

How to write History (?)

The *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* and Neo-Latin historiography in Hungary in the 16th century

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Received: July 3, 2024 • Accepted: October 14, 2024

Published online: December 13, 2024

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ABSTRACT

Gian Michele Bruto (Brutus) (1517–1592) wrote his monumental history of Hungary from 1574 until his death. The *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* was the story of Hungary's decline and fall in the 16th century, written in a single narrative. According to the plans of its original commissioner, the Transylvanian prince and Polish king Stephen Báthory (1571/76–1586), it was meant to provide a political counterweight to the narrative of the court of Vienna and to represent an independent, constitutional Hungary to the European public. Although a version of the work had certainly been completed by 1584, it was not published during Báthory's lifetime. In 1587, Brutus first entered into Habsburg service, then at the end of 1591, having been informed his work was to be published there, he travelled to Transylvania. He died in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia, RO) in May 1592. The Transylvanian court was still planning to publish the work in the 1590s: the Transylvanian historiographer István Szamosközy (1570–1612) brought Brutus' manuscripts into a publishable condition and also wrote a continuation of it (*Rerum Ungaricarum libri IV*) – but this publication was never realised either.

The first edition of the work appeared in print only in the 19th century in the series *Monumenta Hungariae Historica Scriptores*. The text of that edition was edited by Ferenc Toldy (1805–1875) on the basis of two highly damaged and mutilated 16th-century manuscripts and contained not quite thirteen books of the original work.

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I am indebted to Péter Kasza, who was my fellow during the long journey to Trent and my partner in the investigation of the Bruto-manuscripts.

In 2020 an almost complete manuscript of twenty books (fully annotated by the author himself) was discovered in the Diocesan Library, Trent. The philological analysis of the three separate manuscripts now available has allowed four different editing stages to be distinguished, three of which are attributed to Brutus and the fourth to István Szamosközy. In addition to a philological comparison of the manuscripts, this article traces the fascinating history of the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* in its political and literary context.

KEYWORDS

history of Hungary and Habsburg Empire, republic of letters, humanist historiography

The title of this paper could have been (after Cicero and Lucian): *Brutus, or How to Write (Hungarian) History*, for obvious reasons. The *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* was in fact written by a Brutus, i.e. Gian Michele Bruto (1517–1592), a well-known but not well-respected Venetian humanist of his own time, who completed his work on the history of 16th-century Hungary towards the end of his life.¹ The voluminous and carefully elaborated work was not published until the 19th century, and this first (and since then only) edition appeared in heavily truncated form due to the seriously damaged and lacunose manuscripts available at the time.² In 2020, however, an almost intact, autograph manuscript copy of the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* was found in the collection of the former Jesuit college in Trent, Italy.³ The discovery fundamentally changed what is known about the genesis of the work and the last decade of Bruto's career. Naturally, the varied life of this fascinating figure of 16th-century humanism and heterodoxy, or merely a description of his *oeuvre* would by itself provide ample material for this study. In this case, however, the complexity of the broader context of the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* (which is relatively unfamiliar to international scholarship) would necessarily be overshadowed by biographical and literary issues. Indeed, the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* was by no means an individual endeavour. Presenting in a fair manner the decline, defeat and division of the Kingdom of Hungary during the first half of the 16th century was an important issue for the entire political elite of the divided country, in general.⁴ In a narrower sense, however, it was also a joint project of a number of intellectuals, politicians and aristocrats over the course of at least two decades, with Bruto playing only one role in the process (albeit the most important one). To understand this, it is necessary to give a brief outline of the historical and political context in which this initiative was born and carried out.

1. COMPETING NARRATIVES

For almost two centuries after the Battle of Mohács (1526), the territory of Hungary became a conflict zone of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, where smaller or larger armies clashed intermittently, waging an ongoing war and depopulating the central areas of the country.⁵

¹For his biography and oeuvre see Vogel (1864); Battistini (1954); Caccamo (1972); Petneházi (2021¹).

²Toldy and Nagy (1863–1876). On the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri*: Toldy (1863); Veress (1929); Petneházi (2021¹).

³Trento, Biblioteca diocesana Vigilianum (Biblioteca del Seminario Teologico), Manoscritti, 5 MS 20/1–2.

⁴Bak (1973); Kubinyi (1996); Varga (2010).

⁵Szakály (1988); Dávid and Fodor (2000); Pálffy (2009); Fodor (2015).



During this period, the kingdom was divided into three parts: the north-western section and Croatia to the south became parts of the Habsburg Empire; the central areas along with the capital of Buda were occupied by the Turks (1541–1543); while in the east, a semi-independent state, later called the Principality of Transylvania, gradually emerged, paying tribute to the Ottomans and therefore being in a position to prosper peacefully, sometimes for many decades. This eastern state came into being thanks partly to the will of the Sultan and partly to the fact that the Hungarian nobility had elected two kings within a short time after Louis II, the last Jagiellonian king (1516–1526) died at the Battle of Mohács: the Hungarian nobleman János (John) Szapolyai (1487–1540), and Ferdinand (1503–1564), Archduke of Austria (and brother of Emperor Charles V). Each of these monarchs, like their successors, considered himself the sole legitimate king of Hungary and they continued their struggle in the shadow of the Ottomans, sometimes in open warfare, sometimes by more peaceful means.

Controlling the narrative and influencing public opinion and/or foreign allies has always been a strong concern of every politician, and early modern Europe was no different. Hence, with the struggle for Hungary the contest to control the historical record likewise began right after the fateful battle. Indeed, the history of this tragic day (the 29th of August 1526) became the first hot spot of a virtual war between the humanists at the courts of Vienna and Buda, with Johannes Cuspinianus (1473–1529) and Caspar Ursinus Velius (1493–1539) writing rhetorical or historical works on one side (in Vienna), and Stephanus Brodericus (1471–1539) doing the same on the other.⁶ Brodericus, moreover, as Szapolyai's chief diplomat and chancellor, corresponded with all the European courts, explaining to them the legitimacy of Szapolyai's election to the throne of Hungary and the illegitimacy of all the Habsburg claims.⁷ These diplomatic letters were later handed over to Gian Michele Bruto as primary source material for his description of the contest between the two kings.

