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The Renaissance Plato-Aristotle Controversy and the Court of Matthias Rex

At least since József Huszti's celebrated article of 1930 on the "Tendenze platonizzanti alla corte di Mattia Corvino" scholars have consistently assumed a special benevolence towards Plato and Platonism at the Hungarian court (Huszti 1930; Klaniczay 1994, 168-171; Rees 2001). And no wonder. After all, in 1479 King Matthias invited the founder of Florentine Platonism, Marsilio Ficino, to transfer to the royal court in Buda (See: Gentile, 1994: 96-97).¹ Ficino dedicated a series of works to King Matthias, including Bks. III-IV of his *Epistolae*, his translation of Synesius' *De Somniis*, an *Exhortatio ad bellum* against the Turks, and the *De vita coelitus comparanda*, which became Bk. III of his *De Vita*.² He also dedicated his *De Amore* to Janus Pannonius (Gentile, 1994: 91).³ Moreover, associates of Ficino did take up residence in Buda, most notably Francesco Bandini, the first organizer of banquets in Florence on the anniversary of Plato's birthday (Gentile, 1994: 92-94);⁴ and we have not only a rich dossier of letters of Ficino addressed to Bandini and others dealing with his relationship with Hungary (Ábel-Hegedűs, 1903: 271-290, collects this material), but also the evidence of a substantial corpus of writings of

¹ Ficino also rejected an invitation to Buda in 1487 from Miklós Báthory, Bishop of Vács (ibid., 99). Earlier, in 1471, John Argyropoulos had agreed to leave Florence and go to Buda, but instead went to Rome upon getting the news that year that his former student Francesco della Rovere had been elected pope as Sixtus IV (ibid., 97).

² See Gentile 1994, 97 for the *Exhortatio* (1480), 100-101 for Synesius' *De Somnis* (1488-1489), and 105-106 for the *De Vita* (1489).

³ The dedication letter is dated 5 August 1469. Ficino dedicated this work to different people in different manuscripts; for the dedication to Janus see Kristeller 1937, I, 1-1i; Kristeller 1987, 110; Gentile 1992: 745. Janus expressed his admiration for Ficino in an epigram; see Kristeller 1937, II, 268-279; and Kristeller 1987, 97, 177, 198; Janus Pannonius 1985, 182, no. 238; and Janus Pannonius, 2006, 251, no. 434.

⁴ Bandini was in Buda by at least March 1477. Bandini, a priest, functioned as an intellectual and diplomat in Hungary (Vasoli, 1963: 709, called him an "agente di Lorenzo dei Medici"). On him see Kristeller 1956 and Feuer-Tóth, 1990: 56-66. Italian merchants were also quite active; see the list of Italian merchants in the reign of Matthias Corvinus created by Jolán Balogh in *Schallaburg*, 1982: 188-189.

Ficino once held by the royal library in Buda (See Csapodi, 1973: 217-221).⁵ On the testimony of Vespasiano da Bisticci we further know that one of the great lights of the Hungarian Renaissance, Janus Pannonius, visited with Ficino, and subsequently was so taken by the Greek text of Plotinus that he became entranced for three hours reading it and announced that his pursuits would henceforth be exclusively the translating of Plotinus and attending to the care of his diocese (Bisticci, 1970-1976: I, 75; Gentile, 1994: 89-91).

One can also note that the greatest Platonist in Italy before Ficino, the Greek Cardinal Bessarion, had associations with Hungary. Bessarion's *In Calumniatorem Platonis* was the most important work of Platonism in Italy before Ficino began publishing, and one of Bessarion's most important collaborators in the writing of this work was the Dominican theologian Giovanni Gatti (See Monfasani, 2008b; Monfasani, 1997), who spent a year in Hungary as a member of Archbishop John Vitéz's household in Esztergom.⁶ Another Dominican, Pietro Ransano, the historian of Hungary, also had special access to Bessarion's household and produced an amazingly accurate biography of the Cardinal (See Monfasani, 1986: 100-103.). After about five years in Bessarion's household the famous astronomer Johann Müller (Ioannes Regiomontanus) accepted the invitation of John Vitéz between 1465 and 1467 to teach at the University of Bratislava, from where he soon joined the circle of scholars about King Corvinus (Zinner, 1968: 79-162). Finally, historians of the Bibliotheca Corviniana claim that Matthias owned three works of Bessarion, including the *In Calumniatorem Platonis* and a manuscript that actually came from Bessarion's library, the present-day Clmae 438 of the Széchényi National Library (Csapodi, 1973: 160-161, nos. 114-116; for Clmae 438 see also Csapodi-Csapodi-Gárdonyi, 1969: 49, no. 44.).

Yet there is reason to believe that at best these facts present only half the story, and that at worst they give an exaggerated picture of the Platonism of the Hungarian court. Indeed, as we shall see shortly, in the early sixteenth century Hungary was viewed by knowledgeable people in Paris as the great refuge of anti-Platonism. But before turning to this part of the story, let us revisit the data on Platonism in Hungary that we have just rehearsed.

⁵ Csapodi counts 18 Ficino manuscripts (nos. 257-265, 356, 506, 519-520, 542, 544, 550, 618, 674).

⁶ For scholars about Vitéz see Klaniczay, 1988, who stresses humanist currents and does not mention Gatti. See also Monfasani, 1997: 1320-1321.

