Servetus's "Christianismi Restitutio" and Transylvania

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Accessibility
Servetus's *Christianismi Restitutio* and Transylvania*

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Some books are so important and so rare that the study of the transmission of the author's thought is inseparable from the history of the individual copies and the uses to which they have been put. Such is the case with *Christianismi Restitutio*, the principal work of Michael Servetus (1509/11-1553), Spanish anti-Trinitarian humanist thinker, geographer, physician, and discoverer of the lesser circulation of the blood. Printed in 1553, at a secret press in Vienne (France), the work led to Servetus's condemnation as a heretic and his subsequent death at the stake. Nearly all copies of the book were destroyed. Only three copies of the original edition have come down to us, and two of those are imperfect. One is at the University of Edinburgh. Another, which according to one version was snatched from the flames which were devouring the body of Servetus, is in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. A third copy is in the Oesterreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, a copy was in Kassel, but it has since disappeared.

Despite the virtual destruction of the first edition, dissemination of *Christianismi Restitutio* continued. A first partial reprinting was made as early as 1569. In that reprinting, the decisive role was played by Giorgio Blandrata (ca. 1515-1590), Italian physician and reformer, and by Ferenc Dávid (1510?-1579), who, together with Blandrata, was a founder of the Transylvanian Unitarian community. Blandrata, who was in Zurich and Basel in 1557, apparently obtained a printed

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2 Podach, p. 53.
or manuscript copy from among the circle of freethinkers in sympathy with Servetus. With that copy in his possession, he diffused the ideas of Servetus in Poland and then in Transylvania. In 1569, there appeared at Alba Iulia in Transylvania De Regno Christi Liber primus. De Regno Anti-christi Liber secundus. Accessit Tractatus de Pau-do-baptismo et Circumcisione, a work edited and published by Blandrata and Dávid. As a number of scholars have pointed out, this book was,

1 Stanislas Kot, "L'influence de Servet sur le mouvement antitrinitaire en Pologne et en Transylvanie" in Auteur de Michel Servet (note 1 above), pp. 94-103.
save for ten to fifteen pages, a word-for-word reprint of a major portion of Christianismi Restitutio.\(^4\)

Another attempt to republish Christianismi Restitutio was made in London in 1723, based upon a manuscript in the possession of Gysbert Dummer, a Dutchman. A large portion of the first book came off the press, but the sheets were confiscated by Gibson, bishop of London.\(^5\) The origin of Dummer's manuscript has been thoroughly investigated. It can be traced back to a copy of the first edition purchased in London on 13 May 1665 by the Transylvanian student Daniel Szentiványi Markos, that being the copy which is now in Vienna. With Markos's permission, several manuscript copies were made, among them one in Brandenburg in 1668, and another at Cluj, after Markos's return home. These two copies came into the possession of Samuel Krell (Crellius), a German humanist, who, as the need arose, transcribed and sold secondary copies. One of them was Dummer's.\(^6\) Thus, the London attempt to republish Christianismi Restitutio is indirectly connected to Transylvania.

Nearly sixty years later, in 1790 at Nuremberg, a complete reprint of the principal work of Servetus was finally made, thanks to the German polymath Christoph Gottlieb von (De) Murr (1733-1811). In the publication of this edition, a manuscript now at Harvard played a vital role, as will be subsequently shown. But first, we must return to the history of the present Vienna copy.

Markos, who purchased it in 1665, became the Transylvanian Unitarian bishop in 1684. Subsequently, as noted on the title-page, the book passed to his successor, Mihály Gergely Almási, the "future


\(^5\) Fulton (note 1 above), p. 88, citing R. H. Hill, "The 1723 Reprint of the 'Christianismi Restitutio' of Servetus," *Bolton Quarterly Record*, V (4th Quarter, 1927), 197-198. Although Malcolm Steuart states that this partial reprint "never got beyond page proofs" and cites evidence which suggests that one of the copies consists of proofs, it is more logical that they are finished sheets. The number of surviving copies is large; she records ten. Moreover, standard practice was to set type, pull proofs, correct and print, and then distribute the type sheet by sheet.

