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CLASSIS GRAECA
ON A 1785 TRANSLATION OF EURIPIDES
FROM TRANSYLVANIA

Introduction

Euripidis Hippolytos. Graece et Latine ex Versione Alexandri Kovásznai (*Euripides's Hippolytus in Greek and Latin, as translated by Kovásznai Sándor*, a notable late 18th century professor of Marosvásárhely's Reformed College) is a fully bilingual 18th century manuscript edition of *Hippolytos Stephanephoros*. It would be difficult to determine with a satisfactory degree of accuracy when exactly Kovásznai began to work on the text; we do, however, know for certain that by the 24th of August, 1785 his translation had been finished. The manuscript contains two arguments for the play (without specifying their provenience) with its source language and target language text positioned side by side to ultimately conclude with a short 1786 note of the author in Hungarian. While the target language of Kovásznai's earlier translations was mostly Hungarian, interestingly enough, the Greek text – as well as the Greek arguments – is rendered into Latin, and Latin only. In what follows, I shall make an attempt to clarify the reason why and how I deem possible the seamless incorporation of this edition into the corpus of Kovásznai's translations as a whole despite the aforementioned peculiarity, or, rather, owing to it.

1. The context

Before examining the the text(s) of Kovásznai's *Hippolytus* in detail, it seems necessary to make an explanatory digression in order to give some useful context to his decisions of working on the Euripidean text and while doing so, proceeding in a manner unlike that observable in the case of earlier translations. In 1769, the Reformed Church of Transylvania established the so-called Litteraria Commissio assigned to develop a single new standard curriculum for their schools, the *Methodus docendi*.¹ The commission was headquartered in the Marosvásárhely College where Kovásznai worked as a professor, and Kovásznai is known to have made key contributions to the development of the *Methodus* (Kocziány László goes so far as to assert that the final product of the process largely reflects Kovásznai's own intentions).² The official Lat-

¹ JUHÁSZ 1974, 14.

² cf. KOCZIÁNY 1970, 24.

in grammar the use of which the *Methodus* prescribed was, for instance, his partly bilingual Latin-Hungarian adaptation of Christoph Keller's German language Latin grammar from 1770.³ *Christophori Cellarii Grammatica Latina Linguae Hungaricae Accomodata* remained the grammar the Reformed Church recommended for use in schools until 1783⁴ (and, being probably the most state-of-the-art Latin grammar of the entire 18th century,⁵ popular outside Transylvania for decades past that point, as attested by 19th century editions, such as the 1803 one from Kassa⁶). Another fact that may be of some importance is that the *Methodus* did not only affect educational content: it brought along structural changes as well, one of these being the introduction of a separate *classis graeca*, a Greek class with a terminal position in the structure of studies.⁷

In 1781, the achievements of this educational reform were imperiled by a second wave of all-encompassing reforms: this was the year when the *Norma Regia* (technically a Transylvanianized adaptation of the *Ratio Educationis*) was compiled by Mártonfi József and ratified by Joseph II,⁸ prompting heated debates between its loyalist and Catholic backers and its mostly Protestant critics over subjects such as the Latin grammar to be used in Transylvanian schools (the *Norma* proposed a German language rendering of Emmanuel Alvarez) and whether schoolchildren should be made conversant with the works of the Latin auctores via being presented whole texts of a few authors (this was the more conservative, Protestant stance) or chrestomathies, i.e. collections of excerpts from a wide array of them.⁹ The 16th of May marks the formation of the interconfessional Commissio Mixta, of which Teleki Sámuel, Kovásznai's Maecenas was a member,¹⁰ and which was a body intended to settle these disputes. During the course of the same year, Kovásznai translated four short Ciceronian works and two preclassical Latin comedies (one authored by Terentius, the other by Plautus), and around the point when the High Consistory began to officially contest the *Norma*, all of Kovásznai's aforementioned translations appeared in print, in two volumes (each containing texts from authors Kovásznai is known to have lectured on: the names of Terentius and Cicero, for example, both appear in the draft of a report in which Kovásznai informed the High Consistory about the materials taught by him) dedicated to Teleki's son and wife (incidentally,

³ cf. KOLUMBÁN 2005, 68.

⁴ VULKÁN 2013, 37–38.

⁵ FEHÉR 1999, 319.

⁶ KOVÁSZNAI–CELLARIUS 1803.

⁷ JUHÁSZ 1974, 15.

⁸ VULKÁN 2013, 18, 21.

⁹ Ibid., 33, 37–38.