First of all, we have no evidence that King Matthias himself or his de facto minister of culture, John Vitéz, had any devotion to Platonism.⁷ True, if we trust Vespasiano da Bisticci, Vitéz's brilliant nephew Janus Pannonius was at one moment enthralled by Plotinus.⁸ It is also true that one can find some Orphic and Pythagorean themes in his poems.⁹ but Janus never wrote anything that showed a special interest in Platonism apart from the elegy *Ad animam suam* with its clear assumption of the transmigration of souls.¹⁰ The interest of the Hungarian court in Ficino is explainable by reasons other than a devotion to Platonism. By the late 1470s Ficino had become a celebrity. The Hungarian court was gathering Italian intellectual luminaries to turn itself into the new Athens.¹¹ With Francesco Bandini actively promoting his good friend Ficino and facilitating the transmission of his writings to Hungary,¹² nothing would have been more natural than for King Matthias to invite Ficino.¹³ If Ficino had traveled to Hungary, he would have certainly sought to create a circle of *complatonicis* about him and today we might be speaking of the Platonic Academy of Buda (See Monfasani, 2009). But the fact is that he never went to Hungary.

Second, the relationship of Cardinal Bessarion with Hungary is more ambivalent than one might suppose. Archbishop Vitéz called Giovanni Gatti to Hungary as a scholastic theologian, not as a Platonist, not did Gatti function in

⁷ In the case of Vitéz, the only formal education we are sure about is the time he spent in the Arts Faculty in Vienna in the 1430s; see Csapodi-Gárdonyi, 1984: 16; and Ritoók-Szalay, 1996: 158-164. Vitéz's *oeuvre* consists of letters and orations connected with his administrative career; see Vitéz, 1980.

⁸ See n. 1 above.

⁹ See Gentile 1994, 90-91, who cites rightly Janus' epigrams *De corporibus mathematicis* and *De monade et dyade, numberis* (Janus Pannonius 1985, 78-81, nos. 40-41; Janus Pannonius 2006, 181, nos. 293-294) as well as his tribute *De Marsilio Ficino* (see n. 4 above)

¹⁰ One could view the poem's metempsychosis as purely a literary conceit, especially in view of the dense astrological references it contains (Pannonius, 1784: 329-331, no. 12). Birnbaum, 1981: 168-169, considers these indications "fragments of thoughts" as "Janus incorporated some of the ideas of Neoplatonism, turning the terminologies into poetical stuff."

¹¹ E.g., John Argyropoulos was famous for teaching Aristotle in Florence when in 1471 he accepted Matthias's invitation to come to Hungary, though he did not go (see n. 2 above). Regiomontanus was a mathematician and astronomer (see n. 12 above). One could hardly consider Platonists other Italian luminaries, such as Marzio Galeotto, Pietro Ransano, Giovanni Gatti, and Bartolomeo Fonzo.

¹² See nn. 5-6 above.

¹³ Not that Ficino lacked for Hungarian critics. See Pajorin, 1999, who argues that the "Ioannes Pannonius" who criticized the paganizing and astrological aspects of Ficino's thought in a famous letter was Janus Vitéz junior (d. 1499), a relative of John Vitéz and Janus Pannonius.

Bessarion's household as a co-Platonist, but rather as an expert on scholastic philosophy, especially on Thomas Aquinas (See Monfasani, 2008b). Pietro Ransano was an historian, not a philosopher; and his special connection with the Bessarion household seems to have been with Bessarion's client, the humanist Niccolò Perotti, rather than with Bessarion himself.¹⁴ And though Regiomontanus spent four years with King Matthias, all his work for the King was astronomical or astrological.¹⁵ Even when Regiomontanus attacked Bessarion's most bitter enemy, the anti-Platonist George of Trebizond, he did so not on philosophical grounds but on astronomical issues, writing an extensive critique of George's commentary on Ptolemy's *Almagest* in order to defend Theon, the late classical commentator on the *Almagest* (See Zinner, 1964; Zinner, 1968: 156; Monfasani, 1976: 195-196; Monfasani, 1984: 673).

No less importantly we must call into question some beliefs concerning Bessarion's writings in the *Bibliotheca Corviniana*. The assumption that the *Corviniana* once held the 1471 printed edition of Bessarion's collection of Orations against the Turk is simply that, nothing more than a supposition (Csapodi, 1973: 160-161, no. 116), against which we must consider the fact that the editor, Guillaume Fichet, personalized each copy to major recipients through individual miniatures and prefaces, that is to say, he made each such copy a unique and valuable work of art, whose commercial value almost guaranteed that it would be preserved (Meserve, 2003). The argument *ex silentio* works as strongly against the *Corviniana* having possessed this work of Bessarion's as it does for it. Silence, in fact, is an appropriate word for King Matthias's presence in the extant writings of Cardinal Bessarion. Nowhere in these writings does Bessarion mention Matthias, let alone address him, even though Bessarion was passionately devoted to promoting a crusade against the Turks and even though in his speeches and published writings from legation to Germany in 1460-1461 he spoke of Hungary numerous times.¹⁶ He referred to the kings of Burgundy, Bohemia, and Poland, and even mentioned by name Matthias's predecessor as king of Hungary, Ladislav V of Austria, but he studiously avoided any reference to Matthias himself.¹⁷ Given the hostility between

¹⁴ See n. 11 above.

¹⁵ See n. 12 above.