The literary framework for the historical presentation of the events was evidently provided by humanist historiography that flourished during the period, and already had a strong tradition in Hungary. In his *Decades*, Antonio Bonfini (1434–1503) summarised in a humanistic manner the whole of Hungarian history down to the time of Matthias Corvinus's death (1490) and the subsequent interregnum.⁸ In both scope and style, Bonfini and his *Decades* was the most important model in the 16th century for historians undertaking to write, in whole or in part, the history of Hungary of their own time. There were many who wrote extensively, but before the publication of Miklós Istvánffy's (1538–1615) *Historiae* in 1622,⁹ no other major history had

⁶Cuspinianus (1526); Kasza (2020¹); Kulcsár (1985); see also: Kasza (2015).

⁷Kasza (2012). Ferdinand's army conquered Hungary in 1527/8. Szapolyai made an alliance with the Sultan, who in 1529, before the siege of Vienna, handed him back the reconquered country, including the capital and the crown. Before his alliance with the Turks and the subsequent papal excommunication, Szapolyai sent numerous letters to all the European rulers, including Francis I and Charles V. Only some of these letters have been published: Simonyi (1859), 25–41; Kasza (2020²).

⁸Bonfini (1936–1976); Baker (2012); about the context in general: Birnbaum (1988); Rees (2016); Lázár (2010).

⁹Istvanfius (1622). On his life and work: Birnbaum (1985) 151–152; a recent collection of essays in Hungarian: Ács and Tóth (2018).



appeared in print,¹⁰ which means that for basically a century the history writers on both sides of the disputed crown had hid their lights under a bushel, although their works filled hundreds (sometimes thousands) of pages. Neither Velius's historical works, nor the *Decades* by Wolfgang Lazius (1514–1565) at the Viennese court,¹¹ or the writings of Antonius Verantius (1504–1573) or the *Commentarii* of Ferenc Forgách (1535–1577)¹² were ever published (or were published only centuries later). Gian Michele Bruto's Hungarian history was the most elaborate of this series, equal in length to Bonfini's history (although Bonfini covered seven centuries, while Bruto covered only seven decades), and it also came the closest to being printed. Nevertheless, the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* met the same fate as the others: it was only published in the 19th century, on the basis of two rather fragmentary and heavily mutilated manuscripts.¹³

2. A HETERODOX HUMANIST IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

Gian Michele Bruto was born in Venice in 1517, but was forced to flee the city because of the Inquisition in 1565.¹⁴ By that time he had already published a relatively large number of works: apart from text editions of various classical authors (Caesar, Cicero, Horace), he published a small treatise about the education of girls, an oration dedicated to Charles V,¹⁵ and more importantly an anti-Medicean History of Florence (Lyon, 1562), which caused a minor scandal across Europe.¹⁶ As a result, the Medici government tried to collect and destroy all the copies of the *Florentinae historiae*, because it depicted the rise of Lorenzo Medici il Magnifico in an unfavourable light.¹⁷

The man behind Bruto's invitation to East-Central Europe was Ferenc Forgách (1535–1577), bishop of Várad (Oradea, RO), who began his career at the Viennese court, where he reached the position of Vice-Chancellor in the royal Hungarian chancellery. He was a trusted counsellor of Ferdinand I, but also a close acquaintance of another important figure in the story of *Rerum Ungaricarum libri*, Stephen Báthory, prince of Transylvania from 1571. Báthory and Forgách were relatives (Báthory's maternal aunt was Forgách's grandmother), but they probably became

¹⁰The unique exception was Christian Schaeseus's epic poem published in 1571. The work consists of two parts: the *Ruinae Pannonicae libri quatuor* and the *Historia de bello Pannonico Solymani Turcorum Imperatoris ultimo* (three books). The former covers the events from John Szapolyai's death (1540) to the successful defence of the castle of Eger (1552), while the latter describes Suleyman's last campaign in Hungary in 1566. Text editions: Schaeseus (1571); Eder (1797); Csonka (1979). Cf. most recently: Tomkó (2021).

¹¹Mayr (1894); Svatek (2006); Kasza (2021).

¹²The editions of Forgách's *Commentarii*: Horányi (1788); Majer and Toldy (1866). Verantius (Vrančić/Verancsics) served John Szapolyai and Isabella of Jagiellon until 1548. His historical and literary works and his correspondence are published in: Szalay and Wenzel (1857–1875). Cf. Birnbaum (1985); Szabó (1998); Bessenyei (2005); Gyulai (2021).

¹³Toldy and Nagy (1863–1876).

¹⁴Battistini (1954), 96–103.

¹⁵Ibidem, 142–143.

¹⁶Brutus (1562); Battistini (1954), 43–46.

¹⁷Battistini (1954) 128; about the second edition of the *Florentinae historiae* in 1764: Panella (1944).



closer when Báthory spent two years in Vienna as a hostage (in 1565–1567), during the reign of the new emperor, Maximilian (1564–1576).¹⁸ Next, Forgách's relationship with Báthory was strengthened after 1568, when he switched sides, left the Viennese court and moved to Transylvania to join John Sigismund (1540–1571), the son of John Szapolyai, who held the title *rex electus* of Hungary.

Forgách decided to break with the Habsburg court both for personal and political reasons. His career was stuck: he was denied the rich diocese of Győr, which he had wished to acquire (his diocese of Várad in eastern Hungary barely generated any income), but after the last military campaign of Suleyman the Great in Hungary (1566), he also realised that the reunification of the Hungarian Kingdom and the expulsion of the Turks could not be expected from the Habsburg-dynasty any time soon.¹⁹ Forgách (like many other Hungarian aristocrats at the time) considered Stephen Báthory to be much better suited to this task.²⁰ Báthory, having been elected as Prince of Transylvania after the death of John Sigismund, in 1571, appointed Forgách as chancellor of Transylvania.

It was Forgách's idea, still during his service in Vienna, that the fateful events of 16th-century Hungarian history should be recorded in a great historical work in Latin, describing for the European public in a single narrative how the kingdom of Hungary failed against the Ottomans, how it was split between two factions, how the Turks took advantage of the ensuing civil war to occupy the central part of the country, and how the Sultan tried to overrun the rest of the territory. The literary aim of the project was essentially to continue Bonfini's *Decades*, to whose publication Forgách had also contributed.²¹

Nevertheless, in the year of the publication of the first complete edition of Bonfini's *Decades* (1568), Forgách was already working on his own historical work. His 22-book *De Statu rei publicae Hungariae Commentarii*, which dealt with events in Hungary and Europe in the form of a Tacitean *Annals*, covered the period from 1551 to 1572. Forgách certainly started writing his history as early as 1566, but he did not finish it until the 1570s, and he may have been revising the text up until his death in Padua in 1577.²² By that point, however, it was clear that the *Commentarii* were not intended for immediate publication, but (as was the case with other authors) would instead serve as a kind of raw material for a more literary 'grand history'. The task of writing such a grand history awaited Gian Michele Bruto, who arrived in Transylvania in 1574.²³

¹⁸Lukinich (1935), 32–33.

