (1775–1780, with 6 dramas) and there are also some smaller boxes and collections of manuscripts. (On Observant Franciscan school theatre, see Pintér 2003.)

*Liber exhibens* has its own interesting history. Most probably, young students were ordered to copy the texts, in a hurry, because of having gotten news about a serious control of their school; that is why the teachers must have wished to prove their excellent work with the copies of the dramas produced in the previous decades. The manuscripts were first mentioned

in 1862, but the first description of them was published at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the edition of the texts was also decided. By 1914, eleven dramas were published, but then, as after World War I Transylvania became part of Romania, there was no time, money, and researcher to do the work. After World War II, the Communist regime took over all church schools and institutions, but by that time the manuscripts were already lost, or, thought to be lost. The Franciscan fathers hid their most precious books and manuscripts from the front approaching to Transylvania in 1944. They found two excellent hiding places: in the pedestal of the statue of the Miraculous Virgin Mary in their church, and the other part of the treasury was walled up in the dining hall. The treasures were re-discovered in the early 1980s, no one knows whether accidentally, or, possibly the eldest fathers did not want to take the secret with them in their tomb. (See the story and the bibliographic listing of all the books and manuscripts in *Muckenhaupt* 1999.) The manuscripts were restored and, after the political changes took place in Central Europe, the Observant Franciscan order got back their monastery (there is no school any more), and our team was granted the possibility to work there.

*The performances.* One might call the corpus a *cycle* since from 1721 a play (most often in the vernacular) on Christ's Passion was performed every year, exclusively on Good Friday, sometimes on other days of the Easter period. The tradition lasted till the early 1780s. Only two dramas survived from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, but no other trace of the tradition or heritage could be found. The passion cycle seemed to arise from nowhere and then disappeared. On the other hand, these passion plays show the typical medieval characteristics basically unchanged from the early Eastern Christian age. If we follow the development of Western passion play tradition, we can identify the Csíksomlyó cycle with the type of passion plays that was flowering in the 13-15<sup>th</sup> century and was rooted mainly in the new Franciscan spirituality and mysticism (*Sticca* 1988, 108.). The purpose in Csíksomlyó was similar, too: a deep devotion, forcing the audience to take part in the recollection of the Lord's Passion.

*The purpose of the passion plays.* These performances were partly typical, religious school productions, partly an occasion for penitence and mourning for the Catholic population of the region. (Csík has always been a Catholic stronghold, as it is a Catholic region within the Calvinist population of the whole Harghita county.) It was never connected to the Easter liturgy. Most often they were performed in the school, but in several years, the performance took place in parts (i.e. in pieces of the cycle) at the *stations* of the Calvary. (Accordingly, there are plays divided not into *scenas*, but into *statio*s. Cp. *Kedves* 1999.) The authors did not simply want to teach and deeply affect the audience (which was presumably the main task of

the Western performances), but they wanted the audience to get involved in the performance and probably the play itself. Many songs were inserted, and the audience was singing together with those on the stage. All the songs inserted in the plays were popular religious songs of the age, though, by now, we can identify only a part of them. We must remember the unique collection of songs (*Cantionale Catholicum*) partly composed, partly collected by the 17<sup>th</sup> century Csíksomlyó Franciscan monk, János Kájoni (1629/30?-1687); a lot of his chants can also be found in many of the passion plays. (See: *Kájoni* 1676, 1719, 1805, 1921; *Domokos* 1979.) The chants, laments and prayers inserted in the plays create a special atmosphere, and call for the audience to get involved, not only as an audience but as a player, or sometimes even as an author, too. Quite a few dramas contain mainly two types of declamations: one, a call for penitence, recited – or sung – by an Angel, and another, a planctus of penitence recited (practically responded) by the Sinner, repeating the motifs listed by the Angel. At this point the performance might change into an active “happening” formed together by the student actors and a part of the audience.

*The structure and aspect.* All Csíksomlyó plays start with a prologue and end with an epilogue. The prologue calls attention to sins and the need for penitence, lists the scenes and explains the typological connections of the play, often emphasizing the fact that the play is not for entertainment. The authors show exceptional Biblical and theological knowledge, as they inherited a method of thinking quite unknown for the present reader: the complex view of the history from Creation to Doomsday through typological symbolism. This, again, shows a close link to the Western tradition. The epilogue usually sums up the plot, and repeats the thoughts of the prologue.