¹⁶ Mohler 1923-1942, III, 376-403, edits six texts, starting with Bessarion's speech at Nuremberg on 2 March 1460. For references to Hungary, see 382.15-16, 33 (I am unsure of what event Bessarion means as having occurred twenty years earlier); 385.43, 388.3-4, 25; 388.27; 389.11, 24; 390.4, 12; 391.35; 393.17, 24, 29; 394.27.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, III, 385.42-386.1 (Ladislav); 386.7 (rex Boemie); 387.16 (Ladislav and rex Boemiae); 390.9 (rex Boemiae), 11-12 (dux Burgundiae), 39 (Romanorum imperator), 41 (rex Boemiae),

Emperor Frederick III and Matthias until the Peace of Wiener Neustadt in 1463,¹⁸ it is understandable that Bessarion spoke of Hungary but not of Matthias in his public statements in Germany in 1460-1461. Yet, Bessarion's continuing silence is significant in view of the fact that in the later 1460s Bessarion's arch-opponent George of Trebizond believed that he could become a member of King Matthias's household, something that would have been inconceivable if Bessarion was in touch with the Hungarian court (See Monfasani, 1976: 194-200). Bessarion's long-standing ties to Matthias's political rival, the Hapsburg Emperor Frederick III, made it impossible for him to cultivate cordial relations with Matthias.¹⁹

The second of the three Bessarion items assigned to the Bibliotheca Corviniana, a corpus of three theological treatises in Clmae 438 of the Széchényi National Library unquestionably belonged to Matthias since Clmae 438 carries Matthias's coat-of-arms.²⁰ Furthermore, Matthias's arms are visibly painted over those of Cardinal Bessarion's. But if Bessarion had sent the manuscript as a gift to Matthias both arms would appear in the codex. This was Bessarion's practice in preparing gift manuscripts. We have numerous examples of such double arms.²¹ Nor is it

42 (dux Burgundiae); 391.30 (rex Poloniae); 392.35 (Caesar); 398.22 (dux Burgundiae); 401.1 (Caesar).

¹⁸ See Kubinyi 2008, 57-58, 64-68; Hoensch 1998, 59-76 Pastor 1891-1953, III, 53, 64-67, 70, 175 (Pope Pius II asks Bessarion to reconcile Matthias Corvinus and Frederick III), 316 (Treaty of Wiener Neustadt).

¹⁹Bessarion resided in Vienna from May 1460 to September 1461, during which time he became the godfather of the future emperor Maximilian Habsburg. Labowsky, 1967: 691, sums up the situation in this way: "[Bessarion] si diede da fare, con vari tentativi, per ristabiire la pace in Germania e per indurre Federico III ad astenersi dalle ostilità in Ungheria. Il cardinale, che era in grande amicizia con l'imperatore, divenne padrino del suo unico figlio ..."

²⁰ Csapodi, 1973: 160, no. 115; Bartoniek 1937; Csapodi and Csapodi-Gárdonyi 1969, 49, no. 44.. For a reproduction see Berkovits, 1964, Color Plate xvi. Labowsky, 1979: 492, is a bit skeptical, but I confirmed *in situ* Bessarion's arms under Matthias's.

²¹ For three examples, see MS Hamilton 76 of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, which contains Bessarion's gift copy to Pietro Foscari of the original Latin version of his *In Calumniatorem Platonis*, with Bessarion's and Foscari's coats of arms (see Monfasani, 2008b); MS Vat. Lat. 1806 of Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, which contains the dedication copy to Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini of Bessarion's translation of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, with Cesarini's and Bessarion's coats of arms (see Nogara, 1912: 278); and MS Marc. Lat. 135 (= 1694) of the Biblioteca Marciana, Venice, which contains the dedication copy to Pope Paul II of some of Bessarion's theological opuscula, with Paul II's and Bessarion's coat of arms (for a reproduction of the relevant folios see Fiaccadori, 1994: 187, nos. 77-78). This convention can also be seen in gifts to Cardinal Bessarion. MS Reg. lat. 1272 of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana is the dedication copy of Mariano Sozzini's *De Sortibus* to Bessarion and contains both Sozzini's and Bessarion's coats of arms (see Monfasani, 2009b,

likely that Matthias would have been so unaware of polite practice as to efface Bessarion's arms if Clmae 438 were a gift to him from Bessarion. Rather, Clmae 438 seems to have been a manuscript Matthias confiscated from someone else (Vitéz?)²² who had received it as a gift from Bessarion and who had not bothered to add his own coat of arms.²³ As such, Clmae 438 entered the Corviniana purely by chance and reflects no interest in, or connection with, Bessarion or Matthias's part.

The third work of Bessarion assigned to the Corviniana is none other than Bessarion's great defense of Platonism, the *In Calumniatorem Platonis* (Csapodi 1973, 160, no. 114). Although no copy can be identified as once having belong to the Corviniana, the attribution is actually quite plausible. But even here the results are not comforting to those who stress the Platonic currents at the Hungarian court. The basis for the ascription to the Corviniana is the subscription Archbishop John Vitéz added to the end of his copy of George of Trebizond's anti-Platonic *Comparatio Philosophorum Platonis et Aristotelis*, which is today MS Vat. Lat. 3382 of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.²⁴ At the end of George's work, Vitéz wrote: "Finivi legendo die 20a Septembris 1470. Contra hunc scripsit dominus Bissarion cardinalis Nicenus, vir eruditissimus, pro Platone, non tantum contra Aristotilem. // Io(annes)," which we can translate as "I finished reading this work on 20 September 1470. Against this work Bissarion, the Lord Cardinal of Nicaea, a most

Appendix 1). Again, MS Marc. Lat. 90 (= 1515) of the Biblioteca Marciana contains Rodericus Sancius de Arevalo's *De Remediis Afflictae Ecclesiae* addressed to Bessarion with both Sancius's and Bessarion's coat of arms (*ibid.*)

²² The scribe of Clmae 438, Leonardus Job, was also the scribe of MS Type 91 of Houghton Library, Harvard University (Pius II, *Epistola ad Mahumetem*), believed to have been produced in Florence about 1470 and once part of Vitéz's library; see Csapodi-Gárdonyi, 1984: 82-83; and Wieck, 1983: 122 and Pl. 122.

²³ Csapodi-Gárdonyi, 1984 does not connect Clmae 438 to Vitéz. It is not likely that Clmae 438 is a refugee from Bessarion's library since Labowsky, 1979 records no manuscript missing from Bessarion's library that corresponds to Clmae 438.