¹⁹Almási (2006).

²⁰Szádeczky (1886).

²¹Bonfini (1568). The publisher of this first complete edition was Johannes Sambucus (1531–1584), court historian in Vienna from 1565. Forgách handed over to him the manuscript of the last part of the work, covering the reign of King Matthias Corvinus. Cf. Sambucus' Preface: *Quinque posteriores nobilissimus ac doctissimus antistes Varadiensis Franciscus Forgatz etc. ante paucos annos Oporino typographo Basiliensi a Christophoro Trecio primum communicatos liberaliter mihi detulit; nec pauca quo est iudicio (qui et ipse annales texere fertur) nomina corrupta restituit.* Ibidem, 7.

²²For the editions: Majer and Toldy (1866).

²³Petneházi (2023²).



3. FROM TRANSYLVANIA TO CRACOW

By 1574 Bruto already had some connections with the Republic of Letters in East-Central Europe, which began in the mid-1560s. When the new emperor, Maximilian withdrew his support from the old Viennese court historian Wolfgang Lazius in 1564, Forgách (still working in the Habsburg-court) tried to have Brutus invited to fill the vacancy, but the post was eventually given to Sambucus.²⁴ In 1572, Forgách repeated the invitation, this time from Transylvania. After lengthy negotiations, Brutus finally arrived in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia, RO) in January 1574.²⁵ His employer was Stephen Báthory, the elected Prince of Transylvania, who fully endorsed Forgách's narrative concept, especially because in 1575 he had to face on the battlefield the army of Gáspár Bekes, a rival to his position backed by the Viennese court.²⁶

The motivation for this historiographical project was essentially political. Presenting a thorough account of the disintegration of Hungary was intended to offer the European reading public a political counternarrative against the Viennese court's official communication, and the same time providing a sharp response to Sambucus's editions of Bonfini. Although Sambucus held the position of the court historian in Vienna, he never composed a grand history. In the *Appendix* of the Bonfini editions (1568 and 1581), he did, however, publish several short summaries dealing with some episodes in 16th-century Hungarian history. In one of these summaries (*De Ferdinando rege*), echoing the official point of view of the House of Austria, he denied the legitimacy of John Szapolyai's election, and consequently rejected the idea of the elective and constitutional nature of the Hungarian crown.²⁷ Brutus' task, therefore, was to respond to this and compose a work with a patriotic-constitutionalist approach.²⁸

Forgách left for Padua in 1576 (one year before his death there). In May of the same year, Báthory was elected as the King of Poland.²⁹ Bruto followed his patron and went to reside at the royal castle in Cracow, where he was appointed as the court historian to the Polish king. He worked there for ten years (for a not insignificant salary of 840 thalers a year) on his history of Hungary, which, according to his correspondence and reports by the papal nuncio, was completed in about twenty books by 1583/1584.³⁰

²⁴Almási (2009), 157–162; Almási and Kiss (2017); Petneházi (2023²).

²⁵Battistini (1954), 103–111; Petneházi (2021¹), 178–179; Petneházi (2023²).

²⁶Szádeczky (1887¹); (1887²); (1935).

²⁷Bonfini (1568), 774; Bonfini (1581), 774–775.

²⁸Bolognetti, the pope's ambassador in Poland reported in February, 1583: *mostra però di non scrivere altro per hora che quella d'Ungheria, commessagli dalla Mtà S. la qual, dice esso Bruto, non haver havuto in ciò altra intentione che di non lasciar opprimere la verità dalle bugie del Sambuco, et di mostrar principalmente che il Re Giovanni era vero Re. Al che si conforma la Mtà S., dicendo che le conventioni de i Re d'Ungharia non puotero pregiudicare alla libera elettione di quei baroni, i quali anco de i figliuoli restati d'un Re morto potranno eleggere l'ultimo et lasciare i maggiori d'età contra il voler del padre.* Kuntze (1938), 162.

²⁹Szádeczky (1935).

³⁰Petneházi (2021¹), 180–181.



4. FROM CRACOW TO VIENNA AND BACK TO TRANSYLVANIA

By the time Brutus started to work in Cracow, he had already gathered a considerable number of manuscript sources. Due to the destruction of the Hungarian royal chancellery in the repeated sieges and occupations of Buda (1526; 1528–1529; 1531; 1540/1541),³¹ these were predominantly narrative texts having a clearly anti-Habsburg and constitutionalist outlook. Apart from Forgách's *Commentarii*, the most significant of such narrative works was the *Memoirs* of János Zermegh, who wrote a short chronicle in Latin on the events between 1526 and 1540, i.e. about the period of civil war between John Szapolyai and Ferdinand I.³² In addition, several personal notes were also useful sources for Bruto. These included the diaries of Tamás Fejérvári (an old client of King Báthory), which are now lost to us, and probably the notes of Wolfgang Kovacsóczy (the chancellor of Transylvania from 1578 and a former client of Forgách).³³ King Báthory himself also wrote an account for Bruto summarising an episode from 1562 in which he had been involved. This autograph manuscript still exists today and provides a virtually unique example from the early modern period of the tightness of political control of court historiography.³⁴ Indeed, as the discovery of the complete manuscript of the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* in 2020 made clear, Brutus did incorporate into his work exactly what Báthory had hurriedly written for him.³⁵

After the end of the Livonian War (1582), however, the king apparently became less eager to have the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* published. Brutus' long years of work had produced a truly impressive history. But in 1583 he instead published his correspondence in five books, in Cracow.³⁶ In the meantime, Báthory gave the manuscript of the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* to the Jesuit father and special papal envoy Antonio Possevino (1534–1611) to be revised.³⁷ Possevino recommended against its publication because of the often denigrating detail it went into concerning the popes.³⁸ Brutus nevertheless had a sample printing of a few pages made, which he presented to the king in August 1584 (Fig. 1).³⁹ According to the papal nuncio, who

³¹Brutus in the Preface (*Ad lectorem*) of the newly discovered manuscript: *Per tot bella, tot clades, tot incendia eversa in regia urbe tabularia, praeter alia decora nobilissimae gentis et veterum regum monumenta et privatorum testata per multa saecula illustrata facta, quorum cognitio erat nobis magno adiumento ad scribendum futura, sustulerunt.* Petneházi (2021²), 310.

