

A Professor as Diplomat: Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld and the Foreign Policy of the Principality of Transylvania, 1638–1643

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The paper addresses a unique phenomenon, the prominent role played by Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld, a German professor at the academy of Gyulafehérvár Alba Iulia/Weissenburg in the foreign policy of György Rákóczi I, prince of Transylvania during the 1630s and 1640s. Having accepted a mission to Western European courts in 1638–1639, where Bisterfeld’s academic activities served as an excellent camouflage for the professor’s secret diplomatic negotiations, the professor maintained a leading role in keeping contact with the representatives of the Swedish and French Crowns also in the period after his return to the principality. As an “alternative correspondent” to the prince, he proved very useful in creating the treaties of Gyulafehérvár (1643) and Munkács (1645), and he played an outstanding role also in keeping the spirits of the prince high not to give up his plans to join the anti-Habsburg side of the Thirty Years’ War. Building upon the ideas Bisterfeld inherited from his tutor and father-in-law, Johann Heinrich Alsted, the German professor treated his pansophistic ideas and faith in the continuing Reformation as well as his political activities as different parts of the same endeavor as long as Calvinist believers were facing political repression in the Holy Roman Empire.

Keywords: diplomacy, Transylvania, international Calvinism, Gyulafehérvár academy, pansophia

“Mister Bisterfeld showed such benevolence towards the allied lords and specifically towards Your Excellency in promoting the negotiations and assisted us to such a degree that I cannot give ample praise for his good will towards the common cause and his loyal services.”¹ With these words, Colonel Lieutenant Jacob Rebenstock, the representative of the Swedish Crown at the Transylvanian court, summarized his impressions to his superior, Lennart Torstensson, the chief commander of the Swedish armies in the Holy Roman

1 Jacob Rebenstock to Lennart Torstensson (Gyulafehérvár, November 8/18, 1643) RA Transylvania vol. 1. no. 132. The translations from primary sources are mine. In the first half of the seventeenth century, the Swedish administration continued to use the Julian calendar, which often produced this kind of double dating in the correspondence with its agents in the southern parts of Europe. In this paper, I am using the Gregorian dating, adding it in brackets where necessary in the letters cited.

Empire. Rebenstock was writing about the services provided by Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld, a professor at the Gyulafehérvár academy, in the creation of the freshly concluded treaty of alliance. The surviving documentation indeed shows that Bisterfeld not only helped Prince György Rákóczi I from the background with good advice but also had been in fervent correspondence with prominent personalities of the anti-Habsburg side of the Thirty Years' War for years, thus apparently masterminding a much wider network in the principality's western sphere of contacts than the prince himself. As has been noted in several recent monographs, in the seventeenth century, a network of pastors and scholars, often labelled "international Calvinism," attempted to influence high politics between courts.² Nevertheless, in the early modern period, it was still rare at best for diplomats, who officially represented various rulers, to have regarded a theologian as a negotiating partner for a longer period. Suffice it to quote the reaction of a clergyman, István Tolnai, the parson of Sárospatak in Hungary, to the news that, in the summer of 1637, Heinrich Meerbott, a churchman from Hanau, was heading for the court of György Rákóczi I allegedly as a representative of various German princes. "I am surprised," Tolnai wrote, "that those princes (if this is indeed the case) trusted the embassy to a preacher."³

Although Bisterfeld kept his role as a political advisor at the side of György Rákóczi I and, later, his son, György Rákóczi II, for a long time, he held such a key position in Transylvanian diplomacy only between 1638 (his mission to Western Europe) and 1643 (the conclusion of the Gyulafehérvár [Alba Iulia/Weissenburg] agreement). In a recent study, I examined the negotiations leading to Transylvania's reentry into the Thirty Years' War in the 1640s, but I had occasion to make only cursory remarks on the special position Bisterfeld enjoyed in covering the thousands of kilometers between the principality and its potential allies. In this paper, I focus my attention on why the Gyulafehérvár professor seemed to offer a solution to the practical problems of Transylvanian diplomacy in the first half of the seventeenth century and how his political role interfered with his other ambitions as a scholar. The analysis I offer of the overlaps between the two sides in Bisterfeld's biography furthers a more nuanced understanding of the workings of "international Calvinism," and in particular of the group from Johann Heinrich Alsted to Jan Amos Comenius which aimed at continuing Reformation, uniting the knowledge on the universe

2 Schilling, *Konfessionalisierung und Staatsinteressen*, 100–9; Riches, *Protestant Cosmopolitanism*, 1–24.

3 István Tolnai to György Rákóczi I (Sárospatak, August 13, 1637) Szilágyi, "I. Rákóczy György," 1222.

and making the world a better place through learning – but repeatedly had to face serious political repressions.⁴

Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld's Mission in Western Europe, 1638–1639

Bisterfeld became a professor at the Academy of Gyulafehérvár at the end of 1629.⁵ He came to Transylvania with two elder colleagues, Johann Heinrich Alsted and Philipp Ludwig Piscator, at the invitation of Gábor Bethlen, but he arrived only after the death of this prince, who had set up an ambitious plan to provide the Reformed college in his capital with the higher classes of philosophy and theology. By this time, Alsted had already become a renowned scholar whose name was widely known due to his program, which relied on faith in pansophia and a commitment to continuing the Reformation, as well as his encyclopedia, which was built on the same principles.⁶ He probably would not have left his cathedra at the University of Herborn in Nassau had the Restitutionsedikt, issued by Emperor Ferdinand II in 1629, not made the position of the Calvinist confession extremely vulnerable in the Holy Roman Empire. The imperial edict, however, seemed to have finally brought to an end the debate whether the stipulations of the Peace of Augsburg related to the rights for religious practices concerned only the Lutheran confession (which was explicitly mentioned by the document) or also the Reformed one (with the argument that their faith was based on a modified version of the same creed). This loophole had been maintained with the active support of prominent political actors in the Empire, and by closing it, the edict forced many important personalities in Calvinist higher education in Germany to leave the empire. Alsted received an invitation from Deventer, but he chose Gábor Bethlen's offer instead. In this, he was certainly motivated – apart from the salary he was offered, which was decent even by Western European standards – by a certain sense of mission and the opportunity to bring his knowledge to faraway lands.⁷

4 See Hotson, “A Generall Reformation of Common Learning”; Hotson, *The Reformation*.

5 Bisterfeld's classic biography is Kvačala, “Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld.” It has been recently updated with fresh research by Viskolcz, “Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld.” On his theological writings and their impact, see Antognazza, “Bisterfeld and *immediatio*”; Antognazza, “‘Immediatio’ and ‘emperichoresis’”; Antognazza, “Debilissimae Entitates?”

6 Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*. On the Academy of Gyulafehérvár, see Péter, “Das Kollegium von Weissenburg.” Murdock, *Calvinism*, 77–82.

7 Menk, “Das Restitutionsedikt;” Szentpéteri, *Egyetemes tudomány*, 15–34. On the stipulations of the *Restitutionsedikt* concerning Calvinism, see Frisch, *Das Restitutionsedikt*, 53–60. On the salary, see Herepei, “Adatok,” 268–69; Szentpéteri, *Egyetemes tudomány*, 33.