²⁴ See Csapodi-Gárdonyi, 1984: 41, 83, and 142-43, no. 110, and Plate 79; See also *Monumenta Vaticana*, 1980: 40, no. 27 (description by José Ruyschaert); and Monfasani, 2008a: 10. Vitéz wrote similar colophons in other manuscripts, including one six days after he finished Trapezuntius, namely, the Climacus of Clmae 344 (Csapodi-Gárdonyi, 1984: 108-109): "Finivi legendo et signando die 26 Septembris 1470"; cf. also the Tacitus of Lat. 9 of the University Library, Budapest (*ibid.*: 138-139; *Schallaburg*, 1982: 149, no. 21): "Io. Ar. Legi transcurendo 1467, sed mansit inemendatus"; the Tertullian of Lat. 10, *ibid.* (Csapodi-Gárdonyi 1984, 140): "Finivi transcurendo Nitrie die II Iunii 1468"; the Manilius of Vat. Palat. Lat. 1711 (*ibid.*: 119): "Legi et emendavi cum magistoro Galeotto 1469. Io. Ar. Strig"; the Victorinus of Clmae 370 (*ibid.*: 145): "Emendavi quantum fieri potuit et finivi XXVII Septembris MCCCCLXII. Io."; and the Pliny Lat. 141 of the Öster. Nationalbibliothek (*ibid.*: 126-127; *Schallaburg*, 1982: 148, no. 20): "Bude 1464 Maii 23."

learned man, wrote not so much against Aristotle as in defense of Plato. (Signed) John." Since George's work had been available since 1458 (See Monfasani, 1976: 166-168), but Bessarion's refutation first appeared in the summer of 1469 from the Roman press of Pannartz and Sweynheym,²⁵ it is reasonable to suppose that Vitéz was provoked to read George's work in 1470 by the appearance of Bessarion's opus in 1469. Consequently, even while assuming that Vitéz had purchased a copy of Bessarion's work that entered the Corviniana after Matthias confiscated Vitéz's library, we have to concede that the chief effect of Bessarion's work was to provoke Vitéz to want to read George's defense of Aristotle against Plato. This underlying Aristotelianism is confirmed by Vitéz's description of Bessarion's work as not so much an attack upon Aristotle as a defense of Plato, which is a point Bessarion dedicates a whole chapter in the *In Calumniatorem*.²⁶ In other words, of all the things one could say about Bessarion's massive book against George of Trebizond, the only thing Vitéz wished to highlight was that Bessarion did not write against Aristotle. Vitéz may not have felt any hostility towards Plato, but he clearly felt a distinct tenderness towards Aristotle.

We need to accept Vitéz's Aristotelian sympathies as characteristic of Hungarian intellectuals in close contact with Italy. A case in point is the well known Carthusian abbot in Ferrara, Andreas Pannonius.²⁷ One can find in his two treatises *De Virtutibus* references to Plato,²⁸ but from the multiplicity of references and the very structure of his argument, it is clear that Aristotle and Cicero along with Christian authors provided the intellectual substratum for Andreas's moral thought. Similarly, the Hungarian Dominican Nicolaus de Mirabilibus, in his *Disputatio* on the sin of Adam, held in the house of Lorenzo the Magnificent with Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and Angelo Poliziano in the audience, made a courtesy reference to Plato in the dedication to Lorenzo,²⁹ but otherwise conducted his argument completely within a traditional scholastic Aristotelian framework. The same is true of Nicolaus's treatise *De Providentia*,

²⁵ See Mohler, 1923-1942 II, for a critical edition of the original Greek text and the Latin text of 1469. Concerning the Latin text of 1469 see also Monfasani, 1981 and Monfasani, 1983.

²⁶ See Mohler, 1923-1942, II, 83-87, for chapter 2 of Book 2: "Auctoris excusatio, quod Aristotelem impugnare nolit."

²⁷ The best study of Andreas is now Bene 2009.

²⁸ See Fraknói-Ábel, 1886: 40 and 177 (both paraphrase Cicero *De Sen.* 39-41). Bene, 2009, however, sees Andreas moving, while in Ferrara, in a Platonic direction under Scotist influence.

²⁹ *Ibid.*: 353. On Nicholas see the literature gathered by Kostolnyik, 1988: 7-8. Ficino praised Nicholas's performance in the disputation to King Matthias as a Thomist; see Ábel and Hegedűs, 1903: 287 (= Ficino, 1962 I: 902/932).

where Plato nowhere appears (Fraknói-Ábel, 1886: 427-62). We should not forget that many of the contemporary Hungarian intellectuals were scholastic theologians. Not only Nicolaus de Mirabilibus and Andreas Pannonius were university trained theologians, but so too were the Dominican Michael of Hungary, the two Paulists Michael of Pannonia and Gregory Bánffy, and the two Franciscans Oswald de Laska and Pelbart of Temesvár (Kostolnyik, 1988). King Matthias's astrological interests are well known, but it is worth noting that according to one of the humanists at Matthias's court, Lippo Brandolini, Matthias considered Aristotle to be the *princeps philosophorum*.³⁰ That humanists about Matthias, especially Taddeo Ugoletto, helped expand his library is generally known (See Csapodi-Csapodi-Gárdonyi, 1969: 18; Csapodi, 1973: 48-49). It is important to note, however that it is quite possible that in the later 1470s Matthias also sent the Dominican friar Paul of Transylvania to Venice to acquire books for his library (Csapodi-Gárdonyi, 1973: 217). In point of fact, Matthias's library confirms Aristotle's philosophical dominance. If we take Csaba Csapodi's survey of the Corviniana as our base,³¹ including dubious attributions and secondary items for all listed authors, we discover that Aristotle accounted for 20 items, even when counting as a single item the five-volume *Opera Omnia* with Averroes's commentary printed in Venice in 1483-84 (Csapodi, 1973: 136-141). Only God, with 24 complete or partial Bibles (Csapodi, 1973: 184-191), and Cicero, also with 24 items, had a greater presence in Matthias's library (Csapodi, 1973: 398-402 (Biblia); 415-418 (Epistolae, Evangelia). Marsilio Ficino made a good showing with 16 items (Csapodi, 1973: 217-221), but Plato himself could claim only 11 items (Csapodi, 1973: 318-320; 462-463 no. 1031), and was therefore surpassed not only by Thomas Aquinas with 13 items (Csapodi, 1973: 370-373), but also by the great anti-Platonist George of Trebizond with 14 items (Csapodi, 1973: 379-382).³²