³²Zermegh (1662).

³³Petneházi (2012–13).

³⁴Firenze, ASV, Mediceo del Principato 4293, fol. 587–593. Text edition: Veress (1933).

³⁵As Brutus noted in the margin of the manuscript: *a Stephano rege me praesente perniciosissima manu scripta.*

³⁶Brutus (1583).

³⁷Kuntze (1938), 618. Possevino, after his successful diplomatic mission (the Treaty of Jam Zapolski between Báthory and Ivan the Terrible in 1582) worked as “travelling agent” for the Catholic counter reformation in the region. His treatise about Transylvania was published only in the 20th century. Possevino (1913).

³⁸Battistini (1954), 65; Possevino (1913), 201–203.

³⁹Ibidem, 65; the sample page: Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Segr. Stato Polonia 21, 225r–v.



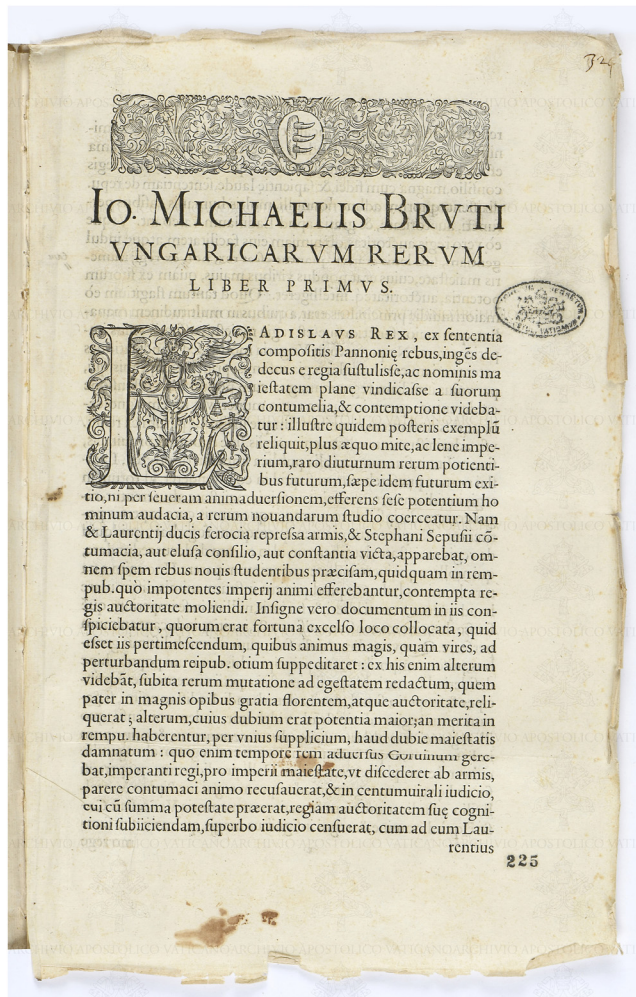


Fig. 1. Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Segr. Stato Polonia 21, 225r

sent the first page of the sample run to Rome, Bruto did not find a warm welcome. In fact, Báthory stopped publication of the work and ordered Bruto to shorten and to revise the text stylistically.⁴⁰ The full extent of these changes is not known. In a letter written in 1586, Brutus refers to twenty-five books,⁴¹ and it seems that the most serious revisions were made at the

⁴⁰Kuntze (1939–1948), 416: *Egli [Bruto] havea cominciato a stampare questa historia, come vedrà dall' incluso foglio, ma il Re l'ha ritenuto sendogli parsa troppo longa et esatta, et scritta anco con stile più grave che corrente. Onde gli ha commesso che la riduca in compendio.*

⁴¹The letter to Martin Cromer: Battistini (1954), 121–123.



beginning of the work. After the death of the king in December 1586, however, the situation underwent a radical change.

As the competition for the Polish throne began between the Swedish Sigismund Vasa (1566–1632) and the Habsburg candidates, Archduke Ernest of Austria (1553–1595) and his brother Maximilian (1558–1618), Brutus entered the service of Archduke Ernest. After Sigismund's election Bruto settled in Vienna, again as court historian. His task was to modify the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* so that the work could be published under Habsburg patronage. It is difficult to imagine how he could have thought it might be possible for such a work to be published with the support of the dynasty. Bruto apparently held a kind of irenic attitude, and seriously believed that a political reconciliation between the dynasty and Hungarian constitutionalism was possible, and this might give his work an additional weight for the publication. But his decision to move to Vienna is perfectly understandable also for personal reasons. One of his daughters had been living with her family in the Imperial capital since 1579.⁴²

However, in Transylvania the dream of the decade-long project of *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* remained alive, thanks to Chancellor Wolfgang Kovacsóczy, who in 1588 tried (unsuccessfully) to persuade the young prince Sigismund Báthory (nephew of the late king) to recall Bruto.⁴³ Even though Bruto himself did not return to Transylvania, an exemplar of the work did. After prolonged negotiations, a manuscript copy of the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* was sent from Poland to Transylvania in 1590/91.⁴⁴ Having been informed of this, Bruto set off from Vienna in December 1591 and – according to the Viennese court librarian Hugo Blotius (1533–1608), who is the only source to report this (and who had in the 1570's lived in the same household as Chancellor Kovacsóczy in Padua) – travelled to Transylvania to 'prevent the premature publication' of the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri*.⁴⁵ Five months later, on 16 May 1592, Bruto died in Alba Iulia.

5. (RE)DISCOVERY AND GENEALOGY OF THE MANUSCRIPTS

The *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* was not published until the 19th century. By then, however, only two rather fragmentary manuscripts were available, one in Vienna containing fewer than six books⁴⁶ and another in Budapest containing fewer than thirteen,⁴⁷ both of which contained extensive omissions and lacunas in the surviving text. These defective exemplars were therefore the basis on which the text was published in three volumes between 1863 and 1876, but this edition⁴⁸ was actually barely usable either as a historical source or as a literary text.

⁴²The wedding ceremony was held in January 1579. Sambucus to Johannes Crato, 31. January 1579: *J. Michael Brutus ad filiam matrimonio illigatam videndam se principis sui venia huc ait advolasse*. Gerstinger and Vantuch (1968), 248.

⁴³Lukács (1981), 161–162.

⁴⁴Szilágyi (1877), 77–78; 267; 272.

⁴⁵*Ut editionem praeproperam impediret*. Blotius to an unknown recipient (Vienna, 3. August 1592). *Annales* (1722), 151–153.

