

THE HUMANIST AND THE DARK LEGENDS OF
HUNGARIAN HISTORY: ANTUN VRANČIĆ AS USER
OF THE MANUSCRIPT *EPISTOLA DE PERDITIOE REGNI
HUNGARORUM* BY GEORGIUS SIRMIENSIS¹

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Georgius Sirmiensis is one of the more intriguing figures of 16th century historiography in the Hungarian Kingdom. Born in around 1490 in the region of Sirmium, most probably in the city of Kamenica (Kamonc in Hungarian), Sirmiensis became a member of the lower clergy and attended different town schools, but since he was a *domidoctus*, his education level cannot be compared to that of the humanists. He nevertheless served as chaplain of two kings, Louis II and John of Szapolya, a position that made him an eyewitness of many events of the turbulent decades between 1520 and 1543. We have no precise data concerning the date of Georgius Sirmiensis' death. It is generally accepted in the literature that he died after 1548.

As he himself stated in the last lines of his work *Epistola de perditione regni Hungarorum*, in around 1545–46 he put his memories down in writing at the request of Antun Vrančić, who was at the time provost of Transsylvania. Sirmiensis's *Epistola* remained in manuscript, and what is more important, in a single copy. It was in possession of the Vrančić family in Šibenik until the middle of the 17th century. Given the uniqueness of the copy, it

¹ The research for this study was supported by the FK-137616 research project of the National Office for Research, Development and Innovation (NKFIH) entitled *The Chronicle of the Downfall of the Hungarian Kingdom – A Critical Edition and Translation of Epistola by Georgius Sirmiensis*.

is quite understandable that no one had access to the work of Sirmiensis until the mid-19th century, when it was published in print for the first time. Or rather: almost no one had access.

On the margins of the manuscript there are numerous annotations: corrections, comments, different notes. All are written in a hand different from that of the main text. To date, scholarship has paid no attention to these marginalia. This paper aims to report in detail on the characteristics of these notes and to attribute them, upon paleographical grounds, to Antun Vrančić. Firstly, I intend to prove that Vrančić read Sirmiensis's work, and read it very carefully; secondly, I will show that he used some information from it in his own writings; finally, I am going to demonstrate that the contact of the two authors and of their works led to a turn in the perception of the Jagiellonian period in Hungary.

Keywords: Georgius Sirmiensis, Antun Vrančić, historiography, Hungarian Kingdom, early modern history, textual studies, marginal notes

György Szerémi (Georgius Sirmiensis, Juraj Srijemac) is one of the most extraordinary figures of Latin historiography, a genre which flourished in the Kingdom of Hungary in the sixteenth century. Szerémi's *Epistola de perditione regni Hungarorum* survived in a single manuscript, and ever since its discovery it has stirred the imagination of professional historians and general readers alike, and for good reason. Szerémi's work abounds in fantastic stories, juicy details, scandal and gossip, episodes of betrayal and terrible murders: it is like a well-written adventure story. Some of his claims can be verified, others are not supported by sources; in any case, the text undeniably provides a unique alternative reading of the events that took place in Hungary in the first half of the sixteenth century. The mysteries surrounding Szerémi and his work are further complicated by the author's notoriously horrible Latin. No other sixteenth-century writer composed a work with so many difficult or barely comprehensible sentences, riddled with so many grammatical errors, not to mention the missing predicates. And yet, barely a decade and a half after the year 1840, in which Antal Gévyay discovered the previously neglected manuscript² among the volumes of the *Hofbibliothek* in Vienna,³ there appeared the first (and so far, the only) Latin edition of the work. Edited by Gusztáv Wenzel in 1857, it was the first volume of *Monumenta Hungariae Historica* (MHH), the grandiose nineteenth-century series of historical sources.⁴ During the second half

² Although the manuscript was catalogued at the end of the 18th century, no further attention was paid to it. Sirmiensis was not known to bibliographers of around 1800, like Dávid Czvittinger or Péter Bod.

³ Antal Gévyay, »II. Lajos király halála: Egy kortárs előadása«, *Tudománytár* (1840), 167–175. In Zadar in 2022, at the »Natales grate numeras« conference, I presented a paper on the history of Szerémi's manuscript, under the title: »Georgius Sirmiensis *De perditione regni Hungarorum* – About a mysterious manuscript of the former Vrančić collection«. The conference proceedings are expected to be published in 2024.

⁴ Gusztáv Wenzel, *Szerémi György Emlékirata Magyarország romlásáról*, *Monumenta Hungariae Historica* 1, Pest, 1857.

of the nineteenth century several studies were published on Szerémi, some of them strongly criticising Wenzel's edition, which indeed had numerous shortcomings.⁵ The twentieth century saw two Hungarian translations of the work, one by László Erdélyi, and another by László Juhász, an outstanding expert in the neo-Latin literature of Hungary.⁶ Although the two translations made Szerémi's text available to a wider readership, interest in the work waned in the second half of the twentieth century. Important smaller studies on Szerémi were brought out,⁷ but historians in general abandoned his obscure text, and considered the author generally unreliable. It was Zsolt Szebelédi who gave a new impetus for research with his dissertation (defended in 2017), in which he examined this extremely interesting and mysterious work from a predominantly linguistic and lexicographic point of view.⁸

In 2021 my younger colleague Szebelédi and I launched a research project supported by the NKFIH. The aim of the project is to publish Szerémi's work in a scholarly edition that meets the standards of the twenty-first century, to provide a new, revised and carefully annotated translation of the text, and to explore the problems related to the work in a series of studies. The project will hopefully challenge at least some of the prejudices against this important Central European author, and result in a more refined portrait. As part of the undertaking, this paper investigates the relationship between György Szerémi and a prominent humanist of the era, Antun Vrančić, with the aim of trying to decide whether it can be proven that the *Epistola* was in fact written for Vrančić. However, the more important question is whether Vrančić actually read the text, and whether he made use of it when composing his own historical work.

⁵ The three most important, frequently cited studies were: Lajos Szádeczky, *Szerémi György élete és emlékirata*, Budapest, 1892 (Értekezések a Történeti Tudományok Köréből, 15/7); idem, *Szerémi emlékirata kiadásának hiányai: A bécsi kódex alapján*, Budapest, 1892 (Értekezések a Történeti Tudományok Köréből, 15/8), László Erdélyi, *Szerémi György és emlékirata*, Budapest, 1892.