There is virtually no secondary literature on the role of Johann Heinrich Alsted as Prince György Rákóczi's political advisor. Limited but relevant evidence shows that Alsted was not only active as a scholar in Gyulafehérvár but also interfered in questions of the prince's foreign policy. A statement made by an unknown correspondent from Rákóczi's court, according to which the prince discussed each issue of importance with Alsted, finds confirmation in other sources. It was not just that the prince seems to have turned to Alsted for help with newsletters in German in order to receive clarification and guidance on news from the Western part of Europe, but the professor himself also maintained some channels of communication with political relevance.⁸ In 1637, when trying to convince Wilhelm V, landgrave of Hessen-Kassel, of the potential of cooperation with Transylvania, Heinrich Meerbott referred to his correspondence with Alsted, and we also know that in 1638 the Gyulafehérvár professor contacted Cornelis Haga, the ambassador of the United Provinces in Constantinople, to whom he sent letters with the princely couriers, presumably to mediate in the conflict between the two political actors.⁹ Since such activities are not known from Alsted's earlier career, he must have been motivated to accept the role of a political advisor by Rákóczi's openness to counsel offered by his well-versed guests as well as the radical changes in his living conditions due to political repression. His experience of being exiled from his earlier home was made more severe by the fact that a significant share of the three theologians' belongings, which had been deposited in Regensburg during their journey, was confiscated by the emperor's administration. In 1635, György Rákóczi I tried to recover these belongings, but even he labored in vain.¹⁰

In the early 1630s Bisterfeld's career was closely connected to Alsted's: he was the professor's faithful disciple and also his son-in-law. When Gábor Bethlen's invitation reached Alsted, Bisterfeld was working as a tutor in Grave (Brabant). It must have been at the invitation of his father-in-law that he came to Herborn, where he taught a course in the spring of 1629 and left with the two others late that summer. Bisterfeld, who was only twenty-four years old at the time, had

8 "Principis Transylvaniae moderna conditio in quo sit" PL AS AR Cl. V. no. 102.; Alsted to György Rákóczi I (Gyulafehérvár, 22 December 1637) KH G 015 no. 4142.

9 The fact that the prince knew about Alsted's letter suggests this interpretation. See István Réthy to György Rákóczi I (Constantinople, September 6, 1638) Szilágyi, ed., *Levelek*, 390. See also Meerbott's speech in front of Wilhelm V ([March 1637]) HStAM Rep. 4f Siebenbürgen nr. 1. (in Hungarian translation: Báthory et al., eds., *Források*, 231).

10 Rákóczi to István Sennyey (Kolozsvár, December 18, 1634) MNL OL X 1904 11696. t.; György Chernel to Rákóczi (Sárospatak, 5 March 1635) MNL OL E 190 7. d. no. 1434.

to refuse an invitation from Groningen (which admittedly seemed somewhat uncertain). Some sources suggest that in 1631 he was not planning to remain in Transylvania for long.¹¹ It is hardly surprising that the young theologian, who at the time had nothing resembling the reputation or network that Alsted had managed to gain, was not terribly motivated to spend his most active years in a land far away from the center of European scholarly life in an environment which must have been quite foreign to him. Also, the year following their arrival proved extremely chaotic in Transylvanian politics. Catherine of Brandenburg, Bethlen's widow and successor, secretly converted to Catholicism and then resigned. She was replaced first by her brother-in-law, István Bethlen, and then by Rákóczi, one of the mightiest landowners in eastern Hungary and someone who had been a staunch follower of Gábor Bethlen's policies in the previous decade. These troubles must have added to the fact that Gyulafehérvár hardly offered a comparably lively intellectual life or the proximity of fellow-minded scholars that a Dutch university could have provided for Bisterfeld.¹² He clearly had good reasons to agree to a visit to Western Europe, where he was entrusted with the task of using his scholarly activities as a disguise for political negotiations in the service of his prince.

Since the early years of the Thirty Years' War, the Principality of Transylvania recurrently participated in the endeavors of the party opposing the Habsburgs. Gábor Bethlen was allied to Friedrich of the Palatinate, and he was later accepted as a member of the League of The Hague between the United Provinces, as well as the kings of Denmark and England. He led three campaigns to Hungary (in 1619–1621, 1623–1624, and 1626), and in the consecutive peace treaties he secured substantial gains with respect to territory and prestige.¹³ Shortly after having secured his throne, György Rákóczi I continued Bethlen's policies and sought contact with Gustav II Adolph, who had just accomplished the first successes of his German campaign. The Swedish king, however, found the costs of Transylvanian intervention too high, and communication problems made it difficult for the two parties to reach any sort of compromise. Although in 1632–1633 there was even a Swedish resident by the name of Paul Strassburg

11 Menk, *Das Restitutionsedikt*, 57–62.

12 On Bisterfeld's concerns, see his later letter, written to Andreas Rivetus in 1637, cited by Miklós, "Bisterfeld," 16. Bisterfeld, however, was not forgotten by his colleagues in the Netherlands: in 1634 he was among the candidates for a teaching position in the newly opened *gymnasium illustre* in Utrecht. Hotson, *The Reformation*, 87.

13 See the most recent research results in Kármán, ed., *The Princes of Transylvania*.

at the Transylvanian court, for over a year he received no instructions from his king, and thus his presence did little more than create more tension for the Transylvanian prince.¹⁴

When György Rákóczi I signed the Peace of Eperjes/Prešov/Eperies on September 28, 1633 with Emperor Ferdinand II, many observers concluded that, by doing so, he had abandoned any plan for cooperation with Sweden. This was not the case, however. Transylvanian envoys traveled to meet Axel Oxenstierna on various occasions over the course of the next two years, but they failed to attract the attention of the head of the Swedish Regency Government. In 1637, then, the aforementioned Heinrich Meerbott took the initiative to motivate the Transylvanian prince to take action again. He was sent to Stockholm in secret, but this insistence on the secrecy of the mission backfired. It was very important to Rákóczi that the plans for an anti-Habsburg alliance not be revealed too early. This, however, meant that he had to come up with creative ways to ensure that his envoy would secure accreditation, and the methods that were devised proved so unusual that they ultimately hindered the creation of any political alliance. The members of the Swedish State Council were presented with a letter in which Rákóczi entrusted Meerbott with the task of recruiting artisans (“*artifices mechanici*”), as well as a ciphered note which presented the prince’s proposal and reached Danzig/Gdańsk hidden in a pistol barrel, on a route separate from the pastor’s. Meerbott explained that the “*artifices*” the prince was looking for were actually parties in the intrigue (“*artificium*”), i.e. the kings of France and Sweden, as well as the landgrave of Hessen. However, after giving the proposal short consideration, the Swedish government decided not to sign anything at the exhortation of someone who lacked clear proof of having been granted plenipotentiary powers.¹⁵

Meerbott’s account of the developments did not survive, but it must have reached Transylvania, because the next envoy, Bisterfeld, received credentials which seem to have followed the Swedish State Council’s suggestion to speak in general terms but be addressed to a specific person in the court. The addressees were not the royal persons but the leading policymakers of the Swedish and French court, Cardinal Richelieu and Axel Oxenstierna, and the credentials did not include Bisterfeld’s name.¹⁶ It seems that they must have been penned only

14 See the detailed description of the events in Kármán, “Thorny Path,” 155–74.

15 On Meerbott’s mission, see Kármán, “Thorny Path,” 174–77.

16 Rákóczi to Richelieu (Gyulafehérvár, April 16, 1638) Gergely, “I. Rákóczy György ... Első közlemény,” 686. With the same date and mutatis mutandis same text to Axel Oxenstierna: RA Oxenstiernasamlingen E 692.

after Bisterfeld's departure from Transylvania in mid-April 1638, and they were surely given to him at a later point of time, thus ensuring that the true nature of the professor's journey could not be revealed as long as he was passing through the Habsburg-friendly territories of Hungary and Poland.¹⁷

Although the credentials only revealed that the envoy was supposed to discuss "certain issues" with the addressees, this proved enough for Richelieu and his administration to enter into a serious conversation with Bisterfeld. After having met Karl Ludwig, the heir of Friedrich of the Palatinate, in The Hague, Bisterfeld reached Paris on July 10, where he was welcomed with enthusiasm according to the account of Hugo Grotius, who was serving there as a Swedish resident envoy.¹⁸ The administration of Louis XIII almost immediately sent forth the king's own envoy to Transylvania (using the sea route through the Mediterranean), and in November, Charles du Bois, Baron of Avaugour, agreed with Rákóczi that he would soon return with full credentials to conclude their alliance (though this never actually happened).¹⁹