According to the plot we may have four groups:

1. The Passion proper;
2. The Passion combined with typological symbolism;
3. Parables;
4. Morality plays with or without the Passion.

*The Passion proper* corresponds to the most frequent definition of the Passion: the plot is composed of the last week of Christ's life. Chronology starts with the Ministry of Christ. The most frequent scenes are that of Mary and Jesus in Bethany, Judas's betrayal, the trials with Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate, the death sentence, the torture of Christ, Judas's self accusation in a monologue, and then his suicide, the Crucifixion and the death of Christ, and finally the scene of the mourning Virgin, the women and Joseph of Arimathaea (often Nicodemus) under

the Cross. Some typical medieval themes and scenes are completely missing, e.g., the *Harrowing of Hell*, *Doomsday*. In contrast to the Western tradition there is no comic action at all. Supernatural beings appear only in two types of scenes: one recalls the typical Franciscan heritage of prophets' play and of heavenly trial (i.e., Deus Pater and some prophets accompanied by Angels discuss the fate of human race) being often combined in one scene or a series of scenes in Csíksomlyó; the other type of supernatural scene resembles morality plays when devils, angels, the seven deadly sins, and other allegories (Mundus, Caro, Amor Divinis, etc.) appear. Apart from these situations there is no supernatural scene in Csíksomlyó. This relatively *limited* use of supernatural elements as well as the closing scene of these plays may also differ from the Western tradition. The message of the triumphal cross is completely omitted in that corpus, there is not any relief, all plays end in and with sorrow. This ending is intelligible if we think of the main purpose of these Good Friday performances. *The sources* of Csíksomlyó plays are similar to the international passion play tradition. Already in the early Christian era, apocryphal testaments were used by the Eastern Church (Edwards 1977, mainly pp. 30-40; Sticca 1988, 33-34.), mainly *Acta Pilati* (B), the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. (Cp. *The Apocryphal New Testament*. The Csíksomlyó passion plays most often use the apocryphal scenes of Bethany, Judas's suicide, Uxor Pilati's message to her husband; the central role of Mary can also be connected to the early Eastern tradition.) Almost every play contains at least one lament or planctus of the Virgin, and the plays definitely justify Sticca's analysis of the role *Planctus Mariae* had in early and late medieval literature (Sticca 1988).

*The Passion combined with typological symbolism.* Most plays of Csíksomlyó add *figurae*, *praefigurae*, and *umbrae* to the Passion proper. The explanation of typology is always given in the prologue. (On typological symbolism, see: Foulkes 1955; Daniélou 1960, 1966; Auerbach 1998; Grabar 1969; Meyers 1970; Miner 1977; Vanyó 1997; Fabiny 1998.)

*Parables.* Parables are not used very often, they give generally the introductory scenes of the Passion.

*Morality plays* are perhaps the best known medieval genre, presenting psychomachia, and teaching *ars vivendi* and *ars moriendi*. The Csíksomlyó corpus shows a tendency to leave the Passion itself out of morality plays. The earlier half of the corpus combines the Passion with psychomachia, with the soul of some young men in the centre. In the earliest dramas the whole Passion is presented as an argument for the youth, later only some (less and less) scenes of the Passion are shown, then Christ alone appears and calls the young man in a

monologue; finally only the morality story remains, without showing anything of Christ's Passion.

#### ABOUT THIS BOOK

This volume contains the earliest 12 dramas – i.e. from between 1721 and 1739 – of the *Liber exhibens*, and also a variant of the one produced in 1737 (Esztelnek, 1753; see 12B).

Following the structure of our series, each drama is followed by annotations.

*Essential data* contains the bibliographical location of the manuscript, its after-life and possible publication. In the previous publications of this series we did not give summary of content, but in the case of these passion-plays we found it important to sum up the plot of each scene, since all the dramas published here are different adaptations of the same theme, i.e. Jesus' passion – the given outlines make it possible to recognize the borrowings between the different texts.

*Author.* In the next section we give the known data about the teacher who was the author (producer, director, copyist) of the play.

*Sources.* Under this entry we look for any detectable sources.

*Performance.* This section describes the stage, the set, the occasion and circumstances of the production, as well as the musical material. Whenever we were able to find folk-song variant of a choral, we publish both scores.

English translations of the annotations follow each drama.

See the abbreviated references in full (in alphabetic order) in the bibliography: *Felhasznált irodalom.*

*Júlia Demeter*