⁶ The first complete Hungarian translation was the work of László Erdélyi (György Szerémi, *A mohácsi vész kora*, Szeged, 1941). That translation was later revised and corrected by László Juhász (György Szerémi, *Magyarország romlásáról*, Budapest, 1961, newer edition: Budapest, 1979). Juhász's translation is the best one available, although it is still plagued by inaccuracies and inconsistencies. In 1987 a Serbian translation by Mirko Polgár appeared: Đurađ Sremac, *Poslanica o propasti ugarskog kraljevstva*, Belgrade, 1987. (I am indebted to Neven Jovanović for drawing my attention to the existence of the Serbian translation.)

⁷ László Baják, »Szerémi György világgépe«, *Magyar Egyháztörténeti Vázlatok 1* (1989), 123–136; Anita Bojtos, »Történelemszemlélet, folklór és obszervancia: Szerémi György és a késő középkori magyar társadalmi tudat forrásairól«, *Magyar Egyháztörténeti Vázlatok*, 3–4 (2011), 19–44; Dávid Csorba, *Mohács egy »mesemondó« szemével: Szerémi György világgépe*, Nyíregyháza, 2012.

⁸ Zsolt Szebelédi, *Szerémi György Epistolájának nyelvi elemzése*, Doktori disszertáció (Kézirat), 2017 (Internet, 23 February 2024).

1. A Mysterious Manuscript: The Problem of the Author and the Recipient

Since only one manuscript has survived, the text might well be an autograph, but critics almost universally agree that the version known today must be a copy. It might have been written by Szerémi himself or a scribe; this cannot be determined, but it is certainly a contemporary copy. Relevant literature generally accepts the view that Szerémi wrote *Epistola* between 1544–1547 at the request of provost Antun Vrančić, as a gift for him.⁹ However, the question is by no means so clear. The name of Vrančić never appears in the text itself, and even where there are suspicious traces of a name, later hands tried to remove them, so they cannot be confidently deciphered. What is more, even the author's name would have been in doubt if one of the readers of the manuscript had successfully executed his plan. Each time the name »Georgius Sirmiensis« occurs in the text, it was crossed out by someone who tried to render it illegible. Excellent examples of this are to be found in the first and in the last page of the manuscript. The manuscript opens with the following lines:

Ego Georgius Sirmiensis (!) capellanus Ludovici regis et Ioannis in regione Budensi plus quam viginti annis residenciam habui.

I, György Szerémi, chaplain to King Louis and King John, lived in Buda for more than twenty years.

The last page of the manuscript contains the following (unfortunately incomplete) sentence:

Et per unum sacerdotem Georgium Sirmiensem, qui quondam capellanus Ludovici regis adolescentis, et post decessum ipsius eciam Ioannis regis

All these [were written by the?] priest György Szerémi, once the chaplain of the young King Louis, and after his death, the chaplain of King John

Szerémi declares his name both at the beginning and at the end of the text, but, as the reproduction of the manuscript shows, already on the first page there are traces of an attempt at erasure (**Figure 1**), and a similar effort is even more obvious on the last page (**Figure 2**).

⁹ Wenzel, who published the Latin text for the first time, already suggested that Vrančić had something to do with the writing of the work (G. Wenzel, *op. cit.* (4), X.), and this idea was canonized by Ignác Acsády, an influential Hungarian historian active in the late nineteenth century, in his major study on Vrančić and Szerémi (Ignác Acsády, »Verancsics Antal és Szerémi György«, *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 4 (1894), 1–59). Following Acsády, Emma Bartoniek, author of an indispensable handbook on Hungarian historiography in the sixteenth century, accepted the statement without any further debate (Emma Bartoniek, *Fejezetek a XVI–XVII. századi magyarországi történetírás történetéből*, Budapest, 1975, 57–79).

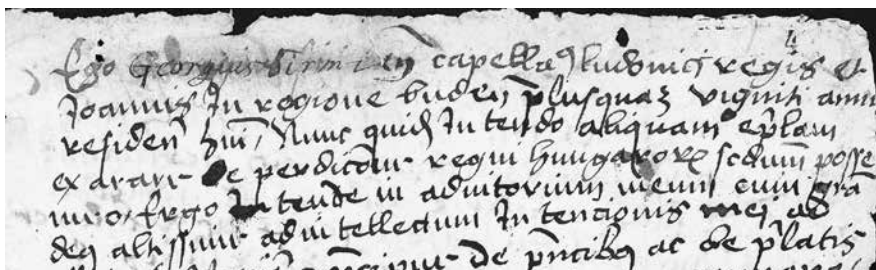


Figure 1. An attempt at erasure in the first line of Szerémi's *Epistola*. National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection, Fol. Lat. 4020, 4r.

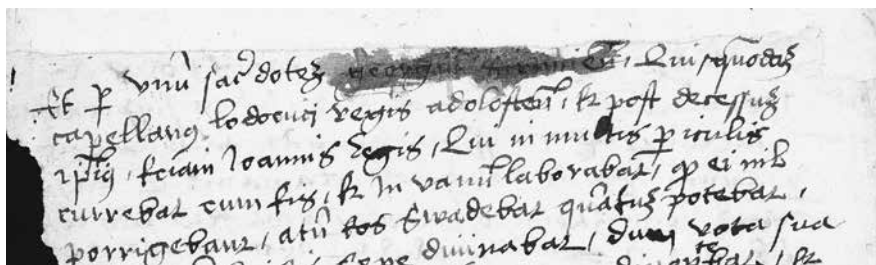


Figure 2. A crossing-out in the first line of the last page of Szerémi's *Epistola*. National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection, Fol. Lat. 4020, 134v.

It is not known who wanted to remove Szerémi's name from the manuscript, when, or why, but fortunately the attempts proved unsuccessful. Every instance of the name remains legible; therefore, we know that the author of the text is indeed György Szerémi.

