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UNITARIAN HERITAGE IN TRANSYLVANIA. DIGITIZING DOCUMENTS IN UNITARIAN ARCHIVES AND LIBRARY IN CLUJ/KOLOZSVAR

Abstract. In the first part I discuss the general European trends in digitising as attempts at the creation of an e-Europe. At the same time I would like to point out the striking passivity in the field of digitisation in Romania. Then, along with the digitisation projects already started in libraries, I will deal with the advantages the creation of digital archives may bring about. In a longer thematic unit I am going to outline the history of the Unitarian Church in Transylvania, setting it in the context of the wide-ranging spiritual movement spread all over 16th century Europe that is called Reformation. Subsequently, I will briefly discuss the major importance of the Main Library and the Central Archives of the Unitarian Church, the unique value of the manuscripts preserved there, as well as our project, which proposes to digitise the most important manuscripts.

1. General Preliminary Observations

The digitisation of traditional materials – printed documents, pictures, etc. – is a largely supported activity all over Europe, which endeavours to create and conserve digital cultural heritage. This means a significant contribution to the existence of an e-Europe. Libraries, together with other public collections, such as museums and galleries, are engaged in the elaboration of digitised documents and in making those widely accessible for their users. Eventually, every group of the population may benefit from this activity. The development of digitising programs provides the opportunity for public libraries to reach also those who have not used their services before, and especially to encourage the population to become active, experienced participants and users of today's netted world. We may definitely affirm that the possession of information and the capability to create new information content means to hold the key to future development in this new world.¹

Searching the Internet with this purpose we may find the description of many projects aiming at the conservation of the cultural heritage of a nation in a digitised form. It is also remarkable that more and more large-scale conferences are organised on this topic. One of the first conferences of this series was organised in Utrecht in October 1999 with the title: Digitisation of European Cultural Heritage Products-Principles-

¹ See: <http://www.ki.oszk.hu/pulman/dg/index.html>

Techniques. 120 librarians and IT specialists were gathered on this occasion in order to discuss the subject of digitisation as regards European cultural heritage. Besides Western European countries some Central European states sent their representatives, but unfortunately there were no participants from the Eastern block.²

The meeting organised in April 2001 in Lund, Sweden was a milestone in this process from the point of view of the European Community. The participants agreed that the integration of distinct national initiatives in digitisation is desirable or even necessary. It was stated that digitising is a key activity in the utilisation of European spiritual and material cultural heritage and a source of learning as regards the diversity of national cultures. "The sources of cultural and scientific knowledge in Europe constitute some sort of shared property combining into an ever expanding collective memory of our various societies, and, at the same time, serving as a firm basis for the development of the digital content industry in the frame of a sustainable information society."³

It may be worth mentioning one of the latest professional meetings organised in Torun, Poland between 3-4 February 2003, with participants from almost every national library of Central and Eastern Europe (though, unfortunately, in the absence of Romania and Slovakia) who came together to present their achievements in the field of digitisation, to exchange their experiences as well as to initiate future co-operation with one another.⁴

The countries that are going to join the European Union in a few years – and here I refer primarily to my own country, Romania – have not thought of devising an official, governmental digitisation strategy regarding their own cultural heritage, neither have they sent representatives to international forums. However, it is high time for these states to face the fact that they should start building up information society, since it is a necessary step towards becoming an integral part of not only the European Union, but also of an e-Europe. Grass-roots initiatives might prove a stimulus to this progress.

The above-mentioned European trends in digitising apply mainly to the materials of libraries, but the digitisation of archives should also be considered a matter of similar importance.

Experiences in the field of the digitisation of archives, too are quite narrow in the Hungarian linguistic area. Considerable work in this field has been performed, for instance, by the Arcanum Ltd. in the Hungarian National Archives and in the Budapest City Archives.

Foreign experiences and resources are much vaster and, what is more important, also accessible. It is unavoidable to ask the question: for what purpose archives can and may be digitised? According to specialists, digitisation is unadvisable to be used as a primary means of stock conservation. But it is of great importance as a secondary technique, since it allows unlimited duplication of digitised documents without the danger of impairing the original.

Making documents of unique value accessible may evolve into a field of special importance in digital archiving. This seems to be the most widely accepted method for the moment. It opens up such documents and publications to a large public that would be much more difficult and expensive to publish using other techniques. Electronically

² Moldován, István: Digitisation of European Cultural Heritage Products-Principles-Techniques Hollandia, Utrecht, 21-23 October, 1999. Conference paper. <http://www.koi.hu/hirlev/1999/912lapz.html>

³ <http://mek.oszk.hu/egyesulet/lund-hun.htm>

⁴ See: <http://www.mek.iif.hu/porta/irattar/torunbes.htm>

accessible archives might give a huge impetus not only to the applied historical sciences, which are continuously in a great need of illustrative material, but to historical and language studies, to the history of jurisprudence as well. Books on sigillography, numismatics, heraldry, epigraphy, that is, all the expensive publications needed for the purposes of applied historical studies could be dispensed with almost completely. Digital processing could allow historians to access source materials mostly unexplored until now without extra expenditure, unbound by time and place. The creation and development of virtual archives for an open information society is thus necessary especially having in view historically valuable materials.