\(^6\) Podach (note 1 above), pp. 31-53. One of the copies made by Krell is in the Andover-Harvard Theological Library; it bears the statement "Adscribi sta Kremingswaldiae Ann. 1719, d. 19. Febr. Samuel Crellius." It came to Harvard by purchase in 1868 as part of the 7,000-title library of C. W. Niedner, professor of church history at Berlin.
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Unitarian” bishop (“futuro episcopo dandus”). Although we are told that this book “was held in the personal trust of the Unitarian bishop in power,”8 to own this book and display it openly was dangerous. Hence, it is not surprising that it sometimes disappeared from sight or surfaced in other hands.

One such instance was in 1764. Count Sámuel Teleki (1739-1822), bibliophile (the library he founded at Târgu Mureș/Marosvásárhely bears his name) and later chancellor of Transylvania, found the book in the possession of the “Societate Brethren” in that year. In his letter to Johann Rudolf Iselin, professor of jurisprudence at the University of Vienna, he stated: “As they also know about the rarity of this book, its price was fixed at 60 gold coins.”9

Teleki did not purchase it at that time, but sixteen years later, in 1780, he became the owner. Jacob Ferdinand Miller, professor of law at Oradea, who in 1785 was commissioned by Teleki to write the history of the Transylvanian copy, noted only that it came into Teleki’s possession as a gift, “chiefly” through the “assistance” of István Agh, the Unitarian bishop.10 József Keresztesi, Calvinist minister at Oradea, who was a member of Teleki’s circle, noted the circumstances of the gift as follows: “And once the Unitarians in Transylvania having some common trouble asked His Excellency Sámuel Teleki to solve it, who asked for the book and got it from them as a gift in 1780.”11 Despite the seeming reliability of this evidence, it does not fit the facts, for in the years just before 1780 there was no important grievance to be redressed. Moreover, at that time Teleki was chief councillor of the Government of Transylvania, a position whose power was not so great that he was able to confer great benefit. We must presume that Keresztesi reversed cause and effect and that the gift was a means of winning favor for future

7 Herbert Hunger, “Michael Servetus and das Exemplar seiner Reritatio Christianismi in der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek,” Biblica, 1 (1912), 73-76.
8 Kolmenen Gall, A keresztiunitárius kollegium története, 1588-1910 (Kolozsvár, 1935), II, 403. See also Podacz (note 1 above), pp. 48-50.
9 The draft of his letter, in Latin, is in the Teleki-Bolyai Library, Samuel Teleki Archive, shelfmark: Tf.-1169, Ms. 283, pp. 17ff.
benefits. Possibly, Agh and those around him, especially his successor in the bishop’s chair, István Lázár, saw Teleki as a “rising man” who possessed qualities that would make him valuable to Joseph II, the new emperor. Indeed, those benefits were not long in coming, for the toleration edict that Teleki helped prepare was promulgated on 29 October 1781.

Whatever the reasons for the gift, Teleki’s ownership soon became widely known. Johann Seivert, a Transylvanian Saxon, boasted in the Ungarischer Magazin in 1781 that at Sibiu a “meritorious and venerable Count” had among his books a copy of Servetus’s main work. Teleki’s ownership presumably came to the attention of those around Joseph II who knew that in 1783 the emperor had tried in vain to obtain the Paris or La Vallière copy. It was apparently suggested to Teleki that he should offer his copy to the emperor. This is confirmed by József Keresztesi’s diary, which states that Teleki “at the demanding request of Joseph II, donated it to the Bibliotheca of Vienna.” In his letter of 27 January 1786 to Gottfried van Swieten, with which he sent the book, Teleki wrote: “Je m’estime bien heureux de pouvoir offrir à la Bibliotheque Impériale le plus rare de tous les livres recherchés, que Vous avez trouvé d’y être placés.” The wording of the last phrase of the sentence suggests that the gift was not entirely voluntary.