The identification of Vrančić as the supposed recipient of the text is a different story. The first paragraph of the *Epistola* serves as a dedication, and – as mentioned before – gives Szerémi's name, but lacks any reference to the recipient. The closing line of the paragraph is an uninformative statement: *de quibus post hec infra scripturis intelliget vestra dilectio* »your kindness will be able to find out about all of this later'. The name of the recipient is not mentioned and even the form of address (»*vestra dilectio*«) is quite ambiguous: it is not clear whether the recipient is a religious or secular person.

The name of Vrančić actually appears not at the beginning of the letter, but in the last lines of the main text: *Et ad Anthonium Ragusiensem (??), me rogaturum*

in scriptis obtulli ei in donum »And I gave these writings to provost Antun of Ragusa (??) as a gift at his request«. ¹⁰

For sure, at the end of the long letter Szerémi claims that he wrote the work because he had been asked to do so (»me rogaturum«), and that he gave his writing to his patron as a present (»in scriptis obtulli ei in donum«), but to whom the gift was made is a significantly more problematic question. As the reproduced image (**Figure 3**) shows, the crossing out of the recipient's name was – unfortunately for us – more successful, so it is barely legible today.

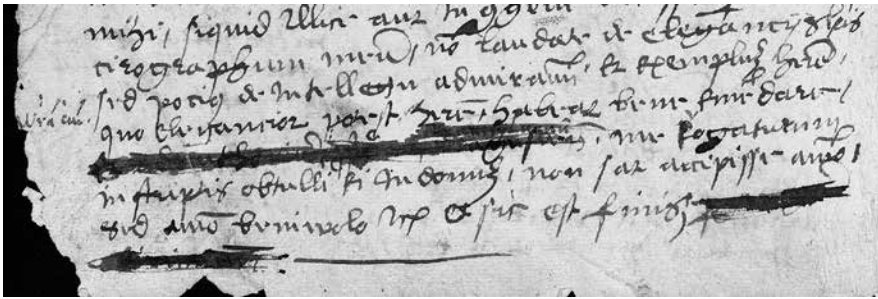


Figure 3. End of the Szerémi's *Epistola*. National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection, Fol. Lat. 4020, 127v.

In a high resolution image, it can be ascertained that the recipient was certainly named *Anthonius* (»ad Anthonium«) and in all likelihood he was a provost (»praepositum« – this is only visible in the manuscript in a heavily abbreviated form), but the location associated with the provost's position is practically illegible. Besides, it appears that there are two cancelled lines, not just one. The author (or copyist) originally wrote »ad Anthonium praepositum [...]ragusiensem.« Someone crossed out the place name and wrote »Transylvanian« (»Transsylvanum«) above it, which was later also crossed out to almost complete illegibility (**Figure 4**). Since the original form »[...]ragusiensem« turns out to be unquestionably truncated, as its first letters are missing, certainty can be established only insofar that the word does not refer to the city Ragusa (present-day Dubrovnik), but to another place that cannot be identified. It is far from certain that the provostship in question was a Hungarian one.

¹⁰ G. Wenzel, *op. cit.* (4), 401. The question marks can be found as early as in the Wenzel edition, indicating the ambiguous reading of the name.

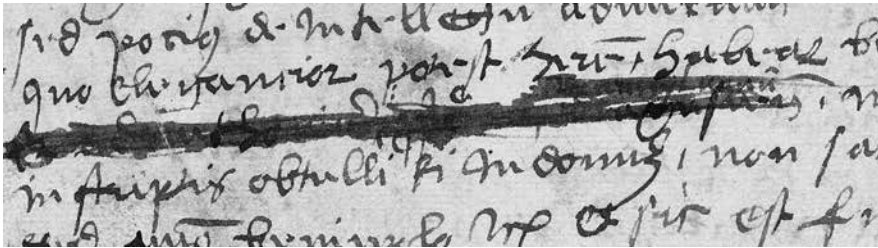


Figure 4. A crossed-out detail from the end of Szerémi's *Epistola*. The National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection, Fol. Lat. 4020, 127v.

The word form »Transsyloanum«, originally intended as an emendation above the line, is less problematic. It is relatively easy to read, despite the later cancelling. It even seems (and this will be important for the identification!) that the word »Transsyloanum« was written in a different hand, so it does not come from Szerémi (or his copyist). As mentioned before, Szerémi's text was apparently written between 1544 and 1547. During this period, Antun Vrančić was indeed the provost of Transylvania. So, if he was the recipient of the letter, or if he even commissioned the work, then it is possible that Szerémi, who tended to be superficial in more ways than one,¹¹ used the wrong title when mentioning his name, which might have been corrected by Vrančić himself while reading. The ductus of the word »Transsyloanum« makes this highly likely. One of the unique characteristics of Vrančić's handwriting is that he often writes the letter »l« in the middle of words as a capital »L«. One of his autograph works, a fragment about the fall of Belgrade (1521), might serve as an example here.¹² A comparison is possible between the ductus of the word »Transsyloanus« in the letter, and in the correction of the *Epistola* (**Figure 5** and **Figure 6**).

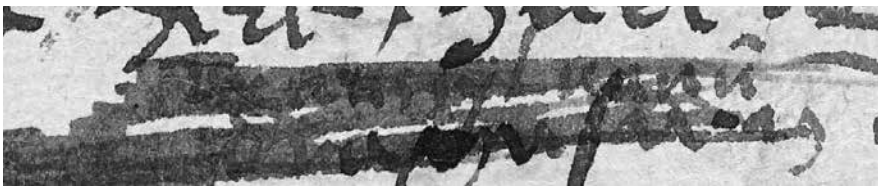


Figure 5. The word »Transsyloanum« crossed out at the end of Szerémi's *Epistola*. National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection, Fol. Lat. 4020, 127v.

¹¹ Szerémi's inaccuracy, his mistakes about dates, places and sometimes even names are legendary. László Erdélyi, in his study on Szerémi, published entire lists of his factual errors: L. Erdélyi, *op. cit.* 77–100.

¹² László Szalay (ed.), *Verancsics Antal összes munkái* I, Pest, 1857, 8–16.