From among several projects of this kind I chose to mention here the digitisation of the 1454 edition of Gutenberg's Bible published in Göttingen. 1282 pages of this two-volume edition have been digitised and made available on CD and, what is more, on the Internet. The pages of the book can be viewed as single images, but the textual content of those pages may be read in transcribed form as well.⁵

A surveying of the Hungarian and international experiences in this field and the publication of these analyses would certainly be extremely useful in the preparation phase of digitisation projects, since by this means the mistakes once already made by others could be avoided.

When the Transylvanian Unitarian Church Collecting Archives started the project which proposes to digitise the most important materials from its archives, as well as the manuscript collection of the Unitarian College Library of Kolozsvár (Cluj) expropriated by the Romanian state in 1948, there was no one we could appeal to for help. The one who hit upon the idea of the whole digitisation project was George Williams⁶, professor at the Department of Religious Studies of California State University in Chico, who had participated in the digitisation of decaying Sanskrit manuscripts in India, thus saving them from utter destruction. The purpose of George Williams, as a Unitarian, was to make the cultural heritage of the Unitarian Church – a church holding a special position in Transylvanian culture – easily accessible for researchers and for all those interested. At the same time, this project would virtually incorporate a segment of the Transylvanian Hungarian culture in all-Hungarian culture, the more so as Transylvania, which had formerly belonged to Hungary, became an integrant part of Romania according to the Trianon Peace Treaty concluding World-War I. Moreover, this project helps Unitarians around the world to learn more about their spiritual roots and to be in contact with Transylvanian culture.

2. The Unitarian Church of Transylvania

Reformation meant the revision of the truths and substance of Christianity taking the Bible as a basis, and emphasising the importance and authority of the Holy Scripture as an original source. All the innovations regarding ecclesiastical matters made during Reformation, thus the Unitarian religion itself as well, are based on the Bible and result naturally from the religious revival of the 16th century.

The reformational Antitrinitarian movement outside Hungary and Transylvania started blossoming among the Anabaptists of Zurich around 1525.

Later, the exponents of the Unitarian idea in Italy, Poland, England and the

⁵ <http://www.gutenbergdigital.de/>

⁶ <http://w3.enternet.hu/sandor64/cffr/georgewilliams/vita.htm>

Netherlands also came from among Anabaptists.

The only place where the Unitarian religion was organised into a permanent ecclesiastical institution was Transylvania⁷. The founder of the church was Dávid Ferenc (1520?–1579).

As a result of the Reformation Western Europe was divided into largely monolithic religious blocks. Italy and Pyrenean peninsula was Catholic, Scandinavia Lutheran, some of the German states were Catholic, others Lutheran, while the Rhenish states were Calvinistic. After 1685, when Louis XVI. had withdrawn the franchise given to Protestant minorities by the Edict of Nantes, and forced Huguenots to catholicise or emigrate, France became wholly Catholic.

In Eastern Europe, however, the religious scale was much more colourful, the more so in the Carpathian Basin, and especially in the Principality of Transylvania founded in 1541, where the adherents of several different denominations used to live together in the same settlement. Religious coexistence looks back upon a secular tradition in Transylvania, on the border of Western and Eastern Christianity, where both the Roman and the Orthodox Church have been present for centuries. Denominational plurality has been amplified by colourful ethnic composition, too. Religious alterity in many cases meant also national disparity.

In an age when West of Transylvania states were waging war on one another in the name of religion, while thousands of Huguenots were killed in the Massacre of St. Bartholomew in France, while the Habsburg emperor declared that he would rather see his country become a lifeless desert than peopled by Protestants, Transylvania could be seen as an island of peaceful intercommunion⁸. Many distinguished theologians and philosophers found shelter in Transylvania, in Kolozsvár (Cluj). I would like to mention here only the names of Jacobus Palaeologus, of Greek origin, and of the German Christian Francken.⁹

According to the spirit of its founder, the Unitarian Church is characterised by latitudinarianism and respect for the liberty of conscience, since faith is the gift of God, and everyone is allowed to practise the form of religion that best suits his/her conviction.