¹⁰ Ibid.

the aforementioned report and the latter dedication were drafted on the same piece of paper), respectively.¹¹

Both of these Hungarian texts are quite strikingly literal translations of their Latin original: they were quite clearly translated in a highly meticulous fashion, abiding by those delineated in Kovásznai's own adapted Cellarius – this bilingual Latin grammar makes a point of highlighting (mostly in good conformity with the correspondencies between Hungarian and Latin morphology described by other grammarians of the late 18th and early 19th century, such as a Révai Miklós, or a Gyarmathi Sámuel¹²) what the Hungarian correspondent of, for instance, each Latin tense, non-finite form and type of verb or verbal expression is, also giving, in addition to that, explicit clues on how certain types of verbal expressions with no clear-cut equivalent should be rendered into Hungarian, and, exempli gratia, when translating *Somnium Scipionis* (I chose this text as an example due to the fact that I made a comprehensive analysis of the fashion in which its verbs are translated at an earlier point) in a good 93% of the cases Kovásznai conformed to the rules he set¹³ (which, on a side note, explains quite well why his translations were poorly received by those who looked for style and sophistication in their text rather than grammatical accuracy). I was thereby led to assume that by means of these Kovásznai intended to defend the Reformed stance and give an example of how Latin texts can be rendered more accessible for students without what he perceived as truncation, and, as a corollary, that the translations themselves were meant to be utilised in schools as supporting materials.

2. The text

At this point, we may ask the question whether the same applies to Kovásznai's *Hippolytus* or not. For a number of reasons, it seems quite probable that this question can be answered in the affirmative.

Among the closest things to a direct clue, three lines affixed to the end of the text are to be counted. When listing the contents of the manuscript, I mentioned a short note added to the text in 1786, which reads "[e]zt a Tragoediát egy darabig magyaráztam A<nn>o 1786. de nem kellett majd senkinek; azért belé-hagytam osztánn. Én soha többször Euripideshez nem kezdek a Vásárhelyi Kolegyomb<an>! 1786 1ma Julii K<ovásznai> S<ándor>" (i.e. "I lectured on this Tragedy for some time during the course of the year 1786, but since it interested next to no one, I gave up on it eventually. I will not treat of Euripides in the Vásárhely College ever again!") Here, Kovásznai does not directly state that the translation was made for educational

¹¹ BoÉR 2018b, 11–12.

¹² Ibid., 17–19, 37–38.

¹³ Ibid., 20–26.

purposes; nevertheless, the note makes it clear that shortly after his compiling this edition, he started giving lectures on *Hippolytus*. With the manuscript – the translated tragedy from one side, the closing note from the other – framing this period, it would certainly be a strange coincidence, if there was no connection between the text and the lectures, especially considering that this edition could have become prime quality support material for lectures of this sort and lectures on Greek language alike.

Although the word order suffered (mostly very) slight modifications, Kovásznai evidently meant to ensure that the content of each line remained largely the same (that is, in most cases each source language word has a target language equivalent, and this equivalent is not transferred to a different line). This, combined with the arrangement of the two texts (namely the fact that the Greek and Latin versions run parallel) facilitates line to line comparison greatly, as exemplified, for instance, here:

Ὅγάρ(2) με(3) Θησέως(4) παῖς(5), Ἀμαζόνο(6) τόκος(7)	Nam(2) me(3) Thesei(4) filius(5), Amazonis(6) progenies(7),
Ἴππόλυτος(1), ἀγνοῦ(2) Πιτθέως(3) παιδεύματα(4),	Hippolytus(1), casti(2) Pitthei(3) discipulus(4)
Μόνος(1) πολιτῶν(2) τῆσδε(3) γῆς(4) Τροιζηνίας(5)	Solus(1) ex civibus(2) hujus(3) terrae(4) Troezeniae(5),
Λέγει(1) κακίστην(2) δαιμόνων(3) πεφυκέναι(4),	Dicit(1) pessimam(2) esse(3) Dearum(4),
Ἀναίνεται(1) δὲ(2) λέκτρα(3) κοῦ 4) ψαύει(5) γάμων(6)	Et(2) recusat(1) lectos(3), neque(4) attingit(5) nuptias(6) ¹⁴

Also, even if we consider certain alterations that Kovásznai was forced to effect in order to prevent his Latin text from becoming agrammatical (such as not preserving the perfectum form of verbs such as ἀσκέκλημαι, πεφυκέναι¹⁵ and λέλακεν¹⁶ – in translation these become *vocor*, *esse* and *clamitat*, respectively, the only morphological difference being the shift from perfectum to imperfectum –or substituting conjunctives for non-finite forms where in Latin subordination marked by infinitival or participial phrases could not possibly be used – the aorist infinitive ἐλθεῖν and *veniret*,¹⁷ or ἔχειν and *habeat*¹⁸ –) to be mistakes, and nevertheless, view praesens perfecti and praesens imperfecti viable correspondents to the aorist preterite, which does not exist as such in Latin (in substitutions such as that of *dedicavit* for ἐγκαθείσατο¹⁹ or that

¹⁴ Kovásznai 1785, VI, VII.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., XII–III.