While d'Avaugour traveled across half of Europe (eventually arriving in Danzig, where he remained as one of the most important points of contact for Transylvanian foreign policy over the course of the next few years), Bisterfeld also reached his new station, Hamburg. The central location of this harbor city and its professed neutrality had made it an important diplomatic hub as early as the first half of the 1630s, but from 1638 on, it is legitimate to speak of a diplomatic congress of the powers interested in the developments in Germany there. Negotiations concerning the possibilities for peacemaking between the Swedish and imperial envoys were running parallel to parleys among the ambassadors of the Danish, English, and French kings, as well as the United Provinces about creating an anti-Habsburg alliance. The representatives of Swedish and French foreign policy were the same persons who would later act as head commissioners at the Westphalian peace congress: Johan Salvius and

17 According to the account book of the town clerk at Kolozsvár, Bisterfeld arrived in the town on April 14, and on April 23, he had already left Sárospatak. Herepei, "Adatok," 402; Tolnai to Rákóczi (Sárospatak, April 23, 1638) Szilágyi, "I. Rákóczy György," 1348–49. This means that he could not have been in Gyulafehérvár on April 16, when his credentials were penned.

18 Karl Ludwig to Rákóczi (The Hague, June 9, 1638) Szilágyi, ed., *Okirattár*, 129–30; Hugo Grotius to Ludwig Camerarius (Paris, July 10 and 31, 1638), to Axel Oxenstierna (*Ibid.*, July 10 and 24, 1638), and to Queen Christina (Paris, August 21, 1638) Meulenbroek, ed., *Briefwisseling*, vol. 9, 439, 490, 440, 473, and 535–36.

19 On d'Avaugour's mission, see Kármán, "Thorny Path," 177–78.

Claude de Mesmes, Count of Avaux.²⁰ It seemed obvious that Bisterfeld would join this “congress,” even if he arrived somewhat late, because by this time the high spirits caused by the Anglo–French and Swedish–French treaties of February 1637 and February 1638 as potential foundations for an anti-Habsburg alliance had already dissipated.

In Hamburg, Bisterfeld met Sir Thomas Roe, one of the most experienced English diplomats, who was happy to hear the Transylvanian offer (which was similar to offers he had often received from Gábor Bethlen in the 1620s as his ruler’s representative in Constantinople). Roe informed Bisterfeld, however, that it would be futile for him to travel to England, since it had become clear by that time that King Charles I did not have the financial means necessary to join the coalition.²¹ It also turned out that the Dutch were not ready to give up their neutrality towards the emperor, and although Johann Joachim Rusdorf, the diplomat of the exiled Palatinate court (and also Bethlen’s correspondent from the previous decade) was enthusiastic to have met Bisterfeld, it was Salvius who became his most important negotiating partner.²²

On his way to Paris, Bisterfeld also informed the Swedish government about his mission. Axel Oxenstierna and his colleagues were eager to bring him to Stockholm.²³ Bisterfeld declined the offer, most probably because, in Hamburg he was closest to each potential negotiation partner and also to prominent members of the European academic network. He nevertheless informed Salvius about the developments and suggested that if the Swedish resident envoy received plenipotentiary powers, he would also make sure that his prince would

20 On the central position of Hamburg in diplomacy, see Tham, *Den svenska utrikenspolitikens historia*, 281–82. On Salvius, see Droste, “Ein Diplomat.” On d’Avaux, see Croxton and Tischer, *The Peace of Westphalia*, 21–22.

21 Sir Thomas Roe to Rákóczi (Hamburg, October 11, 1638) Szilágyi, ed., *Okirattár*, 130–31; d’Avaux to Claude de Salles, baron de Rorté, the French resident envoy in Stockholm (Hamburg, October 16, 1638) Hudița, ed., *Recueil*, 61. After having met Bisterfeld, Roe stayed more than a year in Hamburg, but upon his return he regarded the 21 months spent there as entirely useless and felt that they had worn him down more than 21 years of earlier service. See Beller, “The Mission;” Tham, *Den svenska utrikenspolitikens historia*, 299–300. On Roe’s contacts with Bethlen, see Kellner, “Strife for a Dream”, as well as Zsuzsanna Hámori Nagy’s contribution to this issue.

22 On the Dutch attitude, see Chavigny to d’Avaux (Ruelle, November 14, 1638) Hudița, ed., *Recueil*, 62. On the Palatinate connection, see Rusdorf and Karl Ludwig to Rákóczi (Hamburg, February 14, 1639, and The Hague, April 12, 1639) Szilágyi, ed., *Okirattár*, 135–38, and 138.

23 Bisterfeld to Oxenstierna (Helsingör, May 9/19, 1638) Meulenbroek, ed., *Briefwisseling*, vol. 9, 807–8; d’Avaux to Rorté (Hamburg, October 16, 1638) Hudița, ed., *Recueil*, 61; Anders Gyldenklou to Salvius (Stockholm, October 6/[16], 1638) RA E 5262 Salvius samling vol. 10.

send him one so that the parleys on the details could start.²⁴ In early January 1639, the Swedish *plenipotencia* to Salvius was sent from Stockholm, but a letter by György Rákóczi I reached Hamburg at the same time in which he ordered Bisterfeld to return to Gyulafehérvár. The prince also wrote letters to the French and Swedish diplomats in which he did not even mention the planned alliance and only asked for their support in finding a successor to Alsted, who died on November 9, 1638.²⁵

This unexpected development, which seems to have seriously damaged Rákóczi's credibility among his potential allies, was the result of the problems of communication and the Transylvanian prince's efforts to secure the secrecy of his negotiations. As Bisterfeld explained to Salvius in a note, György Rákóczi I was expecting d'Avaugour to return to his court with the necessary accreditation by April 1639, so he did not need to risk the potential discovery of his intentions were his correspondence to fall into the wrong hands. As the prince expected the final parleys to take place at his court, there was no need to mention the issue to the diplomats in Hamburg, and Bisterfeld's further stay in the western part of Europe also seemed unnecessary. On the other hand, Bisterfeld's request for plenipotentiary powers to be sent to Hamburg did not reach György Rákóczi I in time. For the sake of secrecy, the German scholar did not correspond directly with the prince, but rather sent his messages to Alsted – but since the elder professor was dying, Bisterfeld's messages were only forwarded with delays, and Rákóczi acted before having received the most recent news from Hamburg.²⁶

The professor listened to the prince's summon, but he clearly was not in a hurry. In late March 1639, Grotius already knew that Bisterfeld was going to go to Paris again, but it was early May when the professor actually arrived. In the meantime, he visited the United Provinces again: in March he sent a letter to Rákóczi from Amsterdam, and in April he met Karl Ludwig in The

24 Bisterfeld's note to Salvius (Hamburg, October 27 [November 7], 1638) RA E 5277 Salvius samling vol. 25. nr. 1.

25 The Swedish Regency Government's *plenipotencia* to Salvius (Stockholm, December 1/[11], 1638) Szilágyi, ed., *Okirattár*, 131–32 Rákóczi to d'Avaux and Salvius (with the same text mutatis mutandis) (Kolozsvár, December 4, 1638) Gergely, "I. Rákóczy György ... Első közlemény," 686–87, and RA E 5270 Salvius samling vol. 18. On the arrival of the prince's letters and Bisterfeld's recalling, see Georg Müller to Grotius (Hamburg, January, 15/[25] 1639) Meulenbroek, ed., *Briefwisseling*, vol. 10, 58.

26 According to Bisterfeld's own account, he requested plenipotentiary powers from the prince on October 21, but this request could not have reached Rákóczi until November 26, when the prince wrote his letters to Hamburg. See Bisterfeld's note to Salvius (Hamburg, October 27 [November 7], 1638) RA E 5277 Salvius samling vol. 25. nr. 1.

