

MATERIALS

HISTORY IN THE POLYMATHIC THOUGHT OF MARTINUS SZENT-IVANY: BASIC REMARKS¹

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his article sheds light on the notion of “history” in the thinking of seventeenth-century polymath Martinus Szent-Ivany, S. J. (1633–1705). The author analyses the content and usage of this notion as represented in Szent-Ivany’s *Curiosiora et selectiora variarum scientiarum miscellanea* (1689–1709) as well as in his polemical theological works. It is evident that Szent-Ivany included history (*chronologia*) in the corpus of sciences (*scientiae*), putting it on the same epistemic level with the natural sciences. The bulk of Szent-Ivany’s historical (chronological) work is comprised in his chronological synopses which the author identifies as thesauri of historical data. These collections of historical data fulfill the same role for human history as observations (*observationes*) do for the history of nature (historical physics). The author also examines the cosmological and eschatological contexts of history in Szent-Ivany’s thought, thereby highlighting some early modern aspects of this notion. In the end, the argumentative role of history, especially in polemical theology, is pointed out.

Keywords: Szent-Ivany. History. Historical Physics. Observation. Chronology. Cosmology. Eschatology. Polemical Theology.

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The protagonist of this article, Martinus Szent-Ivany, was a Jesuit polymath who was born in 1633 in what is present-day northern Slovakia (Liptovský Ján).² He

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 - 2 The most comprehensive account of Martinus Szent-Ivany’s life and works to date is SERFŐZŐ. *Szentiványi Márton S.J. munkássága a XVII. század küzdelmeiben* (Publicationes ad historiam S. J. in Hungaria illustrandam. Lucubrationes 17). Budapest 1942. A good Slovak-language overview can also be found in VANTUCH, Anton. Martin Szentiványi – príspevok k jeho životu a dielu. In *Historický časopis*, 1979, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 533-552, in particular pp. 544-549.

joined the Society of Jesus in Vienna when he was twenty years old. He spent the major part of his life in Tyrnavia (present-day Trnava in Slovakia) where the Jesuits ran a university – *Universitas Tyrnaviensis* – which was the leading centre of learning in the then Kingdom of Hungary. Szent-Ivany, apart from holding some principal academic positions, such as rector, dean and chancellor, was a professor of this university. The university had its own printing office – *Typi Academici Tyrnaviae* – of which Szent-Ivany was the prefect for many years. Martinus started his publication activities in 1675 when he compiled his first calendar, *Calendarium Typographiae Tyrnaviensis* – later named simply *Calendarium Tyrnaviense* – which he then published annually until his decease in 1705. In addition to astronomical data, these calendars always contained a scientific dissertation each. Later on, from 1689 onward, these dissertations formed the basis for Szent-Ivany’s nine-volume miscellany *Curiosiora et selectiora variarum scientiarum miscellanea* (referred to as CSVSM in footnotes) which appeared between 1689 and 1709, the last volume being published posthumously.³ In this article, I will refer to this miscellany (*Miscellanea*) repeatedly. Apart from this miscellaneous corpus, Szent-Ivany wrote twenty works of polemical theology in the last five years of his life which gained him international renown due to the plain mathematical method applied in them.

Preliminaries

Szent-Ivany’s historical work is vast. However, right at the beginning it is indispensable to note that when we speak of “historical” in connection with this Tyrnavian Jesuit, we mean something else than a modern reader would probably expect. In spite of the fact that Szent-Ivany collected a huge amount of historical data, we can hardly call him a historian in the modern sense of the word. Namely, the only works that provide a continuous narration of events are his short treatise on the Hungarian crown (*Sacrae coronae Hungariae notitia horographica, politica, historica*)⁴ and a historical-political dissertation on the Roman Empire.⁵ Another Szent-Ivany’s study that bears the attribute “historica” in its title is his *Dissertatio historica de barbibus et capillis* (A historical dissertation on beards and hair).⁶ All the other “historical” works of his are, almost exclusively,

3 A Slovak-language analysis of CSVSM, the only one existing to date, is to be found in JURÓVSKÝ. *Filozofia Martina Szentiványiho*. s. l. 1944.

4 CSVSM, Decas 2, Pars 1. Tyrnaviae 1691, pp. 100-162, especially the historical narration on pp. 100-112. This work, together with *Dissertatio paralipomenonica* (see n. 8), can be considered a forerunner of Matthias Belius’ *Notitia Hungariae novae historico-geographica* (1735 – 1742).