¹⁷ Ibid., VIII–IX.

¹⁸ Ibid., X–XI.

¹⁹ Ibid., VIII–IX.

of *praebuit* for ὤπασεν²⁰), more than 75% of the verbs (counting the by no means incorrect explicitations of future tense such as that in the case of κτενεῖ via the Latin form *interficiet*²¹) from the sample that I analyzed (the prologue) were translated in a grammatically accurate manner. That being said, it is to be noted that at roughly eleven percent, even stricto sensu mismatches (mostly mistranslated participles; I did not include here the untranslated τέλη,²² likely an obscure, aeolic form expressing the praeteritum imperfecti of its base verb, since Kovásznai may not have recognized or interpreted it as a verb) seem to occur more frequently in the sample than in Kovásznai's earlier translations from Latin (and that is not counting noun forms that could mirror the original more closely, an example being the prepositional phrase *excivibus* translating πολιτῶν in the third line out of those cited above, since the genetivus partitivus is no less common in Latin than it is in Greek) despite the fact that as far as the translational behaviour of the languages involved²³ is concerned, Latin and Greek as cognates form a much friendlier²⁴ language pair than Latin and Hungarian. Provided the same holds true for the entire text, this may be intentional: it is not necessarily unlikely that Kovásznai took such a relatively liberal approach to grammatical accuracy here, deeming that at this comparatively higher level of education the proper understanding of the text itself was no less important than the proper understanding of its syntax. It may otherwise be worth mentioning that provided Kovásznai's *Hippolytus* did indeed serve such a dual purpose, an interesting parallelism might be drawn between Kovásznai's hypothetical, reconstructed intention and the stated aim of the very first Hungarian translator of Euripides that we know of, Gyalui Torda Zsigmond or, alternatively, Sigismundus Gelous (the first Hungarian author who is known to have rendered a Euripidean play into a language other than Greek, Latin, in this particular case, predating a fragmentarily preserved Hungarian *Iphigenia in Aulis* of unknown authorship by up to two decades²⁵). In his *Epistola Dedicatoria ad Martinum Kálmáncsehi*, Gyalui Torda claims that he took the effort to translate *Orestes* primarily so as to allow those who are yet to master Greek and would have difficulty reading the original to understand the text ("ut eis qui solidam linguae Graecae cognitionem nondum essent consecuti, quaecunque praesidium ad Euripidem intelligendum adderem, statui aliquot eius fabulas [Torda originally intended to translate more than one play] in Latinum sermonem numeris convertere") if, perhaps, not grammatically: the reason he gives for choosing *Orestes* as the text

²⁰ Ibid., X–XI.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., VIII–IX.

²³ cf. KLAUDY 2005.

²⁴ Ibid., 159.

²⁵ SZENTMÁRTONI SZABÓ 1998.

to be made more accessible is that its contents are to his *liking* ("mihi tragoedia et propter argumentum ipsum, et propter multos insignes locos imprimis placet").²⁶

Taking all these into account, it seems reasonable to assume that Kovásznai's *Hipolytus* edition (and quite feasibly his 1788 translations from Xenophon as well) is – to an extent – functionally analogous with his volumes composed of translated texts from Cicero and the comedians: they seemingly pertain to the two consecutive stages of the same multistage process, which aims at easing the initiation, so to say, into classical languages and cultures by way of firstpairing up Latin texts with their infinitely precise Hungarian translations, and then Greek texts with (again, to an extent) similarly executed Latin renderings, Latin at this point being a language the students are supposed to already understand – a "Latin stage" is therefore followed and being built upon by a "Greek" one, just how the *classis graeca* follows the *classes latinae*, so to say, as per the *Methodus*.