Hague.²⁷ When already in Paris, he had long conversations with Jean de la Barde, a secretary of the Chancellery, and he had the impression that the French court was still ready to conclude the alliance, although, rather surprisingly he did not reflect on why d’Avaugour never returned to Transylvania.²⁸ He also made sure to keep the interest of Swedish diplomacy alive, and he shared the contents of his parleys with Grotius, and also, by letter, with Ludwig Camerarius, the Swedish resident envoy in The Hague, whom he must have met during one of his stays in the Dutch capital.²⁹ Bisterfeld then returned to Transylvania across the Mediterranean. In mid-July, he was already in Venice, but we do not know exactly when he arrived in the principality. Rákóczi’s envoys in Constantinople were still forwarding his letters to Transylvania in late August. He put his final report for the prince on paper November 1639 in Medgyes/Mediaş/Mediasch.³⁰

Bisterfeld as a Diplomatic Correspondent

Bisterfeld and György Rákóczi I’s expectations were proven overly optimistic in the months and years to come. The professor’s impressions in Paris did not deceive him: the French were positive about the chances of cooperation with the Transylvanians, d’Avaux received an order to discuss the articles of the future treaty with Salvius, and a *plenipotencia* was signed for Louis Fleutot, the envoy to be sent to the principality.³¹ Rákóczi was already exchanging messages with d’Avaugour about the best possible route for Fleutot, and he started laying the ground at the Sublime Porte to gain the sultan’s consent for his campaign in Hungary. During the summer and autumn of 1639, Transylvanian ambassadors

27 Grotius to Camerarius (Paris, March 16/26, 1639). Meulenbroek, ed., *Briefwisseling*, vol. 10, 198; Louis XIII to d’Avaux (Saint-Germain-en-Laye, May 9, 1639) Gergely, “I. Rákóczy György ... Első közlemény,” 692; Rákóczi to d’Avaugour (Gyulafehérvár, June 24, 1639) *ibid.*, 695; Karl Ludwig to Rákóczi (The Hague, April 12, 1639) Szilágyi, ed., *Okirattár*, 138.

28 Bisterfeld’s account of his parleys with de la Barde (Medgyes, November 7, 1639) Szilágyi, ed., *Okmánytár*, 32–33.

29 Grotius to Oxenstierna (Paris, May 4/14, 1639) Meulenbroek, ed., *Briefwisseling*, vol. 10, 326; Bisterfeld to Camerarius (Paris, May 12/22, 1639) BSB Clm 10359. fol. 243. On Camerarius as a representative of the Swedish crown, see Schubert, *Ludwig Camerarius*.

30 Rákóczi to d’Avaugour (Gyulafehérvár, July 17, 1639) Gergely, “I. Rákóczy György ... Első közlemény,” 702; Mihály Tholdalagi and István Kőrössy to Rákóczi (Constantinople, August 30, 1639) Szilágyi, ed., *Leveleke*, 592; Bisterfeld’s account on his parleys with de la Barde (Medgyes, November 7, 1639) Szilágyi, ed., *Okmánytár*, 32–33.

31 Louis XIII to d’Avaux (Saint-Germain-en-Laye, May 9, 1639) Gergely, “I. Rákóczy György ... Első közlemény,” 692–694; the king’s *plenipotencia* to Louis Fleutot (*Ibid.*, May 10, 1639) Hudíță, ed., *Répertoire*, 62–63.

visited Constantinople and consulted frequently with the French ambassador there about the possible ways to win the support of the sultanic administration. Their preliminary inquiries with the Ottoman dignitaries yielded no success, but this was not the primary reason why there was no Transylvanian intervention in the Thirty Years' War immediately after Bisterfeld's journey in Western Europe.³²

Contrary to the French court, the Swedish administration lost all interest in any kind of cooperation with György Rákóczi I. In March 1639, shortly after having received the news that Bisterfeld had been summoned back to Gyulafehérvár, the State Council announced that in the future it would not take the Transylvanians seriously, and no further development could move them from this position.³³ Neither the repeated inquiries of the French diplomats nor the incoming messages from Transylvania could convince Axel Oxenstierna to dedicate attention to the issue again, and even the complaints of Johan Banér, the chief commander of the Swedish army in Germany, fell on deaf ears. Salvius dropped various remarks in his letters to the Regency Government according to which the involvement of more allies in the war, such as the prince of Transylvania, would further Swedish success, but to no avail. The Swedish government's reaction, which involved several irrational elements, did not change. Even when Banér's successor, Lennart Torstensson took matters into his own hands and arranged a treaty of alliance with György Rákóczi I (the agreement of Gyulafehérvár, signed on November 16, 1643), Axel Oxenstierna's government refused to ratify it. They rightfully pointed out the formal shortcomings of the text, but did nothing to address them, and thus the Swedish–Transylvanian cooperation in 1644–1645 was never formalized by a fully legitimate international treaty.³⁴

The tension due to the Swedish reluctance eventually poisoned Rákóczi's contacts with the leaders of French diplomacy as well. In d'Avaux's correspondence with his colleagues in 1640 we find a growing number of ironic and, later, sarcastic remarks on the Transylvanian prince, and after a while, Rákóczi also did not conceal his frustration that the promises he had been made were not kept. The prince stopped answering the letters from Jean de la Haye, the representative of the French Crown at the Sublime Porte, and he told

32 See Kármán, "Thorny Path," 180–181.

33 Minutes of the meeting of the Swedish State Council (February 19 [March 1], 1639) Bergh, ed. *Svenska riksrådets protokoll*, 460.

34 On the details of the developments and the possible interpretations of the Swedish attitude, see Kármán, "Thorny Path," 186–97; Kármán, *Confession and Politics*, 54–65.

Bisterfeld to ask d’Avaugour whether the French considered the Hungarians simpletons who would not start to wonder after such a long time whether they were merely being mocked by their partners.³⁵ This formulation, which is so foreign to Bisterfeld’s usually moderate style and suggests the direct interference of the prince in composition of his letters, directs our attention to the latter’s function as a mediator between the Transylvanian court and its potential allies.

Bisterfeld was a good choice to serve as the bearer of György Rákóczi I’s message to the court of his potential allies, as only rarely in the seventeenth century was a political mission entrusted to scholars of his kind. Some surviving letters prove that Rákóczi’s adversaries knew about Bisterfeld’s journey, and it clearly raised suspicion among them, but none of these sources suggest that the Catholic elite of the Kingdom of Hungary would have come to any direct conclusions concerning the politics of the Transylvanian prince based upon the fact that Bisterfeld, a professor from the Gyulafehérvár academy, was traveling to Western Europe.³⁶ Bisterfeld’s academic activities during the journey (to which I will return) seem to have served as an excellent pretext. As noted before, the secrecy of the mission was also secured by the fact that Bisterfeld sent his letters to Alsted, thus creating an illusion of a politically neutral (or at least politically irrelevant) exchange between scholars.³⁷

Of course, after his return to Transylvania, Bisterfeld’s position as a scholar ceased to be an asset for political communication. If any of his letters had fallen into enemy hands, the adversaries of the Transylvanian prince would have been just as eager to know why a professor from Gyulafehérvár was sending ciphered messages to French and Swedish diplomats as they would have been in the case of any other person. In this period, Bisterfeld’s involvement had other advantages. For György Rákóczi I, the developments caused serious embarrassment. It was humiliating that he was bombarding his potential allies with new offers, to which they replied with little more than noncommittal words. After a while, it would have been an immense loss of prestige for him to continue knocking on their doors with further suggestions, especially seeing as how d’Avaugour, d’Avaux, and Salvius were not his equals in the seventeenth-century “society of princes.”

35 Bisterfeld to d’Avaugour (Gyulafehérvár, July 10, 1640) Gergely, “I. Rákóczy György ... Befejező közlemény,” 59. For a detailed account on the developments, see Kármán, “Thorny Path,” 181–185.