⁴⁶Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 8662.

⁴⁷ELTE University Library, Collectio Prayana 35–36.

⁴⁸Brutus (1863–1876).



In the summer of 2020, an almost entirely intact manuscript of the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* was discovered in the Diocesan library of Trent. This astonishing exemplar of more than 2,200 pages contains twenty books, covering Hungarian history from 1490 to 1566 (Fig. 2).⁴⁹ A comparative analysis of the now three copies allowed the order and provenance of the manuscripts to be established. In the following, I will briefly summarise these results.⁵⁰

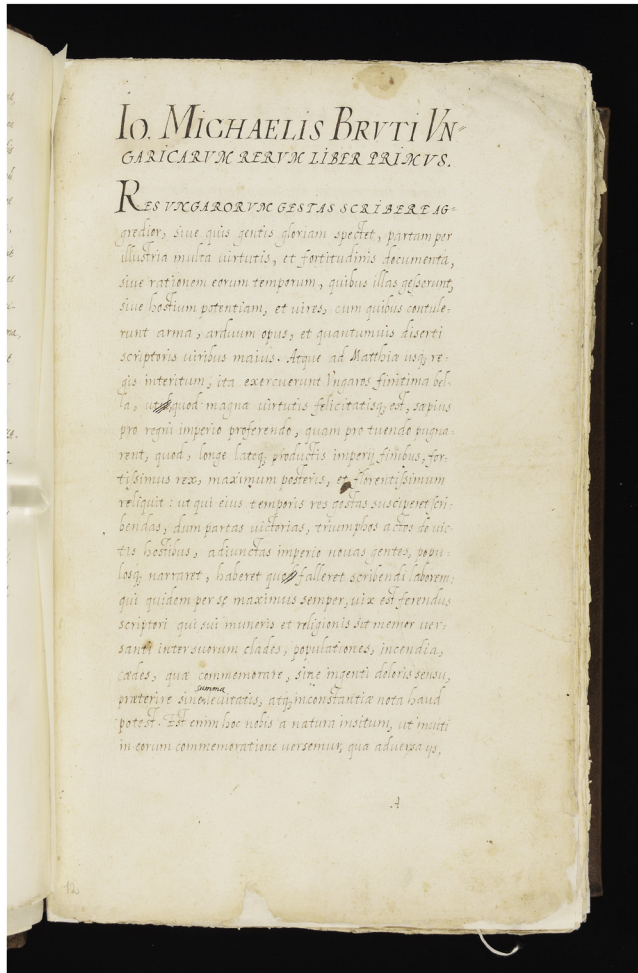


Fig. 2. First page of Book I in the Trent manuscript: Trento, Biblioteca diocesana Vigiliana (Biblioteca del Seminario Teologico), Manoscritti, 5 MS 20/1, 12r

⁴⁹Biblioteca diocesana Vigiliana (Biblioteca del Seminario Teologico), Manoscritti, 5 MS 20/1-2.

⁵⁰The detailed description and comparison of the manuscripts: Kasza and Petneházi (2024).



Since the Trent copy is fully annotated by Bruto himself, it seemed reasonable to assume that this near-perfect manuscript might be a very early working copy, perhaps the one sent back to Transylvania from Poland in 1590/91, which Bruto was not keen to see published. However, a closer examination shows the opposite to be the case.

First, the Trent manuscript contains an (unfortunately fragmentary) introduction addressed to the Reader (*Ad Lectorem*).⁵¹ In this text, Bruto invokes King Báthory with the greatest respect, but the king was clearly already dead when this was written, while Bruto also speaks with the same respect of Emperor Rudolf, whose patronage enabled him to complete his work. This suggests that at least this introduction was certainly written after December 1586.⁵²

Second, comparing the Trent manuscript with the Pest exemplar revealed a further surprising fact. The first seven books of the Pest manuscript were copied by the same scribe who had almost the entire Trent manuscript penned down, and the often-extensive corrections that Bruto made in the Trent exemplar can all be found incorporated into the text of the Pest copy in a cleaned-up format (Fig. 3a–b). Therefore, the Trent manuscript is definitely the earlier one, on the basis of which the corrections were incorporated into the text of the first half of the Pest manuscript. More importantly, however, as four letters from Bruto to the famous botanist, Carolus Clusius (1526–1609) demonstrate, the hand of the scribe both in the Trent exemplar and in the first half of the Pest manuscript is the same as the one who worked with Bruto as late as 1589–1591.⁵³

Third, it is clear that another person, in addition to Bruto, wrote a large number of marginal notes in both the Trent and Pest manuscripts: István Szamosközy (1565–1612), the Transylvanian historian and client of Chancellor Kovacsóczy. He copied substantial parts of the Pest manuscript himself – he took over the revision of the Trent manuscript and copied the text starting at the point (in the middle of Book VII) where Bruto’s scribe stopped. Moreover, he consistently made marginal notes on both the Pest and Trent exemplars.⁵⁴

Fourth, the last fragment of the Pest manuscript was assumed by the 19th-century editor to be part of Book XIV, but it is now clear from the Trent copy that this fragment corresponds to a part of Book XVI (Fig. 4). More importantly, this is a neat and polished scribal work – not by the same hand, however, as the Trent and Pest manuscripts. The text of this fragment was also corrected by Bruto, but it still reflects a textual state earlier than the Trent copy, which, as noted above, predates the first half of the Pest manuscript.

Fifth, there is evidence to suggest that the manuscript from Vienna may be the intermediate link to this earlier fragment of book XVI. The Vienna exemplar contains fragments of Books I–III and VI–VIII, occasionally with extensive corrections and additions by Bruto himself, which are, however, already incorporated in the Trent manuscript. Therefore, the Vienna manuscript is clearly earlier than either the Trent or the Pest exemplar. Moreover, the beginning of the text in the Vienna version is radically different: although the first page of the manuscript is missing, the

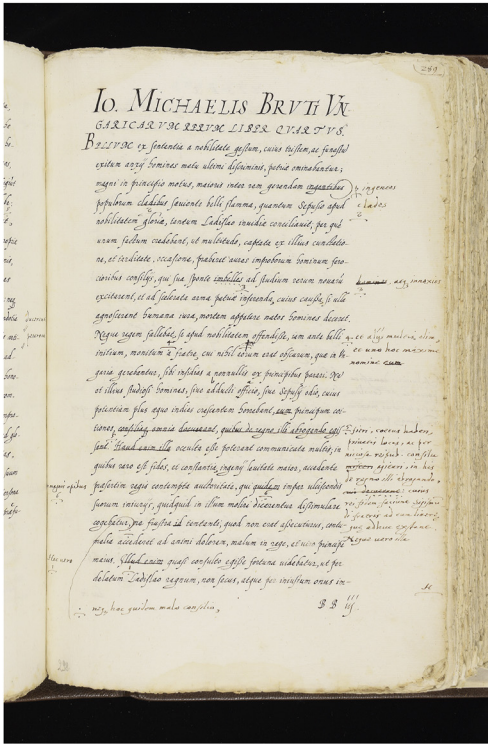
⁵¹Petneházi (2021²).

