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A „HUNGARIAN ZEUXIS” IN VIENNA
ART AND LIFE OF THE CALLIGRAPHER GYÖRGY BOCSKAY (A. 1510–1575)

ABSTRACT OF THE PhD DISSERTATION

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Budapest, 2012

The calligrapher György (George) Bocskay (a. 1510–1575) was the only Hungarian artist evaluated for his art in the Viennese court of the Habsburg Monarchy (the Hungarian Kingdom included) during the early modern period. International and Hungarian scholars focused primarily on his two writing model books decorated by the Flemish artist Joris Hoefnagel, on his inscriptions on the cenotaph of Emperor Maximilian I. in Innsbruck and on some of his letters patent (grants of coats of arms) mostly in articles. The aim of my dissertation is to fill the gap and produce a monograph on the artist's activity.

The calligrapher spent three decades in the court of Vienna. Due to this long period new primary sources related to him could be expected in Hungarian (Hungarian National Archive) and Austrian (Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv – Finanz- und Hofkammerarchiv, Vienna, Tiroler Landesarchiv, Innsbruck) archives. Through my research conducted in these institutions, an extensive body of unknown data emerged which shed new light on his life and career.

György Bocskay was a member of a well-known Hungarian noble family. He belonged to the so called “Rasinja line” of the family. This line of the family had lands in Slavonia, the Southern part of the Hungarian Kingdom (county of Kőrös, now: eastern region of Croatia) from the 15th century. On the base of my new findings, hand-written genealogies of his family from the 16th century, an accurate family tree of his ancestors and descendants can be drawn. One of them, for example, provided evidence on him being the second cousin of the most known member of the family, István (Stephen) Bocskai, the later principal of Transylvania, who belonged to the richer “Kismarja line” line of the family. In previous research father of Stephen, also named George, was often thought to be identical with the calligrapher. However, a Hungarian scholar, István Fazekas published new documents about his death in 1571, so Stephen's father had been already dead four years before the calligrapher's death.

A large amount of reliable data is found in the original letters patent (grant of arms) of the “Rasinja line” of the family. It was granted for the three Bocskay-brothers, Ferenc (Francis), Miklós (Nicholas) and György in 1549. The letters patent was published only partially in the 1940s. In my dissertation I fully published and analyzed the Latin text of the document. It was possibly compiled by György Bocskay himself, who was a scribe of the Hungarian Royal Chancellery already in 1549, where the patent was issued. The document had to be reissued because its original was lost during the battles against the Turkish troops in Slavonia in 1532. The text gives a short description of György Bocskay's early career: he was supported by Miklós (Nicholas) Oláh, bishop of Zágráb (Zagreb) and vice-chancellor of the

Chancellery from 1543 (later chancellor and archbishop of Esztergom) to get a scribe/notary (“notarius”) job at the Hungarian Royal Chancellery where he probably started to work – on the basis of a different source – in 1545. The text of the letters patent also mentions some calligraphic works of Bocskay for Ferdinand I., which cannot be identified yet.

György Bocskay was initially a scribe (notary) and personal servant of Miklós Oláh at the Hungarian Royal Chancellery. After 1554 he was promoted to Hungarian court secretary („secretarius”, „Ungarischer Hofsecretär”). He held this position until his death, having an annual salary from the Hungarian Royal Chamber which resided in Pozsony (Bratislava). The obtained position was a substantial advance in his career because in the absence of the chancellor, head of the Hungarian Royal Chancellery, the secretary (or secretaries) played an important role in running the office as substitutes. During these years he worked together with numerous outstanding persons of the Hungarian history, e.g. György Draskovich, András (Andrew) Dudith, Ferenc (Francis) Forgách, Miklós (Nicholas) Istvánffy, or János (John) Liszthy. He was appointed to the high position of royal councilor („consiliarius”) of the Hungarian Royal Council around 1565 as well. Due to his positions (secretary and councilor) he became a significant member of the Viennese court.