36 György Madarász to Rákóczi (Sárospatak, June 16, 1638) MNL OL E 190 10. d. nr. 2255. Cf. MNL OL A 98 9. cs. 11/b. fasc.

37 Bisterfeld’s note to Salvius (Hamburg, October 27 [November 7], 1638) RA E 5277 Salvius samling vol. 25. nr. 1; Tamás Debreczeni to Rákóczi (Sárospatak, December 26, 1638) MNL OL E 190 10. d. nr. 2313.

It would have been unbecoming for him as a prince to refer again and again to how long he had been waiting for a definite answer and to mention how much frustration this had caused for him. As a princely counselor, Bisterfeld did not need to have such scruples, and in his accounts, he could paint the fury of György Rákóczi I in dark colors, much as he could also claim that, if the prince did not soon receive a positive answer to his proposals, he would give up his heroic plan to assist the common cause.³⁸ Before Bisterfeld's return to Transylvania, János Kemény, another personality from the prince's court, had already served this function of an "alternative correspondent," since he had acted as d'Avaugour's guide during the French diplomat's stay in the principality. Bisterfeld's reputation as a professor, however, made him better fit for the task than the young Transylvanian aristocrat. Also, he personally knew many more of the diplomats involved.³⁹

For a while, the prince and the professor maintained a parallel correspondence with the French and Swedish diplomats. In the letters addressed to d'Avaugour during the winter of 1639, however, we can already trace a duality. György Rákóczi I limited his messages to news, whereas it fell upon Bisterfeld to urge the figures of French diplomacy to continue negotiations.⁴⁰ Then, in 1640, the prince stopped writing to d'Avaugour and the envoys in Hamburg. The entire correspondence with d'Avaux and Salvius went through the Gyulafehérvár professor, who could be regarded being of the same rank as they were. In February 1640, Jean de la Haye wrote to Bisterfeld from Constantinople (parallel to his letter to György Rákóczi I), but we do not have any further evidence that they established a more or less continuous correspondence in the same manner as the diplomats in Hamburg did. The resident embassy of the prince in Constantinople could take care of this connection (whenever Rákóczi was ready to communicate), and since the French diplomat and Bisterfeld were not personally acquainted, maintaining contact with the professor would not have

38 See for instance Bisterfeld to d'Avaugour (Gyulafehérvár, December 27, 1639 and July 10, 1640) Gergely, "I. Rákóczy György ... Első közlemény," 706; Gergely, "I. Rákóczy György ... Befejező közlemény," 59.

39 Kemény to d'Avaugour (Gyulafehérvár, May 1, 1639) Gergely, "I. Rákóczy György ... Első közlemény," 690–91. On the relationship between Kemény and the French diplomat, see also Kemény, *Önéletírása*, 193.

40 Bisterfeld, and Rákóczi to d'Avaugour (Gyulafehérvár, December 27 and 29, 1639) Gergely, "I. Rákóczy György ... Első közlemény," 706.

brought any specific advantages.⁴¹ In any case, in the autumn of 1643, we again have evidence that De la Haye sent news to Bisterfeld from the Sublime Porte.⁴²

After György Rákóczi I's decision to abandon the diplomatic exchange with the French and Swedish representatives, he was involved again only when a new correspondent appeared on the horizon. In the summer of 1641, when Count Zdenko von Hoditz, a Bohemian exile and colonel in Swedish service, contacted him, Rákóczi answered the letter in his own name, as he did again when Lennart Torstensson initiated contact in July 1642.⁴³ The Swedish field marshall maintained parallel correspondence with the prince and the professor during the negotiations leading to the agreement of Gyulafehérvár, and the separate contact with Bisterfeld also proved useful in this. The French disapproved of two points in the agreement of Gyulafehérvár (which theoretically bound them as well). They therefore sent their plenipotentiary to sign a separate treaty with György Rákóczi I (the so-called treaty of Munkács/Mukačevo on April 22, 1645). It would have been beneath the prince's dignity to ask directly for Torstensson's approval for this move, but this could be easily arranged by having Bisterfeld write to the field marshall about Rákóczi's concerns, even if it only took place after the treaty had been signed.⁴⁴

Upon his return to Transylvania, the professor requested the cipher which had been in use during earlier Swedish-Transylvanian contacts and also a list of the people to whom he should write.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, as one would have expected, he did not write anything he wanted. The sources suggest that Rákóczi controlled the content of the letters that Bisterfeld sent to the diplomats in his own name. Some of the drafts which survived were written in the professor's hand, but they have a number of corrections by the prince.⁴⁶ At the same time, it would be a mistake to see Bisterfeld only as a medium through which György Rákóczi I could express his wishes. The prince counted on the professor's expertise and

41 De la Haye to Bisterfeld (Pera, February 27, 1640) Szilády and Szilágyi, eds., *Török-magyarokori állam-okmánytár*, 57. The relationship with De la Haye seems to have been reestablished through Rákóczi's diplomats to the Sublime Porte in the spring of 1643. See de la Haye to Rákóczi (Pera, April 19, 1643) Szilágyi, ed., *Okmánytár*, 46.

42 Réthy to Rákóczi (Constantinople, October 18, 1643) Szilágyi, ed., *Levelek*, 727.

43 Rákóczi to Hoditz (Dés, July 27, 1641) Wibling, "Magyarország," 472–473; Rákóczi to Torstensson (Gyulafehérvár, September 7, 1642) RA Oxenstiernasamlingen E 1023 fasc. 1642. fol. 137r. On Hoditz's attempt to establish contact, see Kármán, "Thorny Path," 181–182.

44 Bisterfeld to Torstensson (Munkács, April 24, 1645) Wibling, "Magyarország," 622–623.

45 Bisterfeld's memorial, drafted after his return to Transylvania ANR DJS Colectia de Acte Fasciculare F 46 fol. 7v–8r.

46 E.g., Bisterfeld to Torstensson (Gyulafehérvár, May 3, 1643) Szilágyi, ed., *Okmánytár*, 48–50.

judgment. Bisterfeld played an important role during the negotiations directly preceding the conclusion of the agreement of Gyulafehérvár and the treaty of Munkács. He himself drafted several of the articles, and he also made corrections to the text in the final round of revisions.⁴⁷

Although we do not know of any opinion papers from Bisterfeld in which he would have given direct advice to the prince on political issues, the lines penned by Jacob Rebenstock, quoted in the introduction to this essay, testify that the professor (who seems to have befriended the lieutenant colonel representing the Swedish Crown at the Transylvanian court) was one of the most important lobbyists in support of a united stand for the Protestant cause in Rákóczi's circles.⁴⁸ In all likelihood, it was Bisterfeld who helped the prince keep his spirits high and convinced him that he should keep the importance of the task in the forefront of his mind instead of the recurrent frustrations he faced when offering his services to the Protestant cause. Shortly before making the final decision, Rákóczi had serious doubts as to whether he indeed had a divine calling to take up arms and thus serve the confessional cause. It was again Bisterfeld who assisted him and counterbalanced the counsel of István Kassai, the prince's other intimate advisor, who was urging the prince to pursue peace instead.⁴⁹

Last but not least, Bisterfeld not only provided services for the prince himself. He also mobilized some family connections. Several people maintained contacts between the court at Gyulafehérvár and d'Avaugour's residence in Danzig at the turn of the 1640s. Prominent among them was a young Scot, Andrew Gawdy, who later had a spectacular career as a high-ranking officer in the Transylvanian army (and thus is known in the secondary literature in Hungarian as András Gaudi). Gawdy helped transmit Bisterfeld's letters in 1639, 1641, and 1643, whereas in 1639 and 1640, this role was played by Pál Göcs and Ferenc Jármí, Rákóczi's Transylvanian clients, who had good connections in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Jármí later was also the envoy of his prince at the congress of Westphalia).⁵⁰ In the late summer of 1642, however, a new person knocked on d'Avagour's door. Peter Wiederstein, who had brought

47 Szilágyi, ed., *Okmánytár*, 263, 285–87.

48 The only surviving opinion papers from this period that were signed by Bisterfeld were penned by István Geleji Katona, the Reformed bishop of Transylvania. They also bear the signature of Pál Medgyesi, Rákóczi's court preacher. Báthory et al, eds., *Források*, 245–48, 251–54.