5 CSVSM, Decas 3, Pars 2. Tyrnaviae: Typis Academicis, 1709, pp. 260-287.

6 CSVSM, Decas 3, Pars 3, Tyrnaviae. Typis Academicis, 1702, pp. 196-215.

chronologies, catalogues and historical calendars (*ephemerides*) or, in one single case, a eulogistic composition full of metaphors and allegories.⁷ Thus we can say that Szent-Ivany's identity as a "historian" seems to consist of two extreme positions: he either provides us with raw historical data that need yet to be amalgamated by means of continuous narration, or else, in a single case, he gives us a highly allegorical piece of writing that, rather than a history, would qualify as a poetic composition. It is hard to tell to what extent he used primary historical sources. However, in the preface to his *Dissertatio paralipomenonica* (1699)⁸ he wrote that he decided to publish "these catalogues", even if they were not yet complete and "integrated", because he wished to instigate the potential readers' interest in archival sources. He thus actually exhorted his readers to send him archival material or, at least, information therefrom.

The key element of Szent-Ivany's Miscellanea is his very short method of teaching and learning all human sciences (*Brevissima methodus tradendi et assequendi quascunque humanas scientias*) which he included in his dissertation on sciences in general (*Dissertatio de scientiis in genere*).⁹ I think we can regard it as "the theory" behind all his scholarly production. This method consists of six epistemological tools – which he denotes as sources (*fontes*) – 1/ observation, 2/ axioms, 3/ analogy, 4/ analysis and synthesis, 5/ the Kircher-Lullian art, and 6/ combinatorics, and it is inspired by three Jesuit scientists – Sebastian Izquierdo (*Pharus scientiarum*, 1659), Athanasius Kircher (*Ars magna sciendi*, 1669), and Casparus Knittel (*Via regia ad omnes scientias et artes*, 1682). It is now unnecessary to analyse the whole; it will suffice to take a look at the first fons which is observation. Izquierdo, whom Szent-Ivany followed, distinguished three types of observation – *experimentalis*, *idealistic*, and *doctrinalis* – and for him, like for Szent-Ivany, it was the first and preparatory step on the way to knowledge (*scientia*).¹⁰

The aim of observation is to collect the building blocks out of which the edifice of a certain science is constructed. In Izquierdo, the notion of observation covers a very wide range of intellectual activities; so, for instance, doctrinal observation includes such a trivial operation as is excerption of information from books. I think this concept of observation is also applicable to Szent-Ivany's

7 Florus regum Hungariae. In CSVSM, Decas 3, Pars 3, Tyrnaviae 1702, pp. 149-174.

8 This dissertation was published separately as *Dissertatio paralipomenonica rerum Hungariae memorabilium* in Tyrnavia in 1699, and also included in CSVSM, Decas 3, Pars 1. Tyrnaviae: Typis Academicis, 1702, pp. 1-257. The mentioned preface is only found in the separate edition of 1699.

9 CSVSM, Decas 3, Pars 2. Tyrnaviae 1709, pp. 1-47; his very short method is described on pp. 22-26.

10 IZQUIERDO, Sebastián. *Pharus scientiarum*, Pars 2. Lugduni 1659, pp. 291-297.

chronologies, catalogues, and historical calendars: they can be viewed as thesauri of basic data, as a preparatory step towards history.

This article does not aim at a detailed analysis of all different forms of history in Szent-Ivany's thought; rather, its purpose is to explore the position of history within his polymathic system. My goal is thus rather simple: I want to show what history meant for a late seventeenth-century Central European polymath. In so doing, I use the notions of "history" and "historical" in two different meanings: they can either refer to what we now commonly denote as history – that is, a description of past events – or they can be employed in a broader early modern meaning (as explained below).

History: sacred and prophane

One very interesting component of the *Miscellanea* are historical calendars which Szent-Ivany denotes as *ephemerides*. However, not all of his *ephemerides* are historical; in fact, the majority of them are not. Those that are contain lists of events arranged according to the months and days of the calendar year: each event is assigned to a certain date of the year irrespective of the year in which it actually happened. There are historical *ephemerides* of diverse content: so, *ephemerides Hungaricae*¹¹ display events from the history of the Hungarian Kingdom, *ephemerides Christiano-Turciae seu Machometanae*¹² contain events connected with Christian-Muslim relations, *ephemerides fatales*¹³ show the dates on which some famous men throughout history deceased, etc. Among these stand out *ephemerides Biblicae*¹⁴ in which we can read that, for example, St Andrew the Apostle started following Christ on the 3rd of January. Also intriguing are his *ephemerides Marianae*¹⁵ which contain an admirable blend of "historical" information: there are victories obtained by the help of the Virgin Mary, there are Marian miracles and apparitions, there are dates on which Marian shrines were established, but we can also learn that, for example, the wedding of St Joseph and Mary was celebrated on the 22nd of December. These *ephemerides* show that, in Szent-Ivany's historical thought, the divine and supernatural was indissolubly intertwined with the natural: Szent-Ivany viewed supernatural interventions as a normal part of human history. Or, to say it in other words, for him human history could not be separated from divine action. It is for this reason that, if we are to authentically understand his historical thought, we also need to take