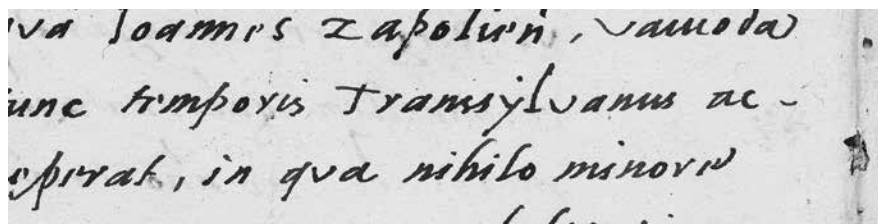


Figure 6. A detail from Vrančić's fragment about the fall of Belgrade (1521) with the word »Transsylvanus«. National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection, Fol. Lat. 422/2, 3v.

A comparison between the two instances of the word »Transsylvanus« in the two images reveals several similarities. While writing the word in the autograph text in **Figure 6**, Vrančić 1) uses a double »s« form; 2) marks the sound »i« with a special dotted »ý«; 3) and when the letter »l« is in a position between other letters, he writes a kind of capital »L« similar to a maiuscula form. Based on this, it is safe to say that the correction was made by Vrančić. The assumption can be further reinforced by a look at the name added in the margin of Szerémi's manuscript (**Figure 3**). Next to the cancelled lines in question, the name »Wrancium« appears, also in Vrančić's own handwriting, as if to resolve, explain, and interpret the identification based on the first name and the title that can be read in the main text.

Based on these considerations, the following conclusions can be drawn in connection with the author and the recipient. The author of the *Epistola* is almost certainly György Szerémi, whose name someone tried to erase to no avail. The recipient is quite certainly a provost named Anthonius, details of whose title are unknown, opening up several possibilities. According to the most likely scenario, Szerémi had Antun Vrančić in mind, but he either used the wrong title or one that no longer suited Vrančić's taste, so Vrančić corrected the text he received, and then named himself as the recipient in the margin.

It cannot be excluded that the original recipient was not Vrančić, but an unknown provost named Anthonius. Then, when the work came into Vrančić's possession, he rewrote the dedication in the final lines to his own name. This is by no means the most probable scenario, but as a philologist I think it is important to use careful wording here. *Probably* Vrančić was the original recipient of the *Epistola*, but it is certain only that the manuscript was in his hands.

2. Vrančić Reading Szerémi

Even if there is a degree of uncertainty as to whether the recipient of the *Epistola* was indeed Antun Vrančić, it is beyond doubt that Vrančić possessed, knew, and thoroughly read the manuscript. His use of it is attested by the countless

marginal notes in Vrančić's own hand. Although there are no more than ten comments in the manuscript by another hand (maybe Faust Vrančić), these two types of handwriting can be unmistakably distinguished from each other. In **Figure 7**, the inscriptions by the two different hands can be clearly differentiated in the right margin. The first hand corrects the word »fratrem« in the main text to »nepotem«, then the other hand, writing with a different ink and in a different ductus, corrects the word »morkolab« in the main text to »Marchio«. »Nepotem« is in the typical handwriting of Antun (the appearance of the letter »e« in the middle of words is a distinctive feature), while »Marchio« is the other hand.

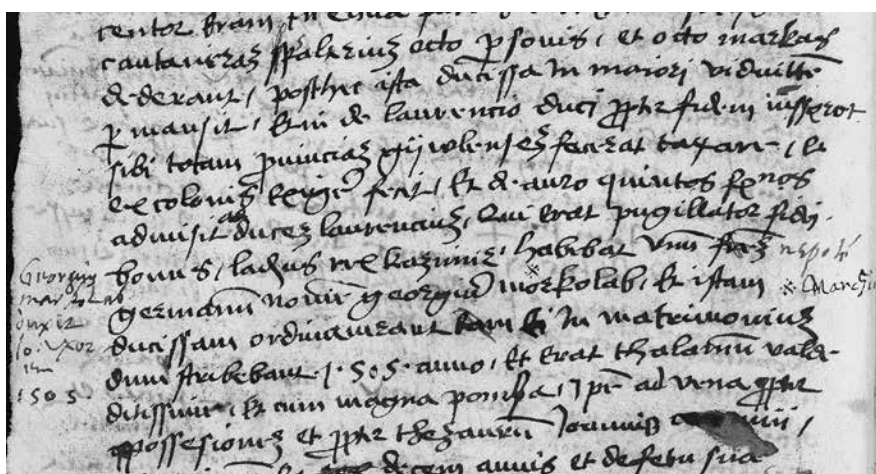


Figure 7. Marginal corrections in Szerémi's *Epistola*. National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection, Fol. Lat. 4020, 19v.

Antun not only did write numerous marginalia, but they are also diverse in character. The example in Figure 8 shows how in some pages he added a lot of comments with a diverse range of content: simple index entries, interpretations, explanations and corrections. The examples below will illustrate the nature of the comments.

Some of the marginal notes highlight the content. The left margin in the **Figure 8** contains the name »Albertus«. In the main text, the Hungarian lords argue about who should be elected king after the death of Matthias Corvinus:

multi volebant et clamabant: Ioannes Corvinus sit rex. Altera pars clamavit *Albertum* de Krakowia Polonum

many wanted him and shouted, »John Corvin shall be king«. The other camp, however, proclaimed King *Albert* the Pole from Krakow

So, the name of the Polish king Albert already appears in the main text, and the margin only highlights it, to help the reader quickly find the way around the text, and to easily locate the passage about Albert.

The same page contains explanatory and interpretive notes on the left and the right margins.

One of the explanatory notes is right below the marginal note marking Albert's name, while the other is on the opposite margin. Both comment on the following line:

Posthec tertia pars fecit clamare Ladislaum Kazmer de Bohemiae regno, videlicet, qui sunt iam periuri ac fidefragi

Afterwards the third group proclaimed [as king] Ladislaus, the son of Casimir from Bohemia; the group which consisted of the unfaithful and the oath-breakers

The left margin contains the note »Is erat Alberti frater rex Bohemiae«. The note explains that the Bohemian king mentioned in the main text was the brother of the previously mentioned Albert. The main text makes no mention of this, it is Vrančić's own (and correct!) addition. The right margin features additional details on the *periuri ac fidefragi*. The reason for this is that the main text only includes one such name, that of Tamás Bakócz, the Archbishop of Esztergom (»Thomas Strigoniensis«). Vrančić tells more: »Thomam archiepiscopum, Knesi et alios illos intelligit.« According to these notes, in addition to Archbishop Tamás, the famous general Pál Kinizsi¹³ also belonged to the group of the disloyal oath-breakers.