49 Kemény, *Önéletírás*, 190–191; Rebenstock to Torstensson (Gyulafehérvár, November 8/18, 1643) RA Transylvanica vol. 1. nr. 132.

50 On Göcs, see Gebei, “Lengyel protestánsok,” 16–17; on Jármí, see Kármán, “Erdélyi követek,” 210–213; on Gaudi, see B. Szabó and Kármán, “Külföldi zsoldosok,” 792–96.

the professor's letters this time, was Bisterfeld's nephew (the son of his half-brother). He had settled in Transylvania, and he later inherited his uncle's house and part of his library.⁵¹ His involvement in Bisterfeld's political endeavors can be seen as a logical extension of his uncle's position and further proof that the illusion of scholars being relatively harmless in the field of power politics could prove both convincing and useful in these turbulent years.

Political Role and Academic Career

Even before his mission to Western Europe, Bisterfeld was involved in parleys concerning György Rákóczi I's potential involvement in the 'Thirty Years' War. A letter from November 1637 testifies that he maintained a network of correspondents and supplied the prince with current news concerning developments in the German theaters of war and the related Protestant courts.⁵² Heinrich Meerbott told the Swedish State Council in the autumn of 1637 that his mission was so secret that, apart from the prince, only Alsted "and another theologian" knew about it.⁵³ On the basis of Bisterfeld's letter to the prince, it is easy to identify this other person as Alsted's son-in-law and faithful follower.

Bisterfeld was unquestionably eager to accept the 1638 mission, which made it possible for him to travel as far as Paris. As noted earlier, at that time, he did not yet have anything comparable to Alsted's network or reputation, and while he was waiting for answers from the various courts, he was able to visit many of his fellow scholars and make acquaintances with useful contacts. In a friendly letter written in the early phase of the mission to Samuel Hartlib, who was one of the most important figures in the international Protestant network, Bisterfeld expressed his joy over the possibility to meet a number of great scholars if, as he hoped, he would be able to travel to England.⁵⁴ Although he had visited Britain in the 1620s, the connection to Hartlib's circle was most likely made during John Dury's journey to Transylvania. Bisterfeld was one of the signees of the position

51 Bisterfeld to d'Avaujour (Gyulafehérvár, August 18, 1642) Wibling, "Magyarország," 596. On Wiederstein, see Viskolcz, *Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld*, 39.

52 Bisterfeld to György Rákóczi I (Gyulafehérvár, November 6, 1637) KH G 015 no. 4165.

53 Minutes of the Swedish State Council's meeting (October 24 November 3], 1637) Bergh, *Svenska riksrådets protokoll*, 107.

54 Bisterfeld to Hartlib ([autumn 1638]) Kvačala, ed., *Korrespondence*, 37. On Hartlib, see Turnbull, *Hartlib*; Greengrass, Leslie and Raylor, eds., *Samuel Hartlib*; Hotson, *The Reformation*, 203–23.

paper on the union of Protestant churches compiled by prominent Transylvanian church authorities at the request of the Scottish irenicist theologian in 1634.⁵⁵

As mentioned earlier, Sir Thomas Roe dampened Bisterfeld's enthusiasm when he declared the journey to England pointless from a political perspective, and thus the German theologian had no excuse to cross the Channel. He nonetheless remained active as a scholar. While making arrangements regarding the creation of an anti-Habsburg coalition in the interest of the Protestant cause, he also defended his church on another battlefield. As a response to the Antitrinitarian treatise of Johann Crell, published in Raków (Poland) in 1631, he published his *De uno Deo ... mysterium pietatis* in Leiden, with the renowned Elsevier publishing house. The work was a logical link in the chain of theological attacks upon the Transylvanian Anti-Trinitarians (who, known as Unitarians, were one of the four accepted confessional groups in the principality) in the second half of the 1630s. The *Mysterium pietatis* was a success (it was rereleased three times), and Bisterfeld made important contacts in Hamburg and the Netherlands which he later maintained. In the long run, Andreas Rivetus and Johann Rulitius proved his most important correspondents, but he also established (or renewed) contact with Johann Adolf Tassius, Joachim Jungius, Gisbert Voetius, Johann Moriaen, and Marin Mersenne.⁵⁶ Hugo Grotius, who often complained about being overburdened by his tasks as a Swedish resident envoy in Paris instead of being able to dedicate himself to his research on the law of nations, wrote with noticeable envy in April 1639 that, according to news he had heard, Bisterfeld was trying to secure a tranquil academic position for himself.⁵⁷ As noted before, this accusation was quite unjust. While the publication of his book and his introduction to the scholarly networks unquestionably furthered Bisterfeld's career ambitions, they also served the interests of Rákóczi's foreign policy by providing credible camouflage for political negotiations.

Bisterfeld made a very good impression in the Western European Calvinist academic world. At the recommendation of Rivetus, in 1639 he received an offer from Leiden University to serve as a substitute for a regular professor and teach for a semester, and in May 1640 the curators invited him to take over the

55 Kvačala, "Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld," 44, 50–52. On Bisterfeld's connections to the Hartlib circle, see also Viskolcz, "Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld," 207–8; Hotson, *The Reformation*, 206–10.

56 Kvačala, "Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld," 46–47; Viskolcz, "Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld," 207–13; Monok, "Johannes Heinricus Bisterfeld." On the attacks against the Antitrinitarians, see Murdock, *Calvinism*, 120–26; Keul, *Early Modern Religious Communities*, 196–201; Szentpéteri, *Egyetemes tudomány*, 34; Szentpéteri and Viskolcz, "Egy református–unitárius hitvita;" Szabó, "A dési per."

57 Grotius to Müller (Paris, April 9, 1639) Meulenbroek, ed., *Briefwisseling*, vol. 10, 327.

position of Antonius Walaeus, a professor of theology who had passed away the previous year. The invitation letter also noted that another professor, Antonius Thysius, was mortally ill (he died a year later), thus it is clear that Bisterfeld would have been very welcome in Leiden if he had decided to leave Transylvania.⁵⁸ This widely respected institution of higher education (which a Hungarian visiting student, Márton Szepsi Csombor, had labeled “Paradisus terrestris” only a few years earlier) clearly would have opened an entirely different career path for Bisterfeld than what awaited him in Transylvania, even if his salary would have been smaller.⁵⁹ In addition to Leiden’s prominent rank in the academic world, the work environment offered by the university also made it an attractive option. Suffice it to mention the famous library, in contrast to all the problems and enormous costs Bisterfeld had to face when trying to transport the books he had purchased during the 1638–1639 mission to Transylvania.⁶⁰ Furthermore, István Geleji Katona, the Reformed bishop of Transylvania, informed György Rákóczi I that Bisterfeld was not only attracted by Leiden’s prestige but also by other motivations: the professor had been recently widowed, and he was planning to marry the daughter of Ludwig Camerarius. The bishop feared that the ambitious plans concerning the Gyulafehérvár academy were collapsing, and he left no stone unturned to please Bisterfeld and Piscator (who had just recovered from a serious illness) while at the same time making scathing remarks and insisting that Bisterfeld and Piscator start meeting the obligations of their office in more than just name only.⁶¹

In the spring of 1641, it seemed that the endeavors of Geleji Katona were bound to fail and that Bisterfeld was going to return to Western Europe; he even informed Salvius of his plan. However, during the summer the letter by Count Hoditz arrived in Transylvania, and with new hopes on the horizon concerning military assistance for the Protestant cause, György Rákóczi I

58 Curators of Leiden University to Rákóczi (Leiden, May 25, 1640) ANR DJS *Colecția de documente medievale* V. 2265. See also Miklós, “Bisterfeld,” 16.