³⁰ Ábel, 1890: 19, in Brandolini's *De Humanae Vitae Conditione*. Galeotto Marzio linked Matthias's astrological interests with an interest in Apuleius; see his *De Dictis ac Factis Mathiae Regis*, cap. 10: "Tenebat praeterea astrologiam et in operibus Apulei Platonicum ita detritum ut eius dogma omnino calleret" (ibid.: 223).

³¹ Csapodi 1973, 465, believed he could identify 1065 items in a collection that he estimated held 2,000-2,500 volumes (466). So, by his reckoning, his catalogue captures about half the volumes once in the Corviniana. His catalogue, therefore, is useful in estimating the relative strength of authors in the Corviniana (if one assumes that losses were not skewed in a particular direction), but cannot be assumed to provide absolute figures about authors and texts.

³² For a study of the Trapezuntian manuscripts of Hungarian interest, see now also Ekler 2007.

George of Trebizond's sizeable presence in Matthias's library, especially compared with that of his Platonic opponent, Cardinal Bessarion, is impressive, and, as we shall now see, more significant than one would first suppose. We have long known that George's son-in-law was the Hungarian ambassador George Polycarpus (Kosztolányi). Even before he married George's daughter, Polycarpus probably had a hand, in George's attempt in the late 1460s to enter Matthias's household (See n. 31 above; see also Monfasani, 1984: 85. For his writings see Juhász, 1932). George's commentary on Ptolemy's *Almagest*, the dedication copy of which, with autograph corrections, survives in Stuttgart, was, to be sure, an excellent way of appealing to Matthias's intellectual interests.³³ One can also understand George's rhetorical and grammatical writings making their way into the Corviniana, even if these manuscripts came from the confiscated collections of John Vitéz and Janus Pannonius.³⁴ Indeed, even though in his *Rhetoric* George had mocked Ianus's teacher Guarino of Verona (Monfasani, 1976: 28-32), Janus had high praise for George's eloquence right in the middle of his, Janus's, Panegyric of Guarino himself.³⁵ Moreover, George was also a translator. So it is not surprising that he personally sent to John Vitéz and Janus Pannonius with new prefaces and autograph interventions a manuscript of his translations of Basil the Great's treatise *Adversus Eunomium* and *De Spiritu Sancto*, the present-day codex Lat. 4857 of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna (See Monfasani, 1984: 76, 252-53, 275, 482-85; Csapodi-Gárdonyi, 1984: 87; Gamillscheg-Mersich, 1994: 80-81, no. 42; another codex with the same two translations bearing Matthias's coat-of-arms painted over Vitéz's is Széchényi National Library, Clmae 415, which Csapodi-

³³ Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, MS. Math. fol. 24; see Monfasani, 1984: 52, 85, 286-87, 671-72, 676, 686-87; for MS Lat. 24 of the Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, transcribed in 1467, containing George's translation of the *Almagest* with a horoscope showing the position of the stars as seen from the cathedral of Esztergom, i. e., Vitéz's archepiscopal seat, on 5 June 1467, the day of the inauguration of the University of Pozsony (Vitéz was its first chancellor) see Monfasani, 1984: 75; Csapodi-Csapodi-Gárdonyi, 1969: 69, no. 137; Csapodi, 1973: 338; Csapodi-Gárdonyi, 1984: 130; and Gamillscheg-Mersich, 1994, Plates 18 and 36. Rashdall 1936, II, 297, remarked about the university: "Both the King and the archbishop, who concurred in its foundation, were much given to judicial astrology, and such fame as the university acquired was due to the astrological eminence of its masters."

³⁴ Clmae 281 contains George's *Rhetoricum Libri V*; Clmae 667 his *Compendium Grammaticae*; and Clmae 2485 his *Dialectica*. Peter Ekler of the Széchényi National Library has pointed out to me that the verso of the Hungarian 1000 Forint banknote reproduces the initial "C" in Clmae 281, f. 1r (see now Ekler, 2007: 270; Berkovits, 1964, Color Plate XLV; Csapodi, 1973: 99. Plate IV; *Schallaburg*, 1982, Plate 36; and Kubinyi, 2008, last illustration).

³⁵ See Thomson, 1988: 174-175, lines 632-35. No epigram by Janus on George seems to have survived; see Janus's *Opera* cited in n. 4 above

Gárdonyi, 1984: 88, therefore attributes to Vitéz's collection as well; see Monfasani, 1984 11-12.). George's autograph marginalia are especially interesting in that in these scholia he continued his war against the Platonists, whereas in the prefaces he had remained silent concerning Platonism (Monfasani, 1984: 482-485).