Vrančić added grammatical and orthographic revisions, too: the last comment on the page in **Figure 8**, in the lower left part, provides an example. The main text contains the word »ebdomatam« (»week«), which does not follow the classical spelling. Vrančić crosses out the word, and writes the correct form next to it: »hebdomadam«. Of course, this is an appropriate orthographic correction.

In the middle of the page, above the phrase »inceptit eum suadere« [he began to persuade him], the complement in the accusative (»eum«) is crossed out and the correct dative form corresponding to Latin grammar is written above it: »illi«. There are stylistic and grammatical additions as well: in the sentence »quod iam nullus audebat sibi prebere«, the incorrect reflexive pronoun (»sibi«) is replaced with the correct demonstrative (»ei«), and the object originally missing from the sentence (»opem«) is supplied in the margin. Thus, Vrančić manages to make a

¹³ Pál Kinizsi (Latin: Paulus de Kenez; ?–1494) was a Hungarian general in the service of the Hungarian army under King Matthias Corvinus. He was the Count of Temes County (in the historical Banat region, in the Kingdom of Hungary) from 1484 and Captain-General of the Lower Parts. He was a general of King Matthias's famed Black Army. He is famous for his victory over the Ottomans in the Battle of Breadfield in October 1479. He reputedly never lost a battle.

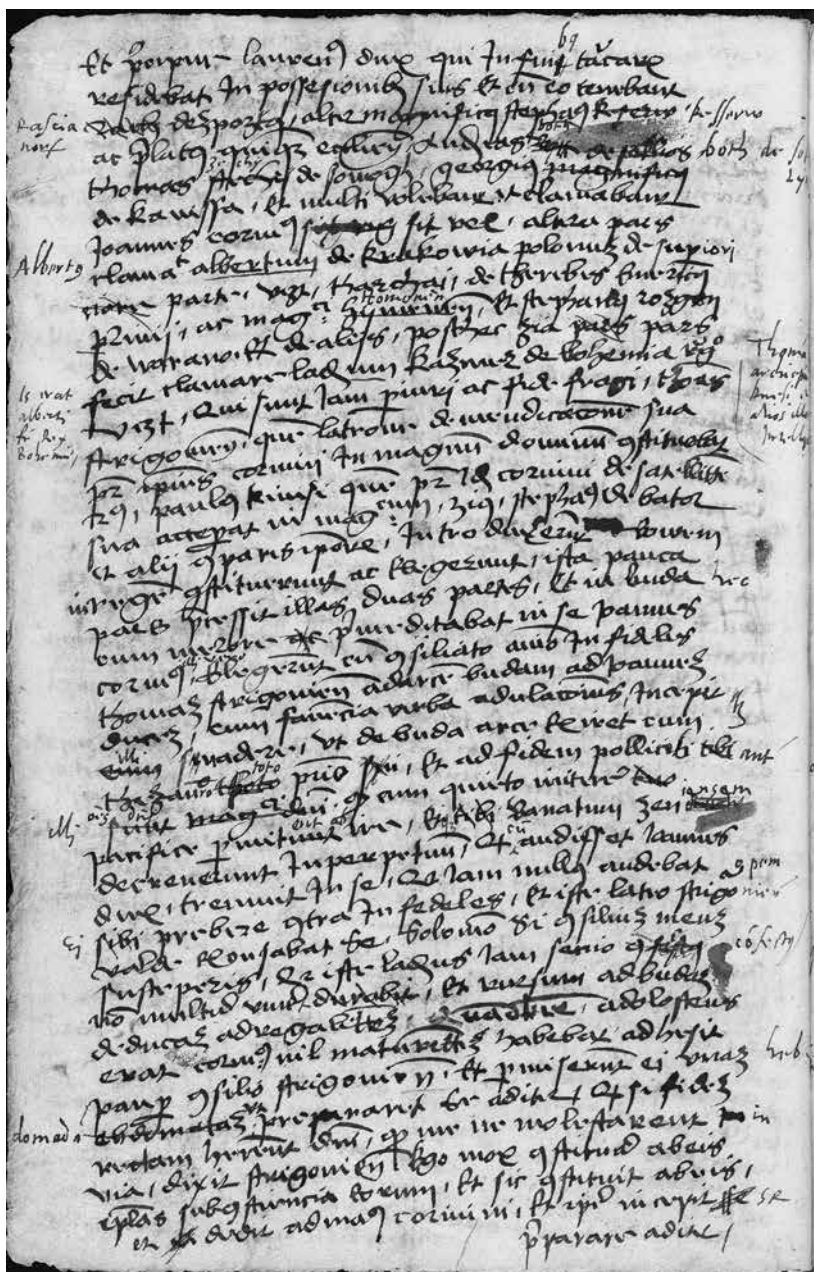


Figure 8. Marginal notes in Szerémi's *Epistola*. National Szechényi Library, Manuscript Collection, Fol. Lat. 4020, 15v.

meaningful sentence from the original: *quod iam nullus audebat ei opem prebere* »because no one dared to help him anymore«.

Of course, not all the pages are so full of comments. Yet, the example clearly shows how thoroughly Vrančić perused Szerémi's text: he commented, supplemented, and corrected it regularly from lexical, grammatical, and stylistic points of view.

An inquiry into the distribution of the Vrančić entries within the manuscript, however, brings surprising results. The Szerémi manuscript consists of a total of 129 folios, i. e. 258 pages. Out of the 258 pages, 122 pages contain some kind of comment, correction, or observation, while 136 pages lack such comments. That is: slightly more than half of the pages contain no annotations at all.

However, the apparently proportional (almost fifty–fifty) distribution significantly changes if the text is split into two parts of equal length, and the proportion of annotated versus unannotated pages is measured across these two sets of pages. The distribution in this scenario is shown in the two diagrams below.

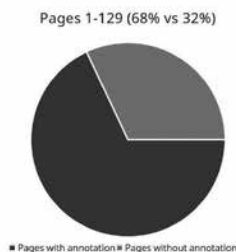


Diagram 1. Proportion of annotated pages in the first half of Szerémi's *Epistola*.