59 Geleji Katona to Rákóczi (Gyulafehérvár, September 26, 1640) Ötvös, “Geleji Katona István,” 218; Szepsi Csombor, *Europica varietas*, 171.

60 Debreczeni to Rákóczi (Sárospatak, October 19 and December 18, 1639) MNL OL E 204 Fasc. 14. fol. 44v and 60v. On Leiden University Library in the seventeenth century, see Berkvens-Stevelinck, *Magna Commoditas*, 11–30.

61 Geleji Katona to Rákóczi (Gyulafehérvár, September 21 and October 8, 1640) Ötvös, “Geleji Katona István,” 211–212, 220–223. On Piscator’s illness, see Geleji Katona to Rákóczi (Gyulafehérvár, December 2, 1638) Beke, “Geleji Katona István,” 337.

managed to convince the professor to stay.⁶² The prince also informed the curators in Leiden that the Gyulafehérvár academy needed Bisterfeld's services.⁶³ Nevertheless, in 1642 the issue of the invitation from Leiden was still on the table. Furthermore, Jan Amos Comenius thought that Bisterfeld had already arrived in the Netherlands, and he was looking forward to meeting him there.⁶⁴ The Leiden curators eventually became frustrated with the long delay of the project, and they blamed György Rákóczi I for hindering communication. As the prince seems already to have given permission for Bisterfeld to leave in the previous year, however, it is more likely that the Gyulafehérvár professor gave up his plans concerning the position in the Netherlands because of the new wave of negotiations, initiated by Torstensson that year.⁶⁵

Bisterfeld's plans to reestablish his family with an offspring of a prominent member of the international Calvinist network also failed. The forty-one-year-old Anna Katherina Camerarius married none other than Paul Strassburg, the former resident envoy of Gustav Adolph II in Transylvania.⁶⁶ All in all, we can say that the German professor paid a huge price for the position he acquired among the prince's political counselors. His marriage to Anna Stenczel, a Saxon burgher's daughter from Kolozsvár/Cluj/Klausenburg, in June 1643 offers a fairly clear indication that he had finally resolved to remain in Transylvania. He and his wife acquired land and a mansion in Tövis/Teiuş Alba/Dreikirchennot far from Gyulafehérvár, and in 1644, they bought a house in Nagyszeben/Sibiu/Hermannstadt, the center of the Saxon communities of Transylvania.⁶⁷ His decision to settle in the principality for good, however, must have left a bad taste in Bisterfeld's mouth. Otherwise, he hardly would have told Comenius (whom he finally met in the early 1650s) that "scholars and artisans summoned to Hungary receive an invitation to perpetual imprisonment."⁶⁸

62 Bisterfeld to Salvius (Gyulafehérvár, April 28 [1641]) RA Transylvanica vol. 1. nr. 30; Rákóczi to d'Avaux (Dés, 27 June 1641) Wibling, "Magyarország," 471–72. The edition identifies the addressee as Hoditz, but this is clearly a mistake, since the text refers to Hoditz in the third-person singular.

63 Miklós, "Bisterfeld," 18.

64 Comenius to Goddofred Hotton (London, March 4/14, 1642) Patera, ed., *Jana Amosa Komenského correspondence*, 50.

65 On the correspondence with regards to this issue, see Kvačala, "Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld," 176; Miklós, "Bisterfeld," 19–20; Monok, "Johannes Henricus Bisterfeld," 324–25.

66 Since Camerarius himself had also recently been widowed and had renounced his position as Swedish resident envoy in The Hague, the family moved to Groningen. Schubert, *Ludwig Camerarius*, 410–11; Mörner, "Paul Straßburg," 355–56.

67 Gyulai, "Bisterfeld özvegye," 78–80.

68 Comenius to Hartlib (Leszno, July 19/29, 1654) Blekastad, *Unbekannte Briefe*, 114.

Various factors contributed to Bisterfeld's decision to stay in Transylvania. The salary may have played a part, albeit not a prominent one. Although the sum (500 talers annually) was competitive on an international level, payment was often delayed. Geleji Katona mentioned such problems as early as 1640, and in 1649, the Transylvanian treasury already owed the professor 600 talers.⁶⁹ Bisterfeld's fellow scholars in Western Europe believed that György Rákóczi I simply refused to let him go. This interpretation, however, seems unconvincing for two reasons. First, in 1641, Bisterfeld was already preparing to depart with the prince's knowledge. Second, had Rákóczi been exerting pressure to limit his mobility, Bisterfeld hardly would have pursued work in his field of expertise with the fervor that he showed in the 1640s. He continued, for instance, to nurture Alsted's legacy, even at the expense of his own research. In 1641, he published an index for the late professor's magnum opus, the *Prodomus religionis triumphantis*, which was published in Transylvania. Over the course of the following years, he fulfilled the wishes of István Geleji Katona and served as a professor not only in name. He continued the program of publishing new schoolbooks, which had been launched by the three Herborn scholars in the previous decade to elevate the educational standards of the Gyulafehérvár academy.⁷⁰ His achievements were praiseworthy and not at all obvious: his fellow professor, the aforementioned Philipp Ludwig Piscator, could not boast half as many publications. For Bisterfeld, who remained a dedicated supporter of the idea of continuing Reformation, the move to Gyulafehérvár was a sacred mission (as he put it in one of his letters when he accepted the Transylvanian invitation),⁷¹ and he tried to live up to his commitment to this mission to the best of his abilities.

It would be quite logical to think of the role Bisterfeld played in Transylvanian foreign policy as a part of this program. We find relatively few references to the fight against the Antichrist in his accounts of current political events (especially if we compare these to Meerbott's), but these accounts nevertheless show that he was influenced by Alsted's attempt to unite the Ramist encyclopedist approach with Millenarist thought. He was, after all, one of the contributors to his master's *Diatrise de mille annis apocalypticis*, a rational attempt to interpret the Bible's account

69 Geleji Katona to Rákóczi (Gyulafehérvár, October 8, 1640) Ötvös, "Geleji Katona István," 221; Gyulai, "Bisterfeld özvegye," 80. A register of salaries survived from 1630. At this time, the first professor received 500 Talers (and it is likely to have been Bisterfeld's position as well in the 1640s) and the second received 350 Talers. Herepei, "Adatok," 269.

70 Viskolcz, *Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld*, 32–42; Viskolcz, "Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld és a gyulafehérvári tankönyvkiadás;" Szentpéteri, *Egyetemes tudomány*, 15–16.