From time to time György Bocskay received different donations from his patrons at the Viennese court, above all from the emperors (and also Hungarian kings) Habsburg Ferdinand I. and Maximilian II. On one hand he got usual benefits, common to all clerks of the court (e. g. small land donations, aids for buying a house for his family or extra money for the wedding of his daughter and niece), on another hand he received uncommon donations (e. g. support for buying clothes and for accommodation in Vienna) as well. He was also granted by the title „aulae familiaris” („aulicus”) by Ferdinand I. around 1561. It was a titular position generally granted for official, economical or intellectual services, e. g. the well-known Hungarian humanist, János Zsámboky (Johannes Sambucus) was also an „aulicus” of the Viennese court. On the basis of the referred sources Bocskay won his title from Ferdinand I. as a calligrapher. Additionally, after 1563, he got a second annual salary not from the Hungarian Chamber, but directly from the court. In my opinion, like his “aulicus” title and his unusual benefits mentioned above, his second salary could also be connected to his activities as an artist at the court.

The first Hungarian patron of György Bocskay in Vienna was the already mentioned Miklós Oláh, who supported him to join the Hungarian Royal Chancellery. Bocskay had connections to other significant members of the elite of the Hungarian nobility as well. Among his patrons were the Batthyány, and the Nádasdy families. For example he had

extensive correspondence with Boldizsár Batthyány III. who was in contact with several outstanding humanists of the “*respublica litteraria*” (e.g. Carolus Clusius).

Bocskay also had close relationship with the members of the Nádasdy family, Tamás (Thomas) Nádasdy, the palatine (the highest ranking official of the Hungarian Kingdom) and his family: his wife, Orsolya (Ursula) Kanizsay and their son, Ferenc (Francis) II. Nádasdy. Bocskay was accommodated in the palace of the family in Vienna in the 1560s where he equipped a workshop for his acid-etched sepulchral inscriptions. Additionally, he prepared not only the inscriptions of the cenotaph of Emperor Maximilian I. in his workshop, but other ones, namely for the marble cenotaph of Tamás Nádasdy. All in all, with the help of recently found primary sources a new work of Bocskay can be identified: he carried out three inscribed stone plates for the sepulchral monument of the palatine, the leader of the Hungarian noble elite. The marble cenotaph was erected in 1566 in the castle of Léka (now: Lockenhaus, Austria), where Tamás Nádasdy and later his wife were buried. In the 17th century the monument was transferred to the church crypt of the Augustine monastery of Léka.

As an artist György Bocskay was a well appreciated member of the Viennese court. In his writing model books prepared for the Habsburg rulers many of his signatures defining himself as a „representative of the *ars scribendi*” or the „*own scribe* of the ruler”, to put it simply: a court calligrapher. He could effectively adapt himself to the expectations of the court and he was specialized consciously in calligraphy, a new art form which became increasingly popular, gaining the rank of art in the time of his career. In the 16th century calligraphy was popularized by printed writing model books containing several samples of different letter types. The printed manuals were at first published in Italy and then spread north of the Alps, e.g. to England, France, Spain and the German speaking territories. The authors of the books were appreciated on one hand as teachers whose printed materials were used in schools, on the other hand as artists. The various and unique letter types can be regarded as a new form of art. In the second half of the 16th century Italian theorists grew to appreciate drawing („*disegno*”) which also influenced the evaluation of calligraphy. By the end of the century calligrapher contests were held and Karel van Mander defined calligraphy as a „sister of painting” (“*pictura*”). The most excellent calligraphers served at princely courts – as György Bocskay did – all over in Europe. The Hungarian calligrapher’s activity at the Viennese court closely related to his official tasks at the Hungarian Royal Chancellery. Additionally, he was given special orders by the Habsburg rulers – inscriptions for the sepulchral monument of Emperor Maximilian I., and for the ratification charters of the Habsburg–d’Este and Habsburg–Medici marriages – as well.

György Bocskay also decorated three writing model books with various letters and ornaments for the Habsburg emperors and Hungarian kings: two manuscripts for Ferdinand I. (1561–62, 1562) and the third for Maximilian II. (1571–73). The evaluation of his art is shown by the fact that in 1596 one of his works was already kept in the cabinet of curiosities (Kunstammer) of Ambras of Archduke Ferdinand II. next to the two others that were decorated by the Flemish miniaturist Joris Hoefnagel for the collection of Emperor Rudolf II. in Prague in the 1590s. Such calligraphic works belonged – besides other groups, e.g. manuscripts containing “naturalia” or connecting the dynasty, luxury copies – to a special group of manuscripts and other written objects welcomed during the 16th century in the cabinets of curiosities. These systematical and encyclopaedical (“theatrum mundi”) collections and their items played a significant role in the political and diplomatic “repraesentatio” of the ruler. Therefore in my dissertation the two manuscripts of Bocskay that were decorated by Hoefnagel could be analyzed in reference to this function of the collection of Rudolf II. in Prague.