Evidently, Vrančić made annotations on 68% of the pages in the first half of the manuscript (the first 129 pages), where only 32% of the pages remained unmarked. In other words, he dipped deeper into the first half of Szerémi's text.

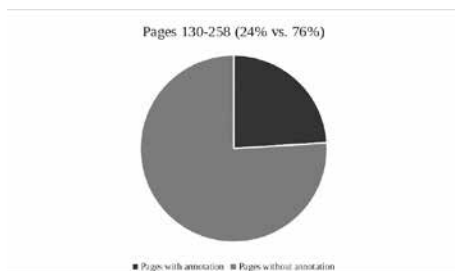


Diagram 2. Proportion of annotated pages in the second half of Szerémi's *Epistola*.

On the other hand, in the second half of the text, only 24% of the pages feature even a single note, while 76% of the pages remain uncommented. That is, the proportion is the inverse of the first half.

Furthermore, the nature of the marginalia should also be considered. In the last 129 pages, out of the 34 annotated pages there are only six where Vrančić provides longer comments, or makes changes to content, language, or style. In all other cases (28 times altogether) he is content to add a year or a name. These entries simply make it easier for the reader to navigate in the text. If we consider only more substantial comments, the ratio of corrected and uncorrected pages alters to 5% vs. 95%. So, while in the first half of the text Vrančić corrected more than two-thirds of the pages, often in several places in the same page (as in the Fig. 8 above), the number of comments and corrections in the second half of the work is, in fact, insignificant. Based on the numbers, it seems that roughly halfway through the text Vrančić's attitude to the work underwent a radical change: while at first he was enthusiastic about corrections and additions, after a while he seemingly lost the will and energy to carry on the editor's quest. The reason for this is unknown, and the following theory is strictly conjectural.

Assuming that Szerémi wrote down his memories or compiled his previous notes at the encouragement of Vrančić, the latter could have had two kinds of intention. He could have set out to edit Szerémi's work for publication, or he could have planned to use it as a source for his own historical work-in-progress. The nature of the marginal notes allows for both hypotheses. Should he have been thinking about the publication of the text, the correction of hard-to-understand or misspelled, grammatically incorrect terms shows the work of a meticulous editor. There are numerous examples of such corrections in the first half of the text. Even if he wanted to use Szerémi's *Epistola* only as a source, it is still important to clarify passages that are linguistically difficult, to correct factual errors, and provide comments that Vrančić, as author, will incorporate into his own work.

The disappearance of notes, on the other hand, suggests that Vrančić soon realized that the text was so badly written that it could hardly be edited for publication. Perhaps he also concluded that no matter how many colourful, terrifying and exciting stories the text contained, its value as a historical source was limited: the *Epistola* was not worth further improvement, because it could not be properly utilised. The drying up of the marginal notes suggests that Vrančić gave up on the text somewhere in its latter half.

However, this brings us to the last problem discussed in this study. The following question, as far as I know, has never been examined in the literature on Szerémi or Vrančić: if Vrančić encouraged Szerémi to write the *Epistola* (as seen above, there is no clear evidence for this), and since he most certainly owned its manuscript, and had read the text and knew it thoroughly, can it be demonstrated that he had used it, that he drew on it somewhere in his own work?

3. Vrančić Uses Szerémi

The final question is, therefore, whether the influence of the *Epistola* (which Vrančić certainly read through and, at least in the first half, annotated with great care) can be demonstrated in Vrančić's work. Answering this question is complicated by the fact that Vrančić did not leave behind a coherent historical text, but described only certain events of the half century between 1490 and 1551, and the fragments rarely overlap with topics that Szerémi talks about. Still, there may be some clues.

Vrančić's surviving works include a letter written to Paolo Giovio.¹⁴ In the letter Vrančić praises Giovio's work on contemporary history, but points out some minor errors related to Hungary. Then, using the opportunity, he compiles a long narrative providing his own interpretation of the circumstances of Buda falling into Turkish hands in 1541. The letter offers almost a short novella about the death of chancellor István Werbőczy. This episode might rely on some information from Szerémi. Szerémi claimed that Werbőczy had placed too much faith in the Sultan's word.¹⁵ According to the *Epistola*, Werbőczy told Bálint Török that the word of the Sultan could be trusted in the same way as the gospel.¹⁶ To the best of my knowledge, no other text attributes such a statement to Werbőczy. Vrančić was not in Buda at the time of the events, so he could not have been an eyewitness. He either heard the anecdote from someone else or, more likely, he found it in Szerémi's *Epistola*.¹⁷ The borrowing of minor details can therefore be assumed, even if the identification of such borrowings requires a systematic investigation that far exceeds the objective of the present study.

More importantly, there is a place in the text where Szerémi does not simply provide Vrančić with data, but inspires a whole concept. The passage in question is at the beginning of Szerémi's work, and it is related to the assessment of the succession struggles following the death of Matthias.

Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490) had no legal successor, so at the end of his life he tried to ensure the inheritance of the throne for his natural son, John Corvinus. As is well known, his attempt was unsuccessful, and after the death of Matthias John Corvinus was denied the crown and the lords eventually elected Vladislaus Jagiellon (1471–1516 King of Bohemia, 1490–1516 King of Hungary)

¹⁴ The letter was written in April 1548. See in: L. Szalay, *op. cit.* (12), 178–226.

¹⁵ »Quare confisus integerrimus senex juramentis ac diplomatibus Turcae, plus quam decebat barbaro [...] constantissime pro fide Solimani disseuerat.« L. Szalay, *op. cit.* (12), 186.

¹⁶ »Nonne dixi magnificencie vestre, quod verba sunt tanquam ewangelium cesaris Turcarum,« G. Wenzel, *op. cit.* (4), 365.

¹⁷ For more details on the sources of the letter to Giovio, see: Péter Kasza, »Manuscripts behind a manuscript. Manuscript sources of Antun Vrančić's work on the fall of Buda', *CM XXX* (2021), 205–215.

as the Hungarian king. There is no trace in the chronicles of the late fifteenth century of the opinion that the election of Vladislaus was a bad decision. Thuróczy, who died before the change of rules, could not report on this event, while Bonfini holds Vladislaus in particularly high esteem; no wonder, since he became his court historian after Matthias' death. It does not even occur to Bonfini that the election of the Jagiellonians at the cost of ignoring John Corvinus could have been a mistake with serious consequences.