Kovásznai wasn't otherwise the first or the only author who experimented with such methods neither within the broader Hungarian-speaking region, nor outside of it (even if, provided, of course, my hypotheses are at least largely correct, his system is somewhat more complex than most owing to the larger number of languages and, subsequently, stages involved). The late 17th, early 18th century translator of Cicero and Nepos, Sopron school teacher Balog György, for instance could be viewed as one of Kovásznai's precursors;²⁷ translations of this sort, nonetheless, only became widely popular in the latter half of the 19th century, posterior to 1844, when Latin lost its official status: with Hungarian having become the single, uncontested language of education, "students had to prove in Hungarian that they learned their lessons, and, in a way, they had to understand the Latin material in Hungarian"; the primary means enabling this became translation.²⁸ This gave rise to the genre of the "Aczél cribs" (the verbal humour inherent to the original term, "aczélpuska", 'steel rifle' with a somewhat archaic spelling is lost in translation), named so after one of the major publishing houses producing them (Aczél Testvérek).²⁹ These "cribs" were booklets containing translations of classical Latin texts (and other support materials, such as glossaries), which were meant to be as transparent as possible in the sense that the target language text, in perfect or almost perfect subordination to the original, was supposed to make the grammatical structure(s) of the source language text visible through itself³⁰ – in other words, they were intended to exhibit the same grammatical precision that characterizes Kovásznai's translations from the previous century.

²⁶ ÁCS–JANKOVICS–KŐSZEGHY 1998, 341.

²⁷ I have previously touched upon the subject in BOÉR 2018a; cf. BARTÓK–KECSKEMÉTI 1993, KECSKEMÉTI 1993.

²⁸ HAJDU 2006, 176.

²⁹ Ibid., 175.

³⁰ Ibid., 176.

Despite its 19th century rise to prominence in Hungary, however, as mentioned above, it must be emphasized that the phenomenon itself was, of course, by no means an exclusively Hungarian one. To give only one example, and that from the other half of the continent, a mere four years after Kovásznai renounced definitively on teaching Euripides and his *Hippolytus*, in Dublin, an Irishman called Martin Tuomy published *A Literal Translation of Euripides's Hippolytus and Iphigenia* – an admittedly literal, prose translation of the same play (and an additional Euripidean text), likewise particularly intended for educational purposes (or, as Tuomy, a "scholar of Trinity College, Dublin" puts it, for his "Fellow-students", "from a sense of the great difficulty that usually occurs to most Junior Sophisters, in reading the original"). "I endeavoured to render it as literal as possible, convinced that a loose translation could hardly remove any part of the difficulty, which was my principal object in undertaking this work", Tuomy explains. "As a literal interpretation was my chief aim, I hope my good-natured readers will excuse want of elegance in the style",³¹ the same want of elegance in the style being, on a side note, something that Kovásznai's printed works (among which, as it was mentioned before, we find a volume containing the Hungarian version of a Plautine and a Terentian comedy, a volume which not including the translated original and disregarding certain formal aspects of the source language texts resembles Tuomy's *Hippolytus* somewhat more closely than Kovásznai's own edition of the aforesaid tragedy) were never quite forgiven for.³²

Conclusion

While it cannot be confirmed with complete certainty that Kovásznai's translating and compiling a bilingual edition of Euripides's *Hippolytus* should be viewed and interpreted as an organic continuation of the complex project I am led to presume he was working on between the early 1770s (when the partly Hungarian, mostly Latin Cellarius adaptation appeared) and the mid-1780s (by this point he published two volumes of translations from Latin auctores and prepared a third), and which appears to have aimed at transforming (pre)classical Latin texts into easier reads through providing these with Hungarian variants of extreme grammatical accuracy, based on what we know (the target language text replicates the exact structure of the source language text, line by line, in a way that can be easily followed; the grammatical precision, although somewhat more lax than in the case of earlier translations is still observable; Kovásznai's exasperated closing note reveals the fact that he experimented with lecturing on the translated play immediately after he finished working

³¹ TUOMY 1790, III–IV.

³² see BOÉR 2018a, 351–2, 359–60.

on the text) the possibility that by elaborating the edition, Kovásznai intended to lay the groundwork for supplementing his construct with a "Greek stage" should not, perhaps, be excluded, either. In any case, it surely is regrettable that this translation and edition of undoubtedly high standard could never see print.

Archives:

KOVÁSZNAI Sándor. *Euripidis Hippolytos. Graece et Latine*. Manuscript. Marosvásárhely: 1785.

KOVÁSZNAI Sándor and CELLARIUS, Christophorus. *Grammatica Latina Linguae Hungaricae Accomodata*. Cassoviae: Typographia Ellingeriana, 1803.

TUOMY, Martin. *A Literal Translation of Euripides's Hippolytus and Iphigenia*. Dublin: W. McKenzie, 1790.