The three writing model books of György Bocskay are of excellent quality and contain an enormous number of various writing samples. In comparison with other similar manuscripts made for the collection of Ambras or Vienna in the same time Bocskay’s model books consist of more samples (no less than approx. 250 different pieces), above all variations of the same letter types such as differently decorated samples of italic or antiqua scripts. Bocskay applied in his model books not only humanist scripts but Gothic types – Italian, French and German ones – as well. He primarily copied his writing samples from popular printed manuals. Among his sources some recently published Italian and German writing model books can be found. In my dissertation I could newly identify some of his unknown printed sources. Aside from using various letters Bocskay frequently decorated his texts with a lot of different ornaments: plant ornaments (e.g. acanthus letters), Flechtwerk, Rollwerk and arabesque.

After the above mentioned first manuscript that was dedicated to Emperor Ferdinand I. in 1562, Ferdinand commissioned Bocskay to engrave the all’antica (Roman capital) inscriptions for the marble cenotaph of the sepulchral monument of Maximilian I. in Innsbruck. In my dissertation I regard this manuscript as a preliminary stage of the inscriptions of the cenotaph by Bocskay. My opinion is that the manuscript can be interpreted as a variation of the original epigraphic monuments of the Antiquity that were collected in Vienna at the time. It contains many writing samples of Roman capitals, special imitations of the carved inscriptions. Additionally, I gave in my dissertation a short overview of the

completion process of the sepulchral monument as well as the occurring all'antica phenomena at the Viennese court, the court of the new Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I.

Eventually, on the basis of known and recently found primary sources (Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv – Finanz- und Hofkammerarchiv, Vienna, Tiroler Landesarchiv, Innsbruck) I could completely reconstruct the making process of the inscriptions. Bocskay worked on the acid-etched plates in his workshop in Vienna from 1563 to 1568. For instance I have found one of his original designs for the cenotaph and it becomes clear that besides the 24 stone plates for the white marble reliefs (scenes from the life of Emperor Maximilian I.) he carried out the sepulchral inscription (more 18 plates) on the frieze of the cenotaph as well. The final version of the scenes and the Latin inscriptions were compiled by the vice-councilor Georg Sigmund Seld commissioned by Ferdinand I.

György Bocskay as a scribe and later as a secretary at the Hungarian Royal Chancellery accomplished tasks of a calligrapher as well. He decorated several letters patent (grants of coats of arms, “*armales litterae*”) issued by the Chancellery for various members of the Hungarian nobility. It is remarkable that Bocskay used the same Italian and German models of printed manuals for his letters that were being used for his manuscripts. During my research in Hungarian and Slovakian archives I found a large number of unknown letters patent that have not been attributed to him but in my opinion were decorated by the calligrapher. Bocskay carried out the richly decorated charters on parchment in booklet (“*libellus*”) or single folio format. Generally the first lines of the text (titulature of the Hungarian king Ferdinand I. or Maximilian II. etc.) were decorated by various letter types and ornaments. Above all he used the printed manuals of the German Johannes Neudörffer the Elder and Italian Vespasiano Amphiareo (“*Amphiareo-group*”, “*Neudörffer-group*”). The decorative elements of the charters show similar phenomena of varying Gothic and Humanistic scripts that can be observed in his above mentioned three writing model books. Eventually, his characteristic letter types and ornaments influenced considerably the other letters patent issued by the Hungarian Royal Chancellery at his time.

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Transformation of a Manuscript by George Bocskay – Imitating Roman Epigraphy as Writing Model Book [poster presentation]

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July 15–20 2012, Nuremberg

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Institute for Art History, Research Centre for the Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

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Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropas (GWZO)

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[Political Allegories by Joris Hoefnagel Relating to Hungary]
Political Genres of the Old Hungarian Literature
Conference of the Institute for Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences
May 25–28 2005, Gyula