⁵²Petneházi (2021¹)183; (2021²), 306; 314–335.

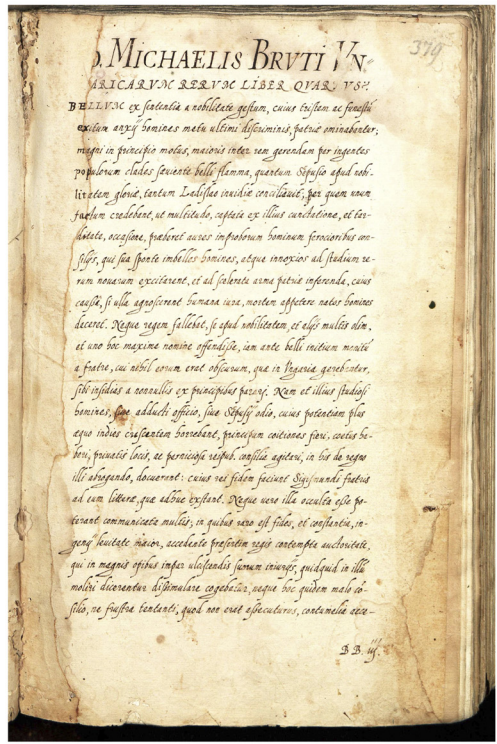
⁵³Universitaire Bibliotheken Leiden, VUL 101: 47 (digitised version: <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:1586768>).

⁵⁴The continuation of Bruto’s Hungarian History written by Szamosközy and preserved also in fragment was published in the 19th century: Szilágyi (1876¹). His only published work at the time was a collection of Roman inscriptions in Transylvania: Zamosius (1593).





A



B

Fig. 3. a–b. First page of Book IV in the Trent and Pest exemplars. Bruto’s corrections in the Trent copy are incorporated in the text of the Pest copy by the same scribe.

Fig. 3. a. Trent, 298r

Fig. 3. b. Pest, page 379

second page begins exactly where the one-page sample printing from 1584 ends. This variant, therefore, did not yet include the magnificent *exordium* preserved in the Trent manuscript.⁵⁵ Which also means that in 1584 Bruto was still planning to begin his work exactly where Bonfini ended his *Decades* (Fig. 5a–b).

All this enables us to conclude the following about the genesis of the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri*. Starting in 1587, Bruto did indeed work on his History of Hungary in Vienna, but not by himself. He engaged a scribe who wrote very skilfully and presumably very quickly, allowing him to complete a manuscript by 1590 at the latest. This new and at the time pure exemplar was ninety percent identical to the manuscript recently discovered in Trent. By that stage, however,

⁵⁵Trento, Biblioteca diocesana Vigilanium, Manoscritti, 5 MS 20/1, 12r: *Res Ungarorum gestas scribere adgredior; sive quis gentis gloriam spectet, partam per illustria multa virtutis et fortitudinis documenta, sive rationem eorum temporum, quibus illas gesserunt, sive hostium potentiam et vires, cum quibus contulerunt arma: arduum opus et quantumvis disertis scriptoris viribus maius.*



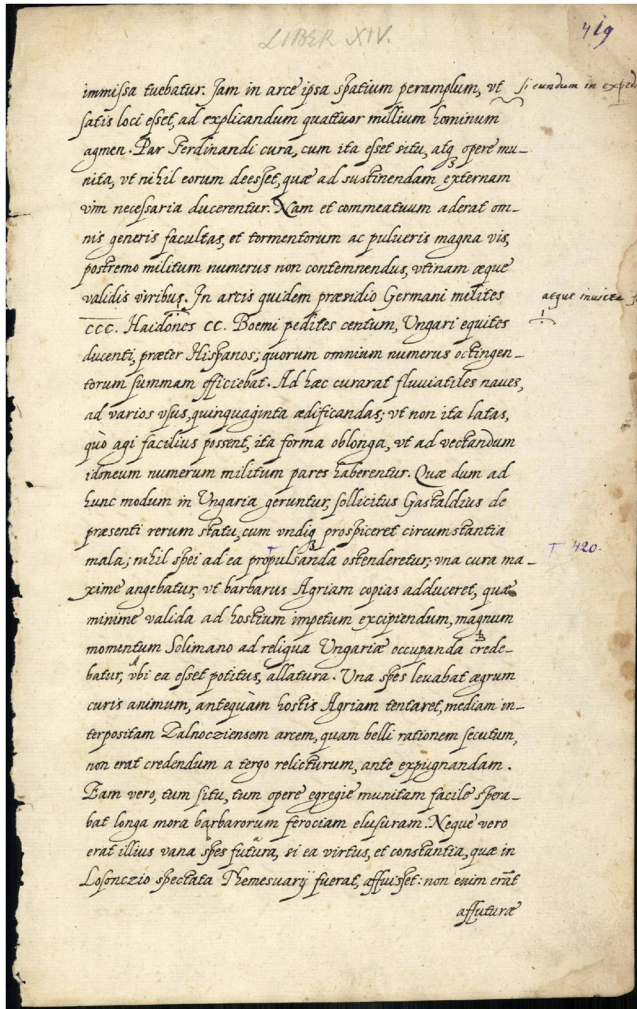
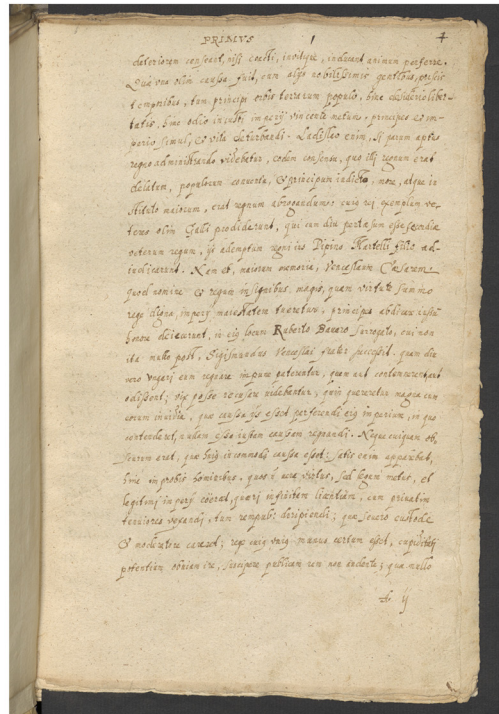
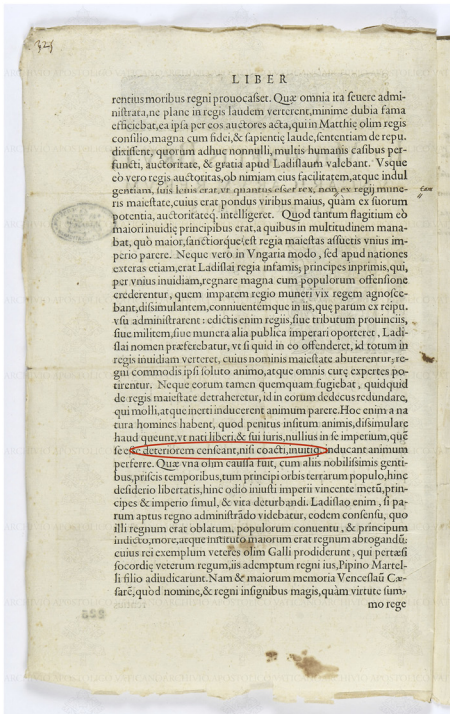