71 Kvačala, "Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld," 48.

of the Apocalypse and calculate the end of times.⁷² Everything was in place, therefore, for Bisterfeld to feel that serving the fight against the Antichrist and assisting the cause of the empire's German Protestants in distress was a personal duty; back in 1629, he had presided over several disputations in Herborn on the right of resistance.⁷³ This attitude also explains why Bisterfeld was not satisfied when György Rákóczi I concluded the Peace of Linz in the summer of 1645. Although the documents secured the liberty to practice religion in Hungary with unprecedented precision, they did not fulfil the professor's expectations, whose aim was to assist Protestantism in a much wider circle. Of course, in his letters to the Catholic d'Avaux and Abel Servien, the other representative of the French Crown at the peace congress of Westphalia, Bisterfeld did not refer to the fight against the Antichrist, but he did give voice to his fear that the Peace of Linz might become a hotbed for even worse conflicts.⁷⁴

Bisterfeld's understanding of his task as a multi-faceted sacred mission must have played an important role in his decision in the early 1640s to forfeit the offer of a professor's position at a renowned Western university and a wife who, through her family and her family's connections, would place him in the center of the international Calvinist network. He did not have many opportunities to formulate his stance clearly in writing, but the few occasions when he did are revealing. In a letter to Cardinal Mazarin after the conclusion of the Treaty of Munkács in 1645, he made only a modest remark on how God had called him to the light of public service from the tranquility of the school,⁷⁵ but to Lennart Torstensson he had more to say. Having read the aforementioned lines penned by Jacob Rebenstock, the Swedish Field Marshall assured the professor of his gratitude for his earlier deeds, at which Bisterfeld wrote the following: "Although I am unworthy of the great praise Your Excellence showers on me so graciously, I can state as much with good conscience that I am almost a martyr of the

72 Kvačala, "Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld," 44. See also Hotson, *Paradise Postponed*, 69. One example of an evocation of the interpretative framework of Salvation History: "Modo Sueci hac hyeme in Caesaris ditionibus hybernare possint, videbimus metamorphosin hostibus horrendam, nobis jucundissimam. Ruet Antichristus, regnabit Christus..." Bisterfeld to Rákóczi (Gyulafehérvár, January 7, 1645) Szilágyi, ed., *Okmánytár*, 230. It is quite characteristic that Bisterfeld specified in his will that if his daughter were to choose a "Papist or an Arian [that is, Antitrinitarian]" husband, she would not receive the annuities anymore, and the same procedure should be followed in the case of each relative listed in the document if they were to choose to leave the Reformed faith. Zimmermann, "Bisterfeld végrendelete," 172–73.

73 Menk, "Restitutionen," 129, note 102.

74 Bisterfeld to d'Avaux and Servien (Fogarás, 22 February 1646) Gergely, "I. Rákóczy György ... Befejező közlemény," 76.

75 Bisterfeld to Mazarin (Sárospatak, May 6, 1645) Gergely, "I. Rákóczy György ... Befejező közlemény," 74.

common cause. It is not only our enemies who want to destroy me, but also those who place their private interest before the public good and the welfare of the motherland. But even so, I am faithfully serving God, all of Christianity, my gracious lord, Hungary, and Transylvania.⁷⁶

The mention of martyrdom in the passage cited above was not a general reference to Bisterfeld's willingness to make sacrifices. It was, rather, a hint at a direct threat upon his life. Other evidence also suggests that Bisterfeld felt that several people around him were reacting with malice to his involvement in the world of politics, and he was afraid that he might be assassinated. He was especially suspicious of the reactions of the Catholic members of the Transylvanian elite.⁷⁷ We do not know whether these fears were well-founded, but Bisterfeld's role in the principality's political decision-making network was unquestionably unique, even compared to the prominent personalities of the Transylvanian Calvinist church. In the early autumn of 1643, when György Rákóczi I sought counsel as to whether the planned war followed divine will, Bishop István Geleji Katona and Pál Medgyesi, his court preacher, noted in their opinion (signed together with Bisterfeld) that, unlike the professor, they had very little knowledge of the diplomatic backdrop. The position paper mirrored a very cautious position, and although (in line with the prince's wishes) it proclaimed the planned military intervention a heroic deed which served God's plan, it repeatedly called Rákóczi's attention to the contention that it was not the duty of members of the clergy to make such political decisions, and from a tactical perspective it was even unfortunate to ask them to do so.⁷⁸

Bisterfeld's involvement in Transylvanian politics made him stand out not only among the leading personalities of the local church but also among most of the intellectuals from the west who stayed in the principality for a time. Martin Opitz, one of the most important poets of German Baroque literature, who had taught in Transylvania for a short while in 1622 at the invitation of Gábor Bethlen, informed Axel Oxenstierna from Danzig in the 1630s about developments in the principality. According to his letters, he continued to maintain contacts with Transylvanians, but there is no evidence that he ever would have tried to influence

76 Bisterfeld to Torstensson (Makovica, 13 March 1645) RA Transylvania vol. 1. nr. 39.

77 See the excerpt from Johann Rulitius' letter, which refers to another letter received from Bisterfeld (Amsterdam, February 12/22, 1644) The Hartlib Papers 43/21A; Geleji Katona to Rákóczi (Gyulafehérvár, September 26, 1640) Ötvös, "Geleji Katona," 218–19.

78 Geleji Katona, Medgyesi and Bisterfeld to Rákóczi (Gyulafehérvár, August 29 and September 1, 1643) Báthory et al, eds., *Források*, 245–48, 251–54.

György Rákóczi I's foreign policy.⁷⁹ Similarly, one finds no indication in the sources that Philipp Ludwig Piscator made any effort to influence Transylvanian foreign policy, and the same is true of Isaac Basire, who as an exiled Anglican pastor spent some time at the Gyulafehérvár academy before it was destroyed by the invading Tatar armies in 1658.⁸⁰ It was only Comenius, who tried to convince the Rákóczi family of the need to assist the international Protestant cause by political and even military means, but his plans, supported with contemporary prophecies, fell upon deaf ears. The dynasty turned to Bisterfeld for advice, and it was the Gyulafehérvár professor, who deemed it unlikely that the visions were of divine origin (much to the disappointment of his Moravian colleague).⁸¹

This development in the 1650s may seem to be in direct contradiction with Bisterfeld's earlier attitude. However, if the professor's radical program of military intervention indeed had its foundations in the dire position of Calvinism in the Holy Roman Empire, this changed with the Peace of Westphalia. It is easy to imagine that, after the Reformed creed had secured recognition in German territories, Bisterfeld – who had settled in Transylvania in the meantime and enjoyed a prestigious reputation among the members of the ruling family – had no desire to see more decades of bloodshed. Comenius' position was profoundly different, since as bishop of the Bohemian Brethren, he saw with despair that the peace treaties signed in Münster and Osnabrück delegated the treatment of religious issues in his homeland to the hands of the Habsburg dynasty.⁸² Although his opinion on various political questions was still sought (such as the choice of Zsigmond Rákóczi's bride in 1649 and the Cossack request for support against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1651), Bisterfeld's position in the Rákóczi family's foreign policy changed after 1648. As a teacher, he was still an ardent supporter of the idea of the continuing Reformation, and the princes could make use of his network of correspondents (which no longer seems to have included the Swedish and French diplomats) in the pursuit of

79 Opitz to Oxenstierna (Danzig, August 12, September 30, 1637, as well as February 17 and June 10, 1638) Reifferscheid, ed., *Briefe*, 564, 565, 577 and 572. On Opitz's stay in Transylvania, see recently Maner, "Martin Opitz."

80 On Basire, see Kármán, "Isaac Basire Erdélyben."

81 Rácz, *Comenius Sárospatakon*, 167–70; Kármán, *Confession and Politics*, 224–36. The political ideas of Comenius inspired the journey of Bengt Skytte, a member of the Swedish State Council, to Transylvania. The Rákóczi's showed interest in him due to his high rank, but the endeavor did not yield any long-term results. Runeby, "Bengt Skytte;" Kármán, "Kísérlet."

82 Kumpera, "Die Entwicklung;" Pánek, "Jan Amos Comenius;" Hroch and Barteček, "Die böhmische Frage."

their diplomatic aims, but there is no indication in any of the sources that he was still playing a role as someone who initiated policies.⁸³ His unique, prominent role in György Rákóczi I's diplomatic efforts, which parallelly assisted the policy-making of the prince with advice and masterminding the communication, was no longer necessary after the Peace of Westphalia.

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83 On Bisterfeld's role as an advisor in the 1650s, see Kármán, *Confession and Politics*, 175–77, 182–84. On his network, see Viskolcz, *Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld*, 24–27, 88. In 1649, Bisterfeld received another invitation to Leiden, but the details of this arrangement are unknown, see Miklós, “Bisterfeld,” 20.

Oxenstiernasamlingen
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