What is surprising, however, is that George seems to have had nothing to do with the Corviniana possessing two manuscripts directly connected to the Plato-Aristotle controversy. The first is codex Lat. 218 of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, which contains what apparently is the dedication copy of George's first salvo in his war against the Platonists, namely, the *Protectio Problematum Aristotelis*, dedicated to King Alfonso the Magnanimous in 1456 (See Monfasani, 1984: 75, 411-412; for a reproduction of f. 1r see Gamillscheg- Mersich, 1994: Plate 7.). This manuscript today carries Matthias Corvinus's coat of arms supposedly painted over those of Alfonso's. It is hard to understand how this manuscript would have left the Neapolitan royal court for Hungary before Matthias's death in 1490. I cannot imagine that Beatrice of Aragon would have taken it with her when she married Matthias in 1476. Though demonstrably transcribed in the 1450s (See previous citation), Lat. 218 perhaps never did reach Naples and was available for purchase in Italy in the 1460s or 1470s, if it were not sent to Hungary by George himself in the 1460s, along with his commentary on Ptolemy's *Almagest* and his translation of two works of St. Basil.

Far more important, however, is the Vatican manuscript Vat. Lat. 3382, containing George's *Comparatio philosophorum Platonis et Aristotelis*.³⁶ To understand its importance, we must jump to a time after the death of King Matthias. By the early sixteenth century, the Platonists would have seemed to have won the fifteenth-century Plato-Aristotle controversy. Not only had Marsilio Ficino firmly established Platonism as both exceptionally fashionable and peculiarly suited to Christian beliefs, but even his predecessor, Cardinal Bessarion, was enjoying a second spring as Aldo Manuzio came out with excellent edition in 1503 of the *In Calumniatorem Platonis*. That edition sold so well that in 1513 the Aldine Press reprinted it. Yet, not all Renaissance intellectuals, indeed, not all Renaissance humanists, applauded this victory of Platonism. A marginal note I recently published demonstrates how much this victory was resented and how much interest there still remained to see disseminated George's now seemingly all but forgotten denunciation of Platonism. .

The starting point for what follows is a marginal note of the notable Anglican churchman Robert Ridley. Before he incepted as a doctor of theology at Cambridge

³⁶ For what follows I appropriate large parts of Monfasani, 2008a.

in 1518, Ridley had spent some time in Paris (See Monfasani, 2008a: 6, n. 32). On the first folio, verso, of his copy of the 1503 Aldine edition of the *In Calumniatorem Platonis*, now at Yale University, Ridley wrote a memorandum in Latin which may be translated as follows:

When I was in Paris, Jacques [Lefèvre] d'Étaples, a most serious critic and interpreter of all the disciplines, told me that the work written below was in no way Bessarion's, but was composed out of hatred for Trapezuntius by a team and not by a single author. The stylistic variety and deformity of the work is sufficient proof of this. He [Lefèvre] went on to say that it is also rather well established that the correction of [George of Trebizond's translation of Plato's] Laws [that accompanied Bessarion's *In Calumniatorem Platonis*] was actually by Theodore Gaza. Bessarion was a protector and extraordinary patron of all scholars; and despite being Greek, he also became not a little skilled in Latin. Nonetheless, because during the papal election won by Sixtus IV, when some persons were favoring Bessarion and others Sixtus, Trapezuntius (in as much as he was an apostolic scribe at the time) backed Sixtus and opposed Bessarion, from that point on Bessarion always harbored a hatred for Trapezuntius. But good Aristotelians owe Trapezuntius their highest gratitude since as a true Christian he translated many volumes of the Christian saints from Greek into Latin, and against Plato he published a work far more useful and profitable than this one right here [i. e., Bessarion's *In Calumniatorem Platonis*], which was stitched together by Trapezuntius' various enemies and generally goes under Bessarion's name. We have rather reliable information that the book Trapezuntius himself published has been taken to Hungary and remains there lest it perish at the hands of the malevolent, who would secretly steal away with it or rip it up in hatred.³⁷

³⁷ Yale University, Beinecke Library, shelf mark Gfp 66, +y 503b: Bessarion, *In Calumniatorem Platonis*, Venice: Aldus Manutius, 1503; sign. a 1r: *ex-libris* of Robertus Ridleyus at the top and in the printer's mark; sign. a1v: autograph note of Ridley in the top and left margins: "Narravit mihi [Iacobus *post* mihi *del. Ridley*], dum Parhisiis essem, Iacobus Stapulensis, gravissimus ille omnium doctrinarum et censor et interpres, hec infrascripta neutiquam Bessarionis cardinalis fuisse opera, sed in odium Trapezontii a diversis et nullo uno auctore composita [composita *in marg. add. Ridley*], quod satis indicat varietas et difformitas stili in hoc opere. Correctionem tamen illam de Legibus satis constare aiebat conditam fuisse a Theodora [*sic*] Gaza. Fuerat Bessario omnium litteratorum refugium et patronus maximus; et Grecus homo Latinitatem non nisi tenuiter callebat. Verum quia in electione summi pontificis, dum aliqui pro Bessarione, alii pro Xisto Quarto starent, Trapezontius, quia tunc apostoli<c>us [*cavum in pagina*] scriba fuerat, Bessarioni <ad>versarius [*cavum in pagina*] Xisto favit, idque ei successit, semper postea a Bessarione odio habitus est. Ceterum

The gossip that Ridley reports contains some errors, but it is quite accurate on its one essential point at that end, namely, that a copy of George of Trebizond's *Comparatio* had been preserved in Hungary, supposedly safeguarded from the clutches of the Platonists who would destroy it if they could., At the beginning of the sixteenth century, anti-Platonic Aristotelians like the humanist Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples were looking to Hungary to release in the fulness of time the masterwork which would counteract the Platonic contagion that had infested Europe. How this information reached Paris, I do not know. But to have reached Paris, as it demonstratively did at the start of the sixteenth century, news of this mysterious Hungarian codex must have been already circulating in learned circles in northern Europe for a number of years. Lefèvre and Ridley were not mere reporters of *res gestae*, telling of the creation and preservation in Hungary of George's work, but also prophets of things to come since within fifteen years or so of Ridley talking to Lefèvre in Paris the Hungarian codex would in fact become the source for Europe's knowledge of George of Trebizond's anti-Platonic manifesto.