3. The Main Library of the Unitarian Church of Transylvania¹⁰

The Unitarian Church, just like other churches, has always laid great stress upon teaching and education. Our oldest educational institution is the Unitarian College in Kolozsvár (Cluj) founded 435 years ago, where the Main Library of the school is also situated. The College has often had to change its location under compulsion in the course of its history; therefore the Main Library has also met with considerable losses, the 16th century manuscript collection having been completely destroyed, for instance.

⁷ Unitarianism disappeared from Poland in the 17th century; in Britain and the US the Unitarian Church was officially founded in 1825.

⁸ Benda, Kálmán: A reformáció és a vallásszabadság eszméje. (The Ideas of Reformation and Religious Freedom) In: Egyházak a változó világban (Churches in a Changing World), Esztergom, 1991. 31.

⁹ See the monographic profile of these two figures in: Lech Szczucki: Két XVI. századi eretnek gondolkodó. Jacobus Palaeologus és Christian Francken (Two Heretical Thinkers in the 16th century. Jacobus Palaeologus and Christian Francken), Akadémiai Kiadó. Budapest 1980.

¹⁰ See more: Bíró Gyöngyi: Az Unitárius Egyház értelmiség könyvtárai a XVI-XVII. századi Kolozsvárott (The Libraries of the Unitarian Clergy), In: Keresztény Magvető. (Christian Sower) 2000. (106. évf.) 35-48.

After this severe loss, a new collection was started during the 18th century in order to re-establish the library.

After World War II, during the Communist era, in the year 1948 the Unitarian College and Library were nationalized by the Romanian Government. Libraries belonging to other denominations were likewise appropriated. Many books (more than 35,000 volumes) and manuscripts from the Unitarian collection were entrusted to the nearby Academic Library of Kolozsvár (Cluj), the present inventory of our manuscripts kept there numbering about 3,000 items. This collection of distinctively Unitarian character represents another source of unique importance for the study of the radical Antitrinitarian movement in European history.¹¹ An eventual reintegration of these manuscripts into our Unitarian Library (also located on the 21. Decembrie Boulevard in Kolozsvár (Cluj)), is a matter of no little interest indeed from the scholars' point of view.

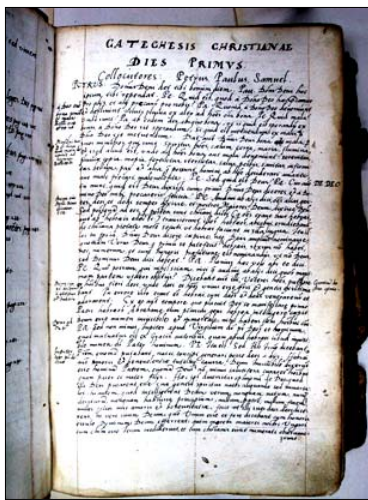


Fig. 1

After the death (in 1571) of the first Transylvanian monarch, János Zsigmond, who was a Unitarian, the Catholic Báthori family succeeding him were trying to press Unitarianism back by their intolerant religious policy. The Unitarians' printing-house was expropriated, the publication and propagation of religious texts without royal assent was forbidden, and censorship was introduced. The situation was not any better under the Calvinistic monarchs of the 17th century either. There were very few Unitarian works that could appear. Part of the works written in this period was left in manuscript. The above-mentioned Palaeologus, for instance, through the works he wrote in Kolozsvár (Cluj) established himself as a well-known thinker in the history of European religious philosophy¹² (See Fig. 1).

These and other works of similar importance written in Latin survived as manuscript copies. Therefore only a few local and foreign researchers have access to these materials, whereas they are of such a great significance that it is impossible to form an adequate view about the dynamics of ideas in 16th-17th century Eastern and Central Europe without knowledge of them.

Through the publication of these texts in digitised form we can make this heritage accessible for everyone interested.

4. The Central Archives of the Unitarian Church of Transylvania¹³

The history of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church Collecting Archives dates back

¹¹ See: The Manuscripts of the Unitarian College of Cluj/Kolozsvár in the Library of the Academy in Cluj-Napoca. II. Indices. Szeged. 1997. 7.

¹² See: Földi és égi hitviták. Válogatás Jacobus Palaeologus munkáiból (Earthly and Heavenly Polemics. A Selection of the Works of Jacobus Palaeologus), Translation: Nagyillés János. Preface by: Balázs Mihály. Kolozsvár, 2003.

¹³ See more: M. Bodrogi Enikő, Molnár B. Lehel: Az Erdélyi Unitárius Egyház Gyűjtőlevéltárának rövid története. (The Brief History of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church Collecting Archives.) In: Művelődés. (Cultur) Kolozsvár. 2001/9. 50-58.

to the first part of the 18th century. That was the time when, in the bud, the present centre of the Unitarian church was established. This centre has been dealing with the management of ecclesiastical matters ever since, and it is headed by a directorate called Consistory of the Unitarian Church. This body, as a producer of documents, set up its own archives, where the documents of considerable historical value created in the course of its activity are stored.