The article in Ungarischer Magazin also drew the attention of Christoph von Murr in Nuremberg. Having learned the identity of the owner from Dániel Cornides (1732-1787), literary scholar and librarian in Budapest, he also learned that the copy was in as good condition as if it had just come off the press.

He decided to try to obtain a transcription, as is shown by his hitherto unannoted correspondence with Teleki. In the initial letter to the count, dated Nuremberg, 22 March 1784, von Murr stated, “I should like to add a copy of this rarest of books to the other manuscripts in my library.” He asked Teleki if he would lend him the book for copying or have it done at Sibiu under his supervision, and he added that he would like it done in quarto format and that it be

12 Johann Seivert, “Siebenbürgische Briefe.” Ungarischer Magazin, 1 (1781), 68.
13 Fulton (note 1 above), p. 86.
15 Hunger (note 7 above), p. 77.
a page-for-page copy of the original. In compensation he offered to send the catalogue of his manuscripts and books in order that the Count could select something in return.17

In his reply of 1 June 1784, Teleki stated that he could fully satisfy von Murr and have the book copied “before my very eyes.”18 Von Murr’s request had arrived at an opportune time, for Teleki, faced with the emperor’s “demanding request,” had his own motive for making a copy. In the words of Jacob Miller, “In order that such a very rare book might have a written memory in his library, Teleki ordered that a copy be so accurately and correctly transcribed that the manuscript might be considered equal to the printed book.” Miller identified the scribe as József Vitéz, later a court agent.19 Just as Teleki wanted a copy “equal to the printed book,” so did von Murr desire a copy which conformed to the printed book. His answer to the letter of 1 June 1784 again contained the request “that the pages of the original might be exactly the same in number as the pages of the manuscript” and that “the transcriber should always write the number of the printed page.”20 This repeated request shows that the German scholar was thinking not only of “the enlargement of his library” but also of reprinting the work.

On 28 August 1785, the impatient von Murr was reassured by Teleki that “Servetus’s book is beside me, and I have hand-copied most of it rather neatly. As soon as the transcription is finished, I shall collate it with the original.”21 Finally, in a letter written at Oradea, 20 January 1785, Teleki informed von Murr that “the copy

17 “Reliquiae Manuscripta, quae in mea bibliotheca sunt, addere cupio descriptum exemplar huius libri inter omnes rarissimi. Utinam a Tua . . . impetrare possem, ut veniam concedeis describendi istum liberum, aut ad me . . . aut Hermannosti Tuis sub auspiciis, in quarta, ut dicere, formas, ita ut paginaris paginam originali correspondant”, Teleki Archive, shelfmark: Tq 1580, Ms. 21, pp. 197-199.
18 “Nec Tibi cumulata satisfactum si libellus sub aculis meis in quarta (ut jubes) formam nitide describeretur. Cujus quidem earum . . . Te voleantiae, libenter in me suscipiam.” Teleki Archive, shelfmark: Tt 1169, Ms. 285, p. 73.
19 Miller (note 10 above), pp. 161-163.
20 “Gratissimum mihi erit, si in liber Serveti describatur, ut paginae originalis paginae manuscripti exacto numero correspondant. Qua de causa forma quarta optima erit, semperque ut scripsisse foliorum impressorum numerum addas, rogo.” Teleki Archive, shelfmark: Tq 1580, Ms. 21, p. 20.
21 “Noli tamen credere, me promissionis immemorem fuisse; Serveti liber penes me est, et cum maxime describatur manus sitis elegantis; Apographum quamprimum paratum, diligenterque collatum fuerit. Curabo ut ad Te perveniam.” Teleki Archive, shelfmark: Tt 1169, Ms. 285, p. 76.
of Servetus’s *Christianismi Restitutio* under my authentic seal was
handled by me to Mr. Adam Servansky who was travelling to Vienn-
a.

Servansky was to turn it over to von Murr’s representative, Johann Jacob Bittner, court agent. Two months later, von Murr received the copy and thanked Teleki warmly: “I was astonished and
dumbfounded when I received the copy of *Christianismi Restitutio*.