The key to this story is John Vitez's already mentioned copy of George's *Comparatio*, Vat. Lat. 3382 of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Vat. Lat. 3382 was in fact the exemplar of the 1523 Venetian editio princeps of George's *Comparatio*. Vat. Lat. 3382 preserves the ink smudges of the printers and the corrections of the press corrector. Not surprisingly, therefore, it also preserves almost all the errors of Vat. Lat. 3382, including a confusion at one point that reflects the wrong ordering of the fascicles in some manuscript prior to the transcription of Vat. Lat. 3382. Vat. Lat. 3382, however, is the only extant manuscript that preserves this confusion.

But how did Vat. Lat. 3382 become the exemplar for the press? The story begins with the note on f. 107v by Ioannes Vitéz which I quoted earlier. In the note Vitéz says that he finished reading the book on 20 September 1470. He presumably did so at his archepiscopal seat of Esztergom. Vitéz was a serious reader, making corrections, writing marginal notabilia, and underlining names. I do not think, however that Vitéz made his corrections against another manuscript. The numerous insertions of missing bits of text in Vat. Lat. 3382 are in a different hand than Vitez's. True, Vitéz highlighted these insertions in red ink, but he himself was not

Trapezontius iste de bonis <Ari>stotelicis [*cavum in pagina*] optime meritis tamquam vere Christianus plurima Christianorum et sanctorum volumina e Graeca in Latina transtulit, et contra Platonem opus edidit longe utilius et fructuosius quam sit [*sic sscr. Ridley*] hoc, quod a diversis et illi inimicis assutum Bessarionis nomine passim inscribitur. Adeo ferme libri a Trapezontio editi in Hungariam delati sunt et illic asservantur ne a malivolis aut furto [*ex furate corr. Ridley*] sublatis [aut lacerati essent *ante* sublatis *del. Ridley*] aut odio lacerati depereant."

responsible for the insertions. We do not know exactly where and when Vat. Lat. 3382 was copied nor whether Vitéz had access to its exemplar. Since we do not have any sure evidence that Vitez possessed two copies of the *Comparatio* or that there was another copy in Hungary, the safer assumption is that Vat. Lat. 3382 was the only copy of *Comparatio* in the the royal collection after Matthias Corvinus confiscated Vitéz's library in 1472.

The next chapter in the story brings us to Bohemia. In a poem written in the first years of the sixteenth century the Czech humanist and aristocrat Bohuslav Lobkowitz of Hassenstein claimed that King Ladislas II of Hungary had given him a copy of George's *Comparatio*.³⁸ In the poem *On Georgius Trapezuntius' Books Against Plato*, Lobkowitz asserted that: "The greatest of kings has bestowed upon me a codex which tears into lofty Plato with venomous teeth. This book ... I wish to be sent to me so that we also might learn the extent of the madness of this new monster." So, like Lefèvre, Lobkowitz had not yet read the book at the time of the poem, but unlike Lefèvre, Lobkowitz found George's anti-Platonism quite reprehensible. After Lobkowitz's death in 1510, another Czech humanist Jan Schlechta sought to borrow this manuscript from Lobkowitz's heirs, but I do not know if he succeeded (See Truhlář, 1893: 220).

In any event, Vat. Lat. 3382 does seem to have been circulating in Eastern Europe at this time since today it carries the ex-libris of an otherwise unknown nobleman who is perhaps Hungarian, the Voior Hippolytus Sorbinus.³⁹ I do not know what role Hippolytus Sorbinus played in the history of Vat. Lat. 3382, but we do not have to wait long for our next notice of the manuscript. In 1516, Johann Eck, the future opponent of Martin Luther, mentioned in a letter of 19 August that he had just been the dinner guest of the theology faculty in Vienna. He went on to say that he had taken the opportunity to consult their library, where "I even saw a George of Trebizond, an Aristotelian and a man of singular erudition. The work was an elegant one, which he wrote in defense of Aristotle against Plato and the Academy and which came from the library of the most victorious King Matthias of Hungary. This is the work against which Bessarion published his *Apologia*

³⁸ See *ibid.*, 11, nn. 49-50. The poem is found in Lobkowitz, 2006: 93:

De Libris G. Trapezuntii contra Platonem
Codice me regum donavit maximus, alti
dogmata qui lacerat vesano dente Platonis.
Hunc mihi, si saltem non dedignare precantem,
Augustine, velim mitti, quo scire queamus
nos quoque, quanta novi fuerit dementia monstri.

Platonis.”⁴⁰ What Eck saw in Vienna was Vat. Lat. 3382 since two manuscripts still in Vienna were demonstrably copied from Vat. Lat. 3382 in the early sixteenth century.⁴¹ The vicissitudes of Vat. Lat. 3382, however, had not yet ended.