Matthias' attempt to secure the throne for his son is discussed in Szerémi. The idiosyncratic chronicler describes how Matthias made the lords swear a five times repeated oath that after his death John Corvinus would be elected ruler. The lords, headed by the Archbishop of Esztergom Tamás Bakócz, took the oath. In Szerémi's description, Bakócz swore by placing one hand on the holy altar and the other on the gospel, and then the text of the oath is quoted in Hungarian.¹⁸

The relevant manuscript page contains a marginal note by Vrančić where he points out that Bakócz was the first to take the oath («Thomas Strigoniensis archiepiscopus primus iuravit»), and then next to the text of the oath he writes: »iuramenti forma« (**Figure 9**).

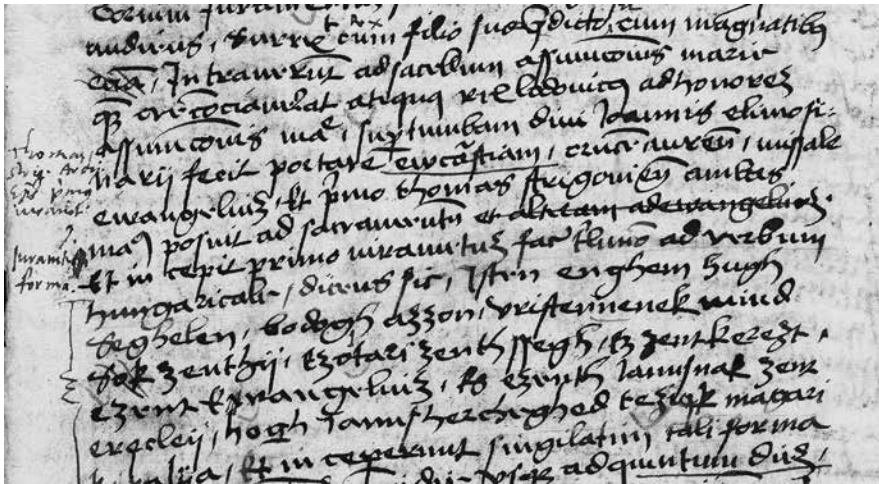


Figure 9. Marginal notes in Szerémi's *Epistola*. National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection, Fol. Lat. 4020, 14v.

¹⁸ »et primo Thomas Strigoniensis ambas manus posuit ad sacramentum et alteram ad ewangelium. Et incepit primo iuramentum facere talimodo ad verbum Hungaricale dicens sic: Isten enghem hugh seghelen, bodogh azzon, uristennenek mind sok zenthly, ez otari zenthsszegh, ez zentkereszt, ezent ewangelium, es ezenth ianusnak zent erocley, hogh Ianus hercheghed teziok magari kiralya. Et inceperunt singilatim tali forma facere iuramentum omni die usque ad quintum diem', G. Wenzel, *op. cit.* (4), 28–29.

The first part of Szerémi's work is a kind of apotheosis of the Hunyadi family. The Hunyadis appear as the embodiment of a national dynasty, but their efforts to establish a dynasty fail due to the stubborn resistance of the Hungarian lords. According to Szerémi's chronicle, Matthias was killed by conspirators.¹⁹ After his death, despite their oath, the lords did not support John Corvinus' claim to the throne,²⁰ and later his children, who were seen by the public as potential rulers, were poisoned.²¹ This led to the ultimate extermination of the Hunyadi family. In Szerémi's view, the fate of the country evidently took a turn for the worse when the Hunyadi family was replaced by the Jagiellonians. There is no earlier trace of this interpretation in Hungarian historiography.

The greatest cataclysm of Hungarian history in the sixteenth century was the defeat at Mohács, which brought the country to ruin. After Mohács, through the period from the 16th to the 19th century (and to a certain extent to this day) it was commonplace that the decline of the country was caused by the weak and impotent governance of the Jagiellonians. During their thirty-five-year rule, the country, which was still strong and solid in the time of Matthias, and represented a significant military force, weakened so much that it was virtually defenceless when facing the Ottoman attack on the eve of Mohács. In other words, the election of the Jagiellonians in 1490 was a mistake. However, this widely held public opinion hides the fact that when Vladislaus II. ascended the throne, even if there were opposing parties and rivals, there was no general agreement that the Bohemian king was unfit to rule. The Hungarian ruling elite did not think so, neither do literary works suggest this. In other words, with his consistently pro-Hunyadi and extreme anti-Jagiellonian position, Szerémi represented a new voice in Hungarian historiography: a view that no other historian before him had promoted.

Among Antun Vrančić's manuscripts and historical fragments there is a short, unfinished text which would most probably have served as a kind of introduction to Vrančić's great, but never completed historical overview. The general attitude and some specific passages of the short text reflect the influence of Szerémi. The opening lines of the work (»Inclinatio regni Hungarorum dubio procul ab excessu divi Matthiae Corvini, regis longe praestantissimi sumpsit exordium«) make the starting point clear: the deterioration of Hungary began with the death of Matthias. After the opening section, Vrančić argues that John Corvinus would have been suitable as Matthias' successor in all respects, but the aristocrats, tired of the heavy-handed rule of Matthias, voted instead for the weaker Vladislaus. However, Matthias tried to persuade the lords to crown his son after his death, and obliged them to do so with an oath, repeated more than once:

¹⁹ G. Wenzel, *op. cit.* (4), 25–26.

²⁰ G. Wenzel, *op. cit.* (4), 29–35.

²¹ G. Wenzel, *op. cit.* (4), 39–43.

Tentatum itaque hoc apud proceres et ex sententia impetratum, moxque in publicis comitiis universi tum proceres, tum reliqui omnes nobilium coetus coronaturos se et in principem suum habituros Joannem Corvinum, patre mortuo, *jurejurando obstrinxere, idque non semel, ut accepi*, quemadmodum suo loco latius prosequemur.²²

He tried to persuade the lords and nobles in the Diet to crown his son, John Corvinus, after his father's death and to recognize him as their king *and obliged them to do so with an oath, repeated more than once, as I have learned*, as will be discussed in more detail in its place.