11 CSVSM, Decas 2, Pars 2. Tyrnaviae 1696, pp. 192-234.

12 Ibidem, pp. 151-191.

13 Ibidem, pp. 62-84.

14 CSVSM, Decas 1, Pars 2. Tyrnaviae 1689, pp. 3-15.

15 Ibidem, pp. 15-27.

into account his eschatological ideas. Just like his contemporaries, Szent-Ivany believed that human history would last for six thousand years and that its end would come very soon.

Another “supernatural” facet of Szent-Ivany’s conception of history is his counting on prophecies. In his cosmological dissertation (*Dissertatio cosmographica seu de mundi systemate*),¹⁶ when discussing the question of the world’s duration, he did not hesitate to adduce the so-called prophecy of St. Malachy¹⁷ in order to support his opinion on the date of the world’s creation. The prophecy of St. Malachy, Archbishop of Armagh, is a list of popes from the twelfth century until the end of times in which each pope is represented by a short allegorical description. This “prophetic” trait connects Szent-Ivany’s historical thought with that of his contemporary Ferenc Főris Otrókoci (1648–1718) who, after his conversion to Catholicism, transferred the Reformed concept of prophetic theology into Roman Catholic environment.

History as a department of science

When speaking of Szent-Ivany’s *Miscellanea*, it will be very beneficial to take into account the work of his younger colleague at Tyrnavia, Franciscus Wagner SJ (1675–1748) and his *Dissertatio philologica de vera eruditione* (A philological dissertation on true erudition, 1701).¹⁸ Wagner was a teacher of rhetoric when he wrote his *Dissertatio* in which he critically assessed the contemporary state of learning, reviewing all academic disciplines from poetry to theology. Of particular interest to us is the passage where Wagner deplors neglect of history in schools. For him, this neglect was absolutely incomprehensible, given the qualities of history as a most useful and amusing subject:

*“I say this: no other subject provides its students with a more unclouded pleasure. Other disciplines show their thorns from afar, advertising the labor connected with them before their gates. But this one is so easy that it is a wonder we are so crazy as to not want to indulge ourselves in pleasure. [In history,] there is so little labor and such honesty that I doubt whether those ignorant of it are human beings at all.”*¹⁹

16 CSVSM, Decas 1, Pars 1. Tyrnaviae 1689, pp. 1-37.

17 Ibidem, pp. 13-16.

18 WAGNER. *Dissertatio philologica de vera eruditione*. Tyrnaviae 1701. This first edition is anonymous. However, the second edition titled *Crito seu de comparanda vera eruditione dialogus* (Augustae Vindelicorum 1720) displays the author’s name on its title page.

19 WAGNER, *Dissertatio philologica*, p. 50: “*Id dico: non aliud studium liquidiore voluptate sui cultores pascit. Caeterae artes spinas suas eminus ostentant, laboremque prae foribus: haec tam facilis, ut mirum sit, tam vaecordes nos esse, ut et deliciari taedeat.*” Translations of Latin quotes are mine.

Later in his life, Wagner became a prominent pedagogue of the Austrian province of the Society of Jesus who exerted great effort in writing textbooks of rhetoric, stylistics and history, and even proposed his own plan of the gymnasial curriculum. When he published his debut *Dissertatio* in 1701, Szent-Ivany was the prefect of the university printing press in Tyrnavia. So, we can suppose he knew Wagner's text and approved of it. In fact, Wagner's dissertation on true erudition sheds interesting light on Szent-Ivany's *Miscellanea*: Wagner lamented over neglect of history at the same time that Szent-Ivany compiled his voluminous chronologies. Thus, we may presume that, by putting together his grand oeuvre, Szent-Ivany, among other things, intended to compensate for what was missing in the then curriculum. In his *Dissertatio de scientiis in genere* (A dissertation on sciences in general), Szent-Ivany reviews the difficulties one encounters in persuing knowledge:

*“The fourth difficulty arises from the lack of either books or time or opportunities. For occasionally there are some who have an extraordinary capacity for all, or at least for several, disciplines, but they are destitute of a sufficient number of books and authors, nor do they have access to libraries well equipped with books which would help them realize their intention to achieve refinement and perfection in their further studies. Then there are others who are, or at least can be, provided with a large stock of books of the best authors, but they are short of time since their status or office imposes on them manifold occupations which hold them back from study. And, lastly, there are those who have an extraordinary passion for reading books and, in fact, do indulge in so doing, but since they lack basic education in the sciences they read everything cursorily without any profit and without an intent to acquire solid erudition. Hence they must content themselves with mere dwelling on the surface of the sciences. And this has been the motive for publishing my *Curiosiora et selectiora variarum scientiarum miscellanea* – namely, to be of assistance to persons placed in such situations ... so they can have at least a compendium or a summary providing them with some information on the main issues contained and dealt with in individual departments of science.”²⁰*

20 CSVSM, Decas 3, Pars 2. Tyrnaviae 1709, p. 7: *“Quarta difficultas est defectus librorum, temporis, et occasionum. Sunt siquidem quandoque, qui eximiam habent ad omnes disciplinas, aut saltem ad aliquas earum capacitatem: sed carent librorum et authorum copia, nec habent accessum ad locupletissimas libris bibliothecas, ex quibus possent se juvare, ad intentionum suarum consecutionem, et doctrinae ulterioris subtilitatem, ac consummationem pervenire. Sunt item alij, quibus suppetit, aut saltem suppetere posset librorum, ac selectissimorum scriptorum abundantia; sed tempus propter multas, ratione sui status, aut officij disparatas a studijs occupationes, iisdem deest. Sunt item alij, qui singularem affectum habent*

As is evident from the above passage, Szent-Ivany conceived of his miscellanies mainly as an aid for autodidacts. They were meant to provide some fundamental information in different “departments of science”. Doubtlessly, history was one of these departments. Therefore, it must be credited to Szent-Ivany’s merit that he treated history as a department of “*scientia*”.

History and cosmology: introducing the historical aspect into the notion of the world

Szent-Ivany’s inclination to historical thinking transpired remarkably already in his first dissertation devoted to cosmography.²¹ In defining the notion of the world – *mundus*, he adopted the classical Pseudo-Aristotelian definition which says that the world, or the cosmos, is the system of heaven and earth together with all the things that exist within them. However, Szent-Ivany introduced two delicate modifications into this definition by stating that the world is a *machina* – he substituted this word for *systema* – of heaven and earth together with all the creations that exist, existed and will exist within them.²² Thus he unfolded the temporal aspect of the gnomic present tense of the verb “exist” in order to explicitly include the temporal – that is, the historical – dimension into his definition. The notion *machina* in his definition need not be interpreted in the mechanical sense; rather, I would suggest that, given his theological background, he used this expression in its original Greek meaning, which is “work” and “something that has been created”. In this connection, it is interesting to note that Szent-Ivany omitted in his cosmography the second classical scholastic definition of “*mundus*” which says that the world is the order of all the things preserved by God. I am convinced Szent-Ivany did so on purpose because, in several places of his *Miscellanea*, he explicitly refused to explain physical phenomena by relating them to God’s action in the world. This, in his view, would be unscientific as science consists in explaining phenomena by their physical causes. So, to sum up, the world, for him, was God’s creation – he uses the original, ancient Greek

ad librorum lectionem, eidemque se serio impendunt: sed fundamentis ipsarum scientiarum carent, adeoque perfunctorie et raptim plurima legunt, at sine fructu, sine fine solidae doctrinae acquirendae intento, solaque superficie scientiarum coguntur manere esse contenti. Atqui hic fuit nostrae intentionis scopus in edendis selectioribus hisce, et curiosioribus variarum scientiarum miscellaneis, ut taliter constitutis succurrere ... possemus. Ut [ei] . . . saltem aliquod compendium, et summarium eorundem habeant, et notitiam aliquam rerum praecipuarum, quae in scientijs singulis pertractantur, atque continentur.”

21 *Dissertatio cosmographica seu de mundi systemate* is the opening text of CSVSM.