. . . Before all those who are fond of fine literature I will celebrate
with due praises your immense kindness and the unusual goodwill,
by which I was honored by Your Excellency, as long as I live and
my body is ruled by my soul.”

In 1790, von Murr had the complete *Christianismi Restitutio*
reprinted on the basis of the manuscript copy given him by Teleki.

There is every reason to believe that the manuscript copy was used
for printing without the knowledge and consent of Teleki.

The correspondence of Teleki and von Murr reveals that the two
men had differing views of Servetus and Calvin. In his letter of 20
December 1785, von Murr stated, “I have just as great regard for this
man [Servetus] as I am shocked by the wicked Calvin.” In reply on
20 January 1786, Teleki called Servetus “a man with a deranged
mind” (“homo crmutus mentis”) and defended Calvin. Sámiel
Teleki was an enlightened, tolerant intellectual, but at the same
time, he was a Calvinist to the core. The bibliophile was proud of his rare
Servetus copy, but it is unlikely that the convinced Calvinist would
have agreed to the propagation of beliefs he considered heretical.

22 “Datum illum liberorum Apographam ‘Restitutio Christianismi’ M. Serveti sigillo
meo clausum D. Adamo Servanski . . . sub finem Januarii mensis Vienaeum profectum
traddid.” Teleki Archive, shelfmark: T 11169, Ms. 2285, p. 81.
23 “Obstupit, voces fauciibus haedit, quem adlatum Christianismi Restitutioris Apo-
grapham ex involucris retraham . . . Tantum enim, quae me hominasti, Comes ac Patrone
Excellentissime, benevolentiam, tamque insistentem benigneitudinem debitissi laudibus celebrabo
apud omnes politissimae litteratissimae amantes, dum meminor ipsius mihi, dum spiritus
hos regent.” Teleki Archive, shelfmark: Tq 1580, Ms. 21, pp. 225-226.
24 Fulton (note 1 above), p. 43, states that “ecclesiastical authorities frowned upon this
undertaking [i.e., the reprint] . . . but a fairly large edition finally found its way into
print.” No basis for this statement is supplied. The same paragraph states that the 1759 edition
is almost as rare as that of Vienna, but the added bibliography records thirty-eight copies in
European libraries and thirteen in North America.
Marosvásárhelyensis,” *Tudományos Győjetény*, XII (1817), 5-8.
26 Hoc “virum inificem tanti facio, quantum abhorreo a pessimo Calvin.” Teleki
Archive, shelfmark: Tq 1580, Ms. 21, p. 218.
27 Teleki Archive, shelfmark: T 11169, Ms. 2285, p. 81.
28 Teleki’s view of Servetus is also revealed by the catalogue of his library which he
Whatever Teleki's feelings might have been about the reprint, he faced no public embarrassment, for the reprint contains no mention of him or von Murr. Indeed, the only indication that it is a reprint is a very small "1790" at the foot of the final leaf. In subsequent years, von Murr revealed his own role but kept silent about Teleki.

In a work he published in 1805, he twice mentioned *Christianismi Restitutio*. Once he referred to it as having been "republished most accurately by me." Elsewhere, he mentioned that the copy originally owned by Dániel Szentiványi Markos passed through the possession of István Agh and then into the hands of Count Samuel Teleki, who later gave it to Joseph II as a gift, thus making it part of the court library in Vienna. "By myself," von Murr added, "in 1790 this book came out again; like the phoenix it rose again from the ashes." Not a word was said about Teleki's help.

Von Murr may have taken another step to hide Teleki's aid. Whereas the Harvard manuscript now has three preliminary leaves — two blank, one with text by von Murr on both the recto and verso — it originally had five preliminary leaves. This is shown by the existence of two stubs. Four of the preliminary leaves were on the same stock of paper as the rest of the manuscript, and one was on a much heavier stock. One leaf probably contained a presentation inscription from Teleki to von Murr. Another very likely had the text (see Figs. 2 and 3) which is present on a preliminary leaf of the manuscript in the Teleki library at Tîrgu-Mureş. The recto states that the transcription was made by Józef Vítész on Teleki's order, before the printed copy was presented to Joseph II. The verso notes that the printed copy is that of Dániel Szentiványi Markos, which was mentioned by Samuel Arell.