The records of our archives start from the end of the 16th century, its oldest piece being the proceedings of a divorce suit started in 1587 (See Fig. 2.). Among the valuable documents from the 17th century we may mention the minutes of synods starting from 1629 (See Fig.3.), the records of Episcopal visitations dating back until 1640, the first complete one bearing the date of 1692-93 (See Fig. 4.).

The account-books of the seniors or prefects of the Unitarian College of Kolozsvár (Cluj) beginning with the year of 1626, the volumes of the Fasciculus Rerum Scholasticarum (See Fig. 5.) are also estimable, as well as the catalogues of College students starting as early as the last decade of the 17th century (See Fig. 6.) and continuing until the 1940s.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

The documents referring to the wrongs suffered by the church and to the printing house of the ecclesia are also worth mentioning here.

Besides the already mentioned and other ecclesiastical documents on administrative matters the intellectual inheritance of many illustrious Unitarians has been completely or partially conserved. Among them we may find the names of bishops: István Lázár (1742–1811), János Körmöczi (1762–1836), János Kriza (1811–1875), József Ferencz (1835–1928), György Boros (1855–1941), Elek Kiss (1888–1971); a chief warden: Pál Augusztinovics (1763–1837); theological and college professors: Domokos Simén (1836–1878), Sámuel Brassai (1800?–1897), János Kovács (1846–1905), Gergely Benczédi (1839–1906), Ferenc Kanyaró (1859–1910), István Borbély (1886–1932), Kelemen Gál (1869–1945); the writer and traveller (in North America) Sándor Bölöni Farkas (1795–1842); and historians: István Nagyajtai Kovács (1799–1872), László Kövály (1819–1907), etc.



Fig.5



Fig.6

5. The digitisation project

The name of George Williams has already been mentioned above as the one who brought us the first digital camera and as the original promoter of our digitisation project.

With the purpose of conserving our valuable archival heritage, two professors from the USA, Dr. Deborah J. Youngman from the Department of Developmental Studies of Boston University and Dr. Kathleen Dunlap from Tufts Medical School, initiated the Transylvania Archives Project (TAP) in 1998 under the direction of Rev. Lehel Molnár B., archivist of the Unitarian Church of Transylvania, and with the support of the present Unitarian Bishop, Dr. Árpád Szabó.¹⁴

One of the aims the TAP proposes is to continue the digitising work started by George Williams at a professional level. The digitisation of processed materials for international online access has already begun. We are indebted to the Unitarian Universalist International Funding Program in the United States for the partial funding of this aspect of our work. The grant offered by them provided the means for us to purchase the necessary materials, services, and technical equipment. Due to the financial assistance and grant coordination of the TAP and to the support we have received from both within and beyond our Unitarian circles, we may dare to assert we now have a facility that stands comparison with the most notable ecclesiastical archives in our area.



Fig. 7

Finally, I would like to give a brief account of the techniques we use in the digitisation of documents. Until recently, images were captured on a 3.3 mega pixel Canon S20 using a standard photo table with overhead lighting (See Fig. 7.) and no cable release. To optimise this activity two persons worked together: one of them turning the pages and the other controlling the camera. Until September 2002 photographs were captured at a resolution of 2560x1920 pixels and compressed in JPG format, so that each picture occupies approximately one megabyte. Books and other printed materials are captured at a resolution of 1280x960 pixels. For digitisation we are employing now an Olympus E20N (five mega pixel) professional digital camera (acquired by means of a grant from the Unitarian Universalist International Funding Program in 2002). By participating in September 2002 in the Euro Summer School organised by the Institute of Mathematics and Informatics of the Bulgarian Academy of Science on the topic: „Electronic Publishing for Cultural Heritage” I had the opportunity to learn a lot about the digitisation of documents, and now, with the new camera we capture the documents in TIF format without compression. With all this support, we have been able to digitise more than 250 manuscripts and books (about 30.000 pictures) on 47 compact disks, but these exist only “in the raw”. We are going to create a searchable database from these, and make subsets of the material available to users on compact or digital videodisks as soon as funds have been raised for this project.

All digitised texts will be converted to Portable Document Format (PDF) using

¹⁴ See more: Deborah J. Youngman and Molnár B. Lehel: The Transylvanian Archives Project: Documenting the History of a Unitarian Community. In: The Journal of Unitarian Universalist History. (Chicago) Volume XXVIII, 2001, Part 2. 1-8.

the adequate software (e.g., Adobe Photoshop). Photographs of some materials can be viewed at the TAP website [http://www.geocities.com/transylvania_archives_project]. One of our next projects is to make the accomplished database accessible for everyone through the above-mentioned homepage.

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