22 CSVSM, Decas 1, Pars 1. Tyrnaviae 1689, p. 1: “*Nomine mundi a philosophis intelligitur, tota haec coeli, et terrae machina, una cum creaturis universis, quae intra coelum et terram sunt, fuerunt, et erunt.*”

meaning of the word *machina* – evolving through time following its God-given laws and human free will. It is important to remark that the cosmographical dissertation represents a kind of general introduction to all the subsequent dissertations of Szent-Ivany's nine-volume miscellany which focus on particular aspects of the created world, such as celestial bodies, animals, plants, minerals, etc. Thus the historical dimension is implicitly present in all his dissertations.

History as chronology

It is actually chronology that is to be regarded as the most scientific part of history. This proposition becomes obvious in light of two contexts. The first is the context of Szent-Ivany's writing and thinking in general: his style is always very plain, even to such an extent that it seems as if he purposefully wanted to avoid all rhetorical embellishment. This is true of all of his writings, both those included in the *Miscellanea* and those of polemical theology. In this context, Szent-Ivany's chronologies appear to be "pure" history destitute of the cement of rhetoric. The other context is historiographical: Tyrnavian Jesuit Franciscus Borgia Kéry (1702–1768), who wrote his history of Byzantium²³ based on the Venetian edition of Byzantine historians approximately half a century after the publication of Szent-Ivany's chronological synopses, complained that many times he had to laboriously determine the sequence of events on his own since he did not have at his disposal some seminal byzantological works by Ph. Labbé and C. Du Cange.²⁴ Thus we can see that chronology represented a crucial problem for a historian even as late as in the mid-eighteenth century. In these contexts, I think it is not inappropriate to regard Szent-Ivany's chronological synopses as the scientific base for writing history, as the building blocks out of which historical narration is to be created with the help of rhetoric.

The importance Szent-Ivany attributed to chronology cannot be overestimated. Apart from being the author of twenty chronological synopses (*synopses chronologicae*), he compiled a dissertation on chronology proper (*Dissertatio chronologica*)²⁵ which makes him a pioneer of this auxiliary discipline of history in the Kingdom of Hungary. He wrote:

“There are two kinds of chronology. One of them is mathematical or astronomical which deals with and measures time as the measure of duration derived from the motion of celestial bodies. The other one is historical and

23 KÉRY. *Epitomae historiae Byzantinae*, Tomuli I–VIII. Tyrnaviae 1738–1742.

24 Cf. *Praefatio ad lectorem* in the second, two-volume edition of Kéry's *Historiae Byzantinae Epitome*, Tyrnaviae 1743.

25 CSVSM, Decas 1, Pars 1. Tyrnaviae 1689, pp. 419–441.

it pays attention to the times of historical events, assigning each of them to the time at which it occurred."²⁶

History as (joyful) collecting of data

So far, we have employed the notion "historical" in its present-day meaning only. However, in order to understand Szent-Ivany's way of thinking we must perceive it in its *early modern* meaning which was considerably broader. According to his own words, Szent-Ivany placed the emphasis of his miscellany on those aspects of knowledge that were absent in the philosophical curriculum of his university. Thus, for instance, he expressed admiration for the fact that in schools no attention was paid to historical physics, despite the fact that *physica historica* was in his opinion much more entertaining than *physica scholastica*.²⁷ Historical physics, as opposed to scholastic physics, occupied itself with particular, concrete phenomena of the physical world, exploring their individual causes. Historical physics was inquisitive, asking "why", it was "*curiosa*". In it, no detail should be regarded as uninteresting.

To be able to assess the importance of history for Szent-Ivany's concept of knowledge, we need to look at the structure of his miscellany *Curiosiora et selectiora variarum scientiarum miscellanea*. This work is composed of several types of texts: it contains dissertations, observations, calendars, catalogues and chronological synopses. Now, the last type of text – chronological synopsis – takes up a considerable part of the content of his miscellany. This means that a considerable part of its content is taken up by sheer enumeration of historical facts arranged in chronological order. This in itself gives eloquent evidence of the fact that for him the knowledge of the human past was a very significant part of "*scientiae*". This circumstance stands out even more conspicuously when interpreted in the context of the then school curricula in the Austrian Province of the Society of Jesus where the university of Trnava belonged. In 1701 – that is, at the time when the last volumes of Szent-Ivany's miscellany were published – Szent-Ivany's younger colleague and co-Jesuit Franz Wagner penned a dialogue in which he critically evaluated the state of education and learning in his day. Wagner complained about neglect of history which for him was absolutely incomprehensible. He extolled history as a most amusing subject and asserted

26 Ibidem, p. 419: "*Est autem duplex chronologia. Alia mathematica seu astronomica, quae tempus ut mensuram durationum, a motibus coelestibus petitam considerat, et metitur ... Altera historica, quae rerum gestarum tempora observat, et res quascunque suis, quibus patratae sunt temporibus, alligat.*"

27 CSVSM, Decas 3, Pars 2. Tyrnaviae 1709, p. 94.

that without knowledge of history no one can call himself a truly educated person.²⁸ It should be noted in this regard that it was only three decades later that chairs of history were established at Central European Jesuit universities.