On folio 108v of Vat. Lat. 3382 we find the *ex-libris* of the Dalmatian nobleman and imperial diplomat Jacopo Bannisio (Concerning him see Rill, 1963.). Bannisio was a man of considerable cultivation. He counted among his acquaintances Pietro Bembo, Erasmus, Willibald Pirchkeimer, and other prominent humanists. In 1522 Bannisio was in Trent and in possession of Vat. Lat. 3382. From a letter of the Augustinian friar Agostino Claravalle printed at the start of the 1523 edition of the *Comparatio* we learn that Bannisio was the initial force behind the printing. Bannisio saw in the *Comparatio* an important text for the times.⁴² The *Comparatio* culminates in a grand apocalyptic vision in which George prophesizes the arrival of a new Plato, whose creed of pleasure and paganism would destroy the Church. George of Trebizond was warning the world of the pupil of George Gemistus Pletho, Cardinal Bessarion, who could very well become pope (See Monfasani, 1976: 156-159.). Bannisio, I suggest, was thinking of Martin Luther, who by 1522 could appear in the eyes of an imperial official to be the apocalyptic figure prophesized by George. Bannisio sent his manuscript from Trent to the prominent Augustinian friar Benedetto Moncetti (Concerning him see Monfasani, 2008a: 13, n. 63.). In 1522-1523, Moncetti was working for the imperial client Duke Francesco Sforza II of Milan. Moncetti, in turn, forwarded the manuscript to yet another Augustinian friar, the

³⁹ Csapodi-Gárdonyi, 1984: 143, misread name in the two *ex-libris*'s on ff. 108r and 108v as “vocol Hyppolitus Wrbinus” instead of “voior Hippolytus Sorbinus.”

⁴⁰ Monfasani, 2008a: 12. See Eck, 1923: 19.3-7: “Videmus etiam Georgium Trapezontium, peripateticum ac singularis eruditionis virum in eleganti opere, quod pro Aristotelis defensione contra Platonem et Academiam scripsit, ex bibliotheca Mathie regis Ungari victorissimi allato, contra quem ob id Bessario apologiam Platonis edidit.”

⁴¹ These are MSS Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 5413 and 5445, concerning which see Monfasani, 1984: 76.

⁴² Addressing Duke Francesco Sforza II of Milan, Claravalle wrote (Georgius Trapezuntius 1523, sig. a1v): “Ternae his diebus a magistro Ioanne Benedicto [Moncetti], theologo insigni, comite Palatino, litterae mihi reditae sunt, quae cum eruditionis et benevolentiae plurimum pre se tulerint, incredibili prope me voluptate affecerunt. Nec minus ingenii acumen, quod non mediocre in eo esse perspicio, quam suavitas morum et amor qui eum impulit ad scribendum me delectavit. Hortatur itaque atque suadet his litteris ut librum quem Georgius Trapezuntius, vir eloquentia et doctrina insignis, de comparatione Platonis et Aristotelis ediderat formulis pressum celestitudini tuae dicatum emittam et corrigam. Cuius exemplar dominus Iacobus de Bannissis, omni virtutum genere praeditus, paulo ante ex Tridento ea quoque causa sibi demisit. Sciebat enim me intuitu sapientissimi viri, reverendissimi domini mei, domini D(ominici) cardinalis Gri(man)i, studiosorum patris et protectoris, eiusmodi negotiis occupari. ”

forementioned Agostino Claravalle, who in those years was seeing through the press in Venice a series of editions of scholastic authors under the patronage of Cardinal Domenico Grimani. Since both Moncetti and Claravalle addressed their prefaces to Duke Francesco Sforza and not to Cardinal Grimani, I believe that the edition had more to do with Bannasio's imperial-theological vision than with Grimani's scholastic publishing program. So, in the end, the *Comparatio* was printed in Italy, but from the 1470s on its destiny had clearly become connected to Hungary as the last refuge of anti-Platonism.

Jacques Lefèvre had hoped that once the moment was ripe, Hungary would give to the world the work that once and for all would reveal the evils of Platonism and demonstrate the superiority of Aristotelianism. Lefèvre's hopes proved vain. The 1523 printing of George's *Comparatio* created no resonance among sixteenth-century intellectuals and no other edition of it appeared in the Renaissance. In many ways the *Comparatio* was a brilliant text. Its vivacity of style and richness of contemporary and historical references far surpassed Bessarion's ponderous *In Calumniatorem Platonis*. But its philosophical exposition was not developed well enough to appeal to scholastics, and the confusion of quires in the philosophical core of the book rendered part of it incomprehensible.

If viewed for what it was, however, a skillfully developed rhetorical invective, then the *Comparatio* comes alive as a work of drama and history. George lays out much of his argument in a series of historical narratives, culminating in the final one which begins with the report of his encounter with the neopagan George Gemistus Pletho at the Council of Florence and ends with his prophesizing the coming of the "fourth" Plato. This last aspect is totally missing from Bessarion's work. Bessarion simply ignored what was for George the whole point of the *Comparatio*. Readers of Bessarion never knew of George's attack on the paganism of Bessarion's teacher Pletho nor of George's warning of the Platonic threat in Rome. Bessarion kept silent about Pletho, and ignored George's apocalyptic warnings about the "fourth Plato." In Bessarion's presentation the only issue was the relative merits of Plato and Aristotle. This was Bessarion's ultimate victory. Bessarion's *In Calumniatorem Platonis* essentially controlled the battlefield uncontested from 1469 to 1523. Bannasio's reinterpretation of George's message in the 1520s gave the *Comparatio* a second life, but even this second publication of the *Comparatio* proved stillborn. Not only was the edition defective, but after Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico the Plato-Aristotle controversy had moved on to other themes and was conducted in a context that could no longer support George of Trebizond's *Comparatio*.

Eleven manuscripts of George's *Comparatio* survive today (See Monfasani, 1984: 600.), but the key one for the diffusion of the *Comparatio* in the Renaissance turned out to be John Vitéz's copy, preserved in the Bibliotheca Corviniana. Apparently, by 1500, Vat. Lat. 3382 was the only manuscript remaining in circulation and therefore the only one that had the possibility of serving as the basis of a printed edition. Lefèvre may have failed in his hopes for the impact of the *Comparatio*, but he was completely correct that Hungary had safeguarded George's work and would be the source of the text of the most important anti-Platonic work printed in the Renaissance.

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