Fig. 4. A page from Book XVI. Budapest, ELTE University Library, Collectio Prayana 36. (fragment of the Polish exemplar)

the work was quite different from what was originally intended. In a very delicately balanced text Bruto tried to preserve the dignity of both sides, as he explains this in the introduction of the Trent exemplar:

In these books on Hungarian history that we are now publishing, we have recorded everything in a manner faithful to the truth and to our profession, but in describing the struggle between the two kings for the kingdom, we have taken every opportunity to express our affection and adherence to Emperor Ferdinand and his most August House. The only thing that constantly resounded in my ears were the wise and earnest words of King Stephen that in writing I should only have respect for the unvarnished



A

B

Fig. 5. a-b. Verso page of the sample sheet from 1584 with the beginning of the Vienna-manuscript.
 Fig. 5. a. Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Segr. Stato Polonia 21, 225v
 Fig. 5. b. Vienna, ÖNB, Cod. 8662, 1

truth, and (that) if I adhere to this without regard to persons or events, I should believe that I shall have done my duty and amply satisfied the man who asked me to do this very thing.⁵⁶

Consequently, when Bruto received news in 1591 that a copy had arrived in Transylvania from Poland, and that the work was to be published on the basis of that older exemplar, he took his newest copy, which contained the latest version of the text and he travelled to Transylvania – along with his scribe. Having arrived (or already during the long journey) they set to work with the clear intention of finally publishing the great history and they started to revise the manuscript just brought there from Vienna. Bruto completed the emendation of the first eight books, and the scribe finished (in a second exemplar, which is now the first part of the Pest copy)

⁵⁶Nam in his ipsis libris Ungaricarum rerum, quos nunc edimus, omnia ex nostra fide et religione persecuti, quae in controversia de regno inter duos reges euenirent ita tradidimus, ut omnem occasionem et oblatam auide arripuerimus et captauerimus undique nostrum in Ferdinandum Caesarem studium et illius augustissimam domum testificandi. Una enim mihi Stephani regis vox sapientissimi eiusdem et gravissimi semper ad aures personavit: unam modo et nudam veritatem propositam ob oculos haberem in scribendo, cuius si nullo discrimine personarum et rerum rationem haberem, tum cumulate me crederem in suscepto munere hoc unum a me poscenti satisfacturum. Petneházi (2021³), 314.



cleaning up the corrections up to the middle of Book VII. This was still not good enough for Bruto, however: he started to proofread the already corrected version, but died before finishing the task, on 16 May 1592. After his death, a new, cleaned up partial copy was made by an unknown scribe based on his final corrections: this copy constitutes the first two and half books of the Trent exemplar. The original copy sent back from Poland – whose only surviving remnant of is the fragment of Book XVI now in the Pest copy – was presumably destroyed by Bruto himself.

The manuscript thus assembled (partly by rewriting, partly by destroying the earliest version), finally received the attention of István Szamosközy after he returned to Transylvania from the University of Padua in 1594. All this is known from a *memorandum* he wrote to Prince Sigismund in late 1594 or early 1595, in which he argued quite effectively for the continuation of the editorial work.⁵⁷ Having obtained the permission of the prince, Szamosközy indeed continued to clean up the text, and also made some orthographic and syntactic corrections.⁵⁸ Moreover, he sorted out from the manuscript set those parts that could be used for publication and those that were considered to be duplicates. His marginal notes reveal which these parts were: those he did not annotate would not have formed the basis of the eventual publication. In broad terms, this meant that for Books I–VIII he preferred the latest copy that Brutus's scribe and then he himself had cleaned up (i.e. now the first half of the Pest-exemplar); while for the remaining part (Books IX–XX), he preferred Bruto's copy brought from Vienna (this is now the second volume of the Trent manuscript) for two reasons: apart from some fragments from the destroyed Polish exemplar he had no other version available and the text was also much cleaner here than in the first part, since Bruto had only occasionally corrected the manuscript in Books IX–XX.

The fascinating story took another twist at this point. In the year of 1594, when Szamosközy took over the editing of the manuscript (presumably as newly appointed *historicus* of the prince), chancellor Kovacsóczy, the tireless promoter of the publication of the work, and several other councillors were executed being considered as members of the so-called pro-Turkish party. In the next year Transylvania entered the long Turkish war on the side of the Habsburgs, which, after initial successes, proved to be a disaster for the entire country. In the spring of 1598, Sigismund Báthory abdicated the throne and for a short period Transylvania came under direct Habsburg control. Imperial commissioners arrived in the province – amongst them the man whose great synthesis of 16th-century Hungarian history was finally published in 1622, Miklós Istvánffy (1538–1615). One of the first things they did was to order the return of the manuscript of Bruto's *Rerum Ungaricarum libri*. Szamosközy, who by this time had done a great deal of editorial work on the manuscripts, gave them back the more complete but earlier copy, which Bruto had brought there from Vienna, but kept the exemplar which had been copied in Transylvania. For the second part, he hurriedly set to copying the text beginning from Book IX, with the help of at least four or five associates. This rapid copy, however, (at present in the Pest manuscript) extended only up to the middle of Book XIII: Szamosközy and his colleagues were clearly unable to complete the transcription. Given all this, it is now clear which was the returned manuscript: the same one transferred to Trent a few decades later, buried there in

⁵⁷Balázs et al. (1992).