One aspect of Szent-Ivany's understanding of history should be emphasized – namely, his special liking for heaping up of data. This is a common denominator between his historical physics and his chronological synopses. In his physics, just like in his chronologies, he accumulated a great number of concrete particularities. This liking for detail and the concrete is an inseparable feature of his conception of history. Also inseparable from his notion of history is the pure joy of knowing. For Szent-Ivany, just like for the above mentioned Wagner, knowing for its own sake was a highly enjoyable activity, which in itself was capable of making one blessed on earth. In the dedication to the first volume of his *Miscellanea* (1689), Szent-Ivany wrote in a Platonic vein: “*unam hanc in terris esse beatitudinem scire*” (there is one beatitude on earth—namely, to know). I believe we should perceive this understanding of history as something that stands out in contrast to the abstract and boring knowledge of scholasticism. History, as opposed to scholasticism, conveys one the true joy of exploring the world one has at his fingertips. History is a turn to and a fascination with the concrete data of everyday reality.

History as constant improvement

But here we should beware of oversimplification. Szent-Ivany was not a Renaissance man who showed disrespect and disdain for all things scholastic. His perception of human history was not one that viewed the Middle Ages as a gloomy period between antiquity and the modern age. Rather, he saw human history as a constant improvement, as a tendency toward perfection. In this respect, three of his dissertations are very instructive: first, the dissertation on things that were in the past but are not anymore in the present;²⁹ second, the dissertation on things that were not in the past but do exist in the present;³⁰ and third, the dissertation on things of false existence – that is, on things that people erroneously take for existent.³¹ This triad of dissertations was inspired by a similar treatise written by sixteenth-century lawyer and humanist Guido Pancirolli (1523–1599) in which this Italian Renaissance scholar compared the inventions of antiquity with those of the modern age.³² Pancirolli was able to

28 See above notes 18 and 19.

29 *De rerum memorabilium orbis terrestris desitione ac deperditione*. In CSVSM, Decas 2, Pars 1. Tyrnaviae 1691, pp. 265-300.

30 *De rerum novarum inventione*. Ibidem, pp. 242-264.

31 *De variarum rerum dubia aut ficta existentia*. Ibidem, pp. 301-344.

32 PANCIROLLI. *Rerum memorabilium sive deperditarum pars prior. Nova reperta sive rerum*

provide a list of ancient inventions that was about twice as long as the list of the inventions of the modern era, which led him to the conclusion that the ancients were more advanced than were the moderns. Now, Szent-Ivany, writing a century later, reversed this ratio: his list of modern inventions is much longer than his list of ancient inventions. Interestingly, though, he counts among modern inventions such medieval things as the university and scholasticism. Moreover, he enriched the debate with a new dimension by adding the things of false existence. Among these, there were such fabulous creatures as the unicorn or the remora whose existence was considered true by the ancients because, as Szent-Ivany opined, they let themselves be misled by hearsay. Thus, we can see that for Szent-Ivany history was a constant progression towards perfection. He saw his own contemporaneity as more advanced than the previous periods while at the same time he was free from uncritical admiration for classical antiquity.

Szent-Ivany explicitly rejected the ancient model of history as a gradual decline from the golden age down to complete deterioration. He firmly asserted that this idea should be once and for all eradicated from the human mind.³³ In his opinion, the world was created in the state of perfection, and human history and civilization, too, tend toward perfection. As a theologian he was convinced that all things would attain their fulfillment after the last judgement on doomsday.

History and eschatology

Important for the understanding of Szent-Ivany's idea of history is his conception of eschatology and time. In his works, he adduced at least two definitions of eternity. The first of them says that eternity is duration without end,³⁴ as opposed to time which is duration with an end to it. So, both time and eternity are defined as duration, they are so to speak of the same quality, differing from one another only in quantity. The second definition of eternity adduced by Szent-Ivany is even more interesting: it claims that eternity is an infinite series of times and a number of ages without end.³⁵ It almost seems as if eternity were an infinite extension of

memorabilium recens inventarum et veteribus plane incognitarum liber secundus. Francofurti 1646.