The general attitude of Vrančić's introduction reflects the worldview of Szerémi's work. Vrančić, just like Szerémi, emphasises that Matthias bound the lords to keep their promises with an oath (»jurejurando obstrinxere«), and even made them swear more than once (»idque non semel«). In Szerémi's version, Matthias makes the lords swear no less than five times. Vrančić, however, admits that he knows about this fact from someone else (»ut accepi«): whether he read it or heard about it is not clear from the use of the verb »accepi,« but the story of multiple oaths certainly relied on a source.

In my lecture, and even in the first version of this paper, I said and wrote that apart from Szerémi's work no other text known to me puts so much emphasis on the lords' (later broken) oath. However, my colleague Vladimir Rezar, one of the reviewers, drew my attention to a passage in Book 1 of the *Commentariorum de temporibus suis libri undecim* by Ludovicus Cerva Tubero (Ludovik Crijević Tuberon, 1458–1527), where the humanist from Dubrovnik writes about the efforts of King Matthias to ensure the throne for his natural son, John Corvinus:

Est autem fama satis constans, Regem Matthiam, praefectos, ac quosdam ex purpuratis suis, caeterosque amicorum, quos propter summa in eos beneficia, sibi etiam extincto fidos fore rebatur, iuramento adegisse, voluntarione an coacto non satis compertum habeo, vt filium sibi in regnum substituerent. Sed quoniam vita functi amicis fere carent [...] iurati promissis haud quaquam stetisse creduntur.²³

The story persists that King Matthias made the major lords and several of his friends, whom he obliged with a number of good deeds and therefore believed that they would remain loyal to him even after his death, swear (whether they acted voluntarily or under duress, I do not know) that they would make his son his successor on the throne. But as a dead man mostly has no friends [...] the oath-bearers are held to not have kept their promise.

²² L. Szalay, *op. cit.* (12), 5.

²³ Ludovik Crijević Tuberon, *Ludovici Tuberonis Dalmatae Abbatis Commentarii de temporibus suis*, Vlado Rezar (ed.), Hrvatski institut za povijest, Zagreb, 2001, 27.

It is clear from this that the story of the lords' broken oath was known to their contemporaries. The same knowledge can be inferred from Szerémi's report, since he himself could not have witnessed the events he narrates, but only knew them by hearsay, from the accounts of others.

Nevertheless, I think that Vrančić has taken the story from Szerémi's text. I can provide several arguments for this claim. We have seen that Vrančić considered this passage in the *Epistola* to be important, because he marked it in the manuscript, and then essentially retold the story in a more elevated humanistic register. Moreover, the narratives of Szerémi and Tubero differ in one detail: Tubero does not say that the lords swore several times, whereas Szerémi insists that they swore five times to the king, Matthias. In Vrančić's text we also read that the lords were obliged by the king to swear repeatedly. This detail in itself makes it more likely that Szerémi and not Tubero was Vrančić's source. Additionally, Tubero's text was not known among historians in Hungary until the second half of the 16th century; it was discovered, copied and brought back by Ferenc Forgách decades after Vrančić wrote his introduction. The first Hungarian historian to make proven use of Tubero's work was Forgách's protégé Gian Michele Bruto (1517–1592).

Rezar is right to point out that the criticism of the Jagiellonian era was already to be found in Tubero, therefore one cannot claim that Szerémi was the first writer who interpreted the events in this manner. The fact is that in the second half of the sixteenth century the idea that the decline of the country started with the death of Matthias spread, becoming a commonplace in Hungarian historiography. Many later works choose 1490 as the starting point.²⁴

Unfortunately, the passage to which Vrančić referred in the introduction, where he intended to tell the story of the succession to Matthias in more detail, was never completed. But the reliance on Szerémi can, I think, be reasonably assumed in the light of the above arguments. Whether Vrančić's views, beside Szerémi whom he definitely read, might have been influenced not only by Szerémi but also by Tubero and his work – in other words, whether Vrančić, as a Dalmatian, was familiar with the work of his colleague from Dubrovnik – is a question that can only be clarified by further research. But this is well beyond the scope of this study.

²⁴ The two most important and comprehensive national histories written in the sixteenth century, Gian Michele Bruto's (*Brutus*) *Rerum Ungaricarum Libri* and Miklós Istvánffy's *Historiae*, both take up the thread of events from 1490, from the death of Matthias.

Péter Kasza

HUMANIST I TAMNE LEGENDE UGARSKE POVIJESTI –
ANTUN VRANČIĆ KAO KORISNIK RUKOPISA JURJA SRIJEMCA
EPISTOLA DE PERDITIONE REGNI HUNGARORUM

Rad odgovara na tri važna pitanja vezana uz djelo Jurja Srijemca (Györgyja Szerémija) *Epistola de perditione regni Hungarorum*. Premda se u znanstvenoj literaturi zdravo za gotovo uzima da je Srijemac djelo sastavio na zahtjev Antuna Vrančića, u samom tekstu za to nema jasnih naznaka; mjesta na kojima je o tome možda bilo riječi naknadno su izbrisana ili precrtana. No, pojedine ispravke i marginalne bilješke ukazuju da je Vrančić imao veze s rukopisom i da ga je pomno čitao. Drugi dio rada donosi klasifikaciju Vrančićevih ispravaka u rukopisu i pokazuje neujednačenost njihove distribucije u dvjema polovicama teksta. Čini se da je Vrančić isprva redigiranju djela pristupio vrlo ozbiljno, da bi kasnije od pothvata zapravo odustao. Dosad nije bilo potrage za utjecajem Srijemčeva djela na Vrančićeve historiografske ulomke. Ovaj rad upozorava na dva primjera takva utjecaja; jedan je posebno važan jer pokazuje da se promjena ugarskog stava o vladavini Jagelovića može pripisati Srijemčevoj ocjeni preuzetj u Vrančićevu djelu.

Ključne riječi: Juraj Srijemac, Antun Vrančić, historiografija, Ugarsko Kraljevstvo, povijest ranoga novog vijeka, tekstologija, bilješke na marginama