Support for the hypothesis that the von Murr copy had such a leaf comes from the fact that the manuscript now has on the verso of one preliminary leaf, among other statements, the one that is on the verso himself compiled, Bibliotheca Samuelli S.R.I. Com. Teleki de Scii, 4 volis. (Vienna, 1796-1819). In vol. 2 (Vienna, 1800), p. 46, the manuscript and the 1790 reprint are recorded under the heading "Scriptores atheismi, suspecti, mystici et paradoxi."

29 "Mens canis fiber interdum a 1790 adpatur, veluti redivivo funere Phoenix," in C. G. von Murr, *Adnotationes ad Bibliothecam Hallerianam botanica, medicinae, physicae et medicinae practicae cum varis adscriptis Michaelis Serveti perimentibus* (Erlangen, 1805), p. 69. The other statement is found on p. 29. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Gerhard Baader, chief researcher of the Institute for the History of Medicine, Free University, Berlin, in making available copies of von Murr's statements.
Fig. 2 Recto of a preliminary leaf in the Tirgu-Mureș manuscript

In præsens Exempli oppis exaequ. anno editionis M DC III ad dextram subsidiarum legitur:

Danieli Hunske Benedicto Transilvano-

Vide colligere licet: Exemplum hoc idem esse, de quo Samuel Collini in ibi aedibus publicis, Pera-
Arch. Sorbici. pag. 204.

Fig. 3 Verso of a preliminary leaf in the Tirgu-Mureș manuscript
in the Tirgu-Mureș copy (Fig. 4). Von Murr only added that he published Christianismi Restitutio based on this copy in 8 May 1790. Had von Murr not been copying the placement of the statement, it is unlikely that something so important would have been placed on the verso. On the recto of the same leaf is a presentation inscription from von Murr to a certain Reinhard, dated 1808.

To state that von Murr suppressed Teleki's assistance is not to imply that he did so for improper reasons. The leaves might even have been removed as early as 1790 before the manuscript was put in the hands of the printer who prepared the printed edition. In the
year following the French Revolution, ecclesiastical authorities might have taken reprisals against von Murr in Catholic Bavaria or Teleki in Hapsburg Austria, had their role become known — despite Teleki's innocence of any desire to propagate the beliefs of Servetus.

Later, as well, Teleki would have suffered only embarrassment from having his name associated with an edition of Christianismi Restitutio. Whatever von Murr's motives were, the hiding of Teleki's aid has misled modern scholars. To be sure, Józef Keresztesi's diary stated that before Teleki's printed copy was sent to Vienna, "Józef Vitéz, a student from Debrecen, had transcribed it in two copies at Oradea, one of them kept in Teleki's possession, and the other he sent by him to a Lutheran gentleman in Nuremburg called De Murr, in 1786." That statement now has been proved by Teleki's correspondence with von Murr and by comparison of the handwriting of the two

30 Keresztesi (note 11 above), p. 116. Kazinczy (note 17 above), pp. 3-8, also was aware that Teleki had two copies made.
Von Murr did not have the copy made after the printed book was in the library of Joseph II, as scholars have sometimes assumed. Instead, his manuscript copy was a gift from Sámuel Teleki.

Thanks to the good offices of Melanie M. Winer of the Houghton Library, we were able to compare some pages of the two manuscripts. Unfortunately, the accession records at Harvard do not show the source from which the manuscript in Houghton was received.

Fulton (note 1 above), p. 43, did not record Teleki's involvement. Neither did Paćach (note 1 above), p. 52, who explicitly states that von Murr made his copy with the permission of Joseph II and that the royal library made a copy for Teleki.
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