33 CSVSM, Decas 1, Pars 1. Tyrnaviae 1689, p. 30: "*Evellenda proinde est penitus e mentibus hominum opinio illa: Mundum hunc perpetuo defluxu per aetates labi, ac deficere, continueque ruere in deterius.*"

34 SZENT-IVANY. *Ratio status futurae vitae seu dissertatio de statu futurae vitae.* Tyrnaviae 1699, p. 3: "*Aeternitas est duratio, quae nullum finem habet.*" This dissertation is also included in CSVSM, Decas 3, Pars 1. Tyrnaviae 1702.

35 SZENT-IVANY. *Quinquaginta rationes et motiva, cur in tanta varietate Religionum & Confessionum Fidei, in Christianitate moderno tempore vigentium, sola Religio Romano-Catholica, sit eligenda, & omnibus alijs praeferenda.* Tyrnaviae 1702, p. 11: "*Aeternitas est, cujus finis nullus, cujus mensura semper, est series infinita temporum, est numerus saeculorum sine*

time. Interestingly, this is in accordance with his cosmological views because, in his opinion, the new heavens and earth after doomsday will not be a new creation. The whole cosmos will be transformed, not substantially, but only as regards its accidents. All its accidents will become more perfect. This is also true of the movement of celestial bodies. It will not cease after the last judgement. This Szent-Ivany's assertion is in clear contradiction to what was held by Thomas Aquinas and scholasticism. According to scholastics, the cosmos will come to a halt at the end of times. Now, if Szent-Ivany claims that celestial bodies will not stop moving in eternity, it means that time, too, will continue to exist, albeit in another, more perfect form. This, in turn, must inevitably have an implication for the understanding of history. We can clearly see the connection which, in Szent-Ivany, is implied between physical and historical facts. Just like every detail of the physical world is worth attention and study because the world will not be finally destroyed and replaced by something different and incomparably better (but it will last forever), so, too, every detail of human history is likewise worth attention because movement, and implicitly time, will not be destroyed in eternity. Just like knowledge of the physical world is a foretaste of the world to come in eternity, so is knowledge of history – we may hypothesize – a foretaste of eternal happening, be it in heaven or in hell.

Szent-Ivany's views on eschatology are comprised in his work titled *Ratio status futurae vitae seu dissertatio de statu futurae vitae* (The reason of state of the future life or a dissertation on the state of the future life) which was published separately in 1699³⁶ and also included in the seventh part of his *Miscellanea* (Decas 3, Pars 1, 1702). The name of this dissertation is an allusion to the notion of *reason of state* which means the striving for security and self-assertion of the state by any means. By inserting this notion into the title of his dissertation on the future life, Szent-Ivany explicitly opposed the Macchiavelian political ideas of his age, as if he wanted to emphasize the priority of eschatological existence over history. Interestingly, Szent-Ivany describes the eschatological existence in a very corporeal, unspiritual language. Everything in the future world can be measured and counted, everything is, so to speak, touchable. For him – I do not hesitate to affirm – the eschatological reality is more real than the earthly one. The eschatological existence of people will consist in the beatific vision of God which, besides the universe and all its parts, will encompass all history from the beginning of the world, all things past, present, and future. It is interesting to note that, just like in his cosmology (see above), Szent-Ivany included history also in his eschatology.

fine.”

36 It is interesting to note that on the title page of *Ratio status futurae vitae* from 1699 we can already read that it is a part of *Miscellanea*, although the respective volume of *Miscellanea* came out no sooner than three years thereafter.

History as argument

In the early modern period, history became a powerful weapon both in the hands of Catholics and in those of Protestants. History was confessionalised and confessions sought historical arguments in support of their antiquity – it will suffice to remind ourselves of two fundamental historical works of the period: *Centuriae Magdeburgenses* initiated by M. Flacius (1520–1575) on the one hand and *Annales ecclesiastici* compiled by C. Baronius (1538–1607) on the other. In the confessional strife, antiquity counted as one of the signs of the true Church. Martinus Szent-Ivany was the author of twenty works of polemical theology in some of which history appears in two forms: it either consists in enumeration of facts concerning the ancient Church – its doctrine, rite, and discipline – or it provides a continuous narration of past events. In both cases, historical facts are used as arguments that bring evidence in support of the Catholic stand against Non-Catholics.