⁵⁸Just as he proposed in his *memorandum*. Balázs et al. (1992), 57–61; cf. Petneházi (2023¹).



the library of the Jesuits for four hundred years and waiting to be rediscovered in 2020. That was therefore the moment (in 1598) when the Trent and Pest manuscripts in their present form were assembled; under external pressure and clearly through the person of István Szamosközy.⁵⁹

The manuscript returned from Transylvania was transferred to the imperial court, and from there to Trent, sometime after the foundation of the Jesuit college in 1623 (it is already listed in the library's first catalogue, which dates to 1643). The exemplar now in Vienna – the original length of which is unknown – is thought to have come to the imperial library from Bruto's bequest he left in the imperial city before he set off on his last journey. The Szamosközy-manuscript (i.e. the part kept by Szamosközy in 1598) remained in Transylvania throughout the 17th century, but it had been badly damaged: sheets, sometimes whole fascicules, had disappeared, including the first eight pages of the work. Then, in the 18th century, it was transferred to the University Library in Pest and eventually served as base text for the 19th-century edition.

Based on all of these facts, a quite unique genealogy can be deduced. Even if the Vienna manuscript is regarded as one redaction, the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri*-corpus, currently known in three exemplars, is still composed of various manuscript-parts dating from different periods. Among these manuscript-parts, at least four different editing phases can be distinguished, three of which are attributed to Bruto and the fourth to István Szamosközy:

1. Redaction in Poland (1584): Fragment of Book XVI (Pest); sample print (Rome); Vienna-manuscript.
2. Redaction in Vienna (1588–91): *Ad lectorem* (Trent); Books II–XX (Trent).
3. Bruto's Transylvanian redaction (1591–92): Book I–VII (Pest); Book I–II (Trent).
4. István Szamosközy's redaction (1594–98): Books VII–VIII copied by Szamosközy (Pest); Books IX–XIII, rapid transcript by different hands (Pest).⁶⁰

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

István Szamosközy wrote the following words about Brutus in his memorandum to the Prince of Transylvania in 1594/95:

The distinguished old gentleman was often heard to declare his faith in his (Hungarian) History claiming that all the science, craft, and literary skill he had acquired from the best authors since his youth, he tried to concentrate in his last work, as the ultimate synthesis of his literary efforts, on which he had worked with all his strength and talent. But even if he had remained silent, the work itself would clearly document this.⁶¹

⁵⁹Petneházi (2023¹).

⁶⁰Kasza and Petneházi (2024).

⁶¹Balázs et al. (1992) 54. *Auditus est non semel clarissimus senex, suum ipse testimonium de his historiis proferre dicereque se quicquid ab ineunte aetate studii, doctrinae rerum uerborumque ornamenta ex illustribus auctoribus memoria hausisset, totum id in has historias, veluti lucubrationum suarum omnium et laborum supremum promptuarium contulisse, omnesque ingenij sui nervos hic potissimum intendisse. Haec ita se habere, vel ipso tacente, res ipsa testis esse potest.*



Indeed, Szamosközy's words perfectly match the description of the manuscripts outlined above. Bruto, the 'distinguished old gentleman' must have considered the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* to be the masterpiece of his life for good reason; therefore, it is completely understandable that in the hope of its publication he polished and shaped the text almost to his last breath.

As a historian, humanist and a private individual, Bruto led a very unusual life. The start of his career was not easy. Although he managed to attract the attention of the humanist republic of letters as early as the 1560s, he did not really achieve his ambitions and struggled from then until practically the end of his life to make his way from the second rank of the *res publica litteraria* to the elite. He arrived in Cracow at the age of almost sixty, and there, for the first time in his life, he felt that he had reached the top. He was appreciated, respected and well paid, while his intellectual independence and worldviews were not questioned. As a result, he managed to complete his task in a few years, and in 1583–1584 the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* seemed to be ready to be printed soon. At the same time, his influence and recognition as the chief humanist of the Báthory court increased abroad. In the end, however, he failed to make a real breakthrough. The *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* was not published and while his influence was acknowledged and sometimes exploited among his humanist contemporaries,⁶² his minor works failed to achieve any real critical success. His Latin style was considered strange, obscure and alien,⁶³ and this criticism seems to have reached Báthory's ears at some point, which may have contributed to his refusal to allow the work to be printed. This situation was not helped by the fact that Bruto, sensing the spirit of the times, finally gave up his long years of trickery game with the papal nuncio and converted to the Catholic faith in 1585.⁶⁴

But regardless of the elaborateness and subtleness of Bruto's style and of what a Nicodemite he was, his productivity and writing skills are undeniable. It can be noted, however, that his literary attitude was already rather out of fashion. Even in the final decades of the 16th century he was still a true follower of the literary ideals of the golden age of humanism, and as a historian, he carried on and perfected the practices of that period until the end of his life. It was no accident that he regarded Paolo Giovio (1483–1552) as his main point of reference and consistently criticised him, not only in his *Florentinae historiae* but also in other writings, in the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri*, including its fragmentary introduction. Giovio wrote the great general history of Europe of the first half of the century, striving for balance and impartiality through words alone, garnering harsh and almost immediate criticism from his contemporaries.⁶⁵ Bruto certainly wanted to avoid this fate. He wrote a Hungarian history, which after several revisions would have been able to serve the needs and tastes of the divided political public of Hungary, and of the courts of Vienna and Gyulaférvár, despite (or perhaps because of) its deliberate complexity. It was not the history writer's fault that the political compromise, which the *Rerum Ungaricarum libri* could have commemorated for the collective memory, never came to fruition.

⁶²Cf. Dudithius (2019), 332–334.

⁶³Lipsius' judgment: *Michaelis Bruti epistolarum libros vidi. O vere bruti! Nihil unquam legi frigidius.* Lipsius (1978), 462.

⁶⁴On the 5th of April 1585. Kuntze (1939–1948), 680.

⁶⁵Jovius (1550–1552). In the Preface to the *Florentinae Historiae* Brutus criticised Giovio's partisanship as early as 1562. Valeri (2007); Cosentino (2017).



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