Two of Szent-Ivany's polemical treatises – *Magnum chaos*³⁷ and *Doctrina fidei catholicae*³⁸ – are based on the so-called consensus of the first five centuries (*consensus quinquesecularis*) according to which the doctrine of the Apostles, the Church Fathers and the ecumenical councils until 500 AD must be regarded as true. Consequently, that church whose teaching is shown to be in accordance with the doctrine of the first five centuries is the true church. Another polemical work titled *Forum scrutarium antiquarum haeresum* (The second-hand market of the ancient errors)³⁹ argues, in the opposite direction, that the Protestant teaching is like a beggar's cloak sewn together out of different pieces of cloth representing different ancient heresies. Still another polemic – *Lutheranicum nunquam et nusquam* (The Lutheran never and nowhere)⁴⁰ – builds upon the famous question of the Counter-Reformation – namely, where were the Lutherans before Luther? – a question about which a certain Slovak Lutheran wrote that the Catholics took more pleasure in it than a monkey did in a nut.⁴¹

37 *Magnum chaos inter Confessionem Augustanam, & Confessionem Augustinianam. Sive Discrimen ac Disconvenientia, in Doctrina Fidei Confessionis Augustanae, a Sancti Augustini Doctrina.* Tyrnaviae 1704.

38 *Doctrina Fidei Christianae, Primorum quinque Saeculorum, Seu Examen, Quenam ex tot & tam varijs Religionibus modernis sit vera Christi Ecclesia.* Tyrnaviae 1708.

39 *Forum scrutarium antiquarum haeresum, ex quibus nostri temporis Haereses, inconcinne, & distortissime consarcinatae sunt.* Tyrnaviae 1707.

40 *Lutheranicum nunquam, et nusquam. Seu Intricatissima & insolubilis quaestio. An? & Ubi? ac quando? Extiterit Lutherana Ecclesia, Ante Martinum Lutherum, hoc est, ante Annum Christi 1517.* Tyrnaviae 1702.

41 KRMAN. *Constantia in orthodoxo consensu Ecclesiarum Hungarico-Lutheranarum cum Wittenbergensi aliisque Γρηγοῖως Lutheranis a prima reformatione* (1702), p. 11, ms. no. Rkp. dep. 1, ms. is kept in the "Lyceálna knižnica" of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. Krman quotes Zacharias Lani.

In his *Dissertatio chronologico-polemica de ortu, progressu, ac diminutione schismatis Graeci* (A chronological-polemical dissertation on the origin, progress, and diminution of the Greek schism),⁴² Szent-Ivany included a chapter on the historical evolution of the split between the Western and Eastern Churches. The aim of this narration was to prove that it was Photios, the patriarch of Constantinople, who initiated the schism without good reason and that in the past there had always been wise representatives of the Eastern Church who preserved unity with the Latin West. In this treatise Szent-Ivany wanted to demonstrate that the East did not have sufficient reasons for separating itself from the West.

Szent-Ivany employed history as argument also in his cosmological dissertation when arguing against the ancient model of historical decline (see above). He adduced historical facts from the past to show that the sinister things of his own age – for example, military conflicts, pestilence, and taxes – were not worse than they had once used to be. The source of Szent-Ivany's historical argumentation was Laurentius Beyerlinck's *Magnum theatrum humanae vitae* (1655).

Conclusion

History in its present-day sense – which Szent-Ivany preferred to call chronology – was a substantial and inseparable part of his notion of “scientiae”. His “scientiae” encompassed the whole spatio-temporal reality of the world. An objective fact in the realm of human history was considered by him no less scientific than an objective fact in the realm of physics. In his *Curiosiora et selectiora variarum scientiarum miscellanea*, he passionately collected a great number of these facts, both physical and historical, giving no preference to either these or those. Both were objects of knowledge as a foretaste of the blessed vision in the world to come. Both were equally beatifying for the curious and inquisitive mind. Both were equally important for building a truly humane civilization. It should be stressed in the end that, for Szent-Ivany, history was equivalent to collecting concrete data, regardless of whether these data concerned past events or the physical world around us. It was a fascination with concrete particularities, and a departure from abstract, non-concrete universalities and subtleties of scholasticism. Szent-Ivany was a forerunner of the eighteenth-century emancipation of history as an academic discipline (*scientia*) in its own right. Hopefully, this examination of the notion of history in the thought of Martinus Szent-Ivany, a Central European polymath of the Baroque era, can throw more light on the period concept of history in general.

42 *Dissertatio chronologico-polemica, De Ortu, Progressu, ac Diminutione Schismatis Graeci, atque Graeci Ritus Ecclesiae, cum Romana Ecclesia, tot Votis exoptata Reunione*. Tyrnaviae 1703.

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