


Fornication and adultery in the city of Debrecen (1547–1625) compared with the morality of Geneva

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To be sure, the more productive field of the international research on Protestantism is related to the subject of social history. In the case of the Calvin studies, for instance, readers will see, much has been written about the operation of the Genevan civil-church administration, consistorial discipline, sexual sins and family-marital life. Their authors' outstanding effort was to consult with the original manuscripts of the Genevan Archives. However, the early generations of Protestant preachers, not only in the western but also in central-eastern Europe, were trying to commit everything to renew the public morality of people. The illumination of the Hungarian pastors' views on the new spiritual and religious dimensions of family life is a neglected part of the research. Consequently, it would be interesting to scrutinise, for instance, the public morality related to the sexual crimes of local townfolk of the city of Debrecen, which apparently was the centre of the Hungarian Reformation since 1562–1563. Doing so, the present research deals with the operation of the law court, the number of cases, the crimes and motives represented in the *Registers of the Magistracy of Debrecen* during the period of 1547–1625. Figures and statistics presented by this article point out how important was the practice of forgiveness in the religious life in Debrecen. It is taken for granted that the main results of the study permit to take a brief comparison of the sexual morality of the two Calvinist towns, namely Debrecen and Geneva.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article is based on the field of systematic theology. The study offers an attempt to understand sexual sins or crimes in the 16th and 17th-century theological, judicial and historical context.

Keywords: sexuality; sin or crime; forgiveness; adultery; Protestantism; Calvin; Méliusz.

Introduction

The history of the reception of John Calvin's theological-ethical legacy in Hungary is a very long and interesting one. It is because of the peculiar social and political circumstances of the 16th century Hungarian Protestantism (Kovács 2009:xv; Révész, Kovtas & Ravasz 1927:3–10). In 1541, when Calvin returned to Geneva, Hungary had been divided into three different parts, namely: *Principality of Erdély* [so-called: Transylvania], territory of the *Turkish subjection* and the remaining areas of the *Kingdom of Hungary* (Ács 2019; Kálmán 2020; Molnár 2001:xiii; Schroeder 2000; Ulrich 2022). Because of this unique but frequently inconsistent and dangerous situation, so many Hungarian preachers were taking pains to implement the main points of the great reformers' theology (Hörcsik 1990:341–348). Amid their compassion for teaching the pure word of God, initially, they were reclining upon Luther's guidance, but from the 1550s, John Calvin's doctrines became decisive in the areas of *Principality of Erdély* and the *Turkish subjection* (Bucsay 1978:209–228, 1985; Szabó 1912:113–173). Doing so, Protestant pastors in Hungary did not cite directly from the written heritage of Calvin and that of his successors, because they were concentrating on the principle of *Sola Scriptura* (Hörcsik 2009:15). They were quoting only from the *Bible* itself. So, it is not easy to find out which reformer influenced the early Hungarian Reformed confessions and religious convictions (Kiss 1881).

It is taken for granted that one of the most significant and productive areas of Calvin is the international research links on the subject of social history. Here it is important to mention the respectful contributions of Willam E. Monter (1974:1023–1033, 1976:467–484), Robert M. Kingdon (1972:114–131, 1990:158–172, 1995, 1996:21–34; eds. Kingdon & Witte 2005), William G. Naphy (2002a, 2002b:94–111, 2003), Karen E. Spierling (2005:785–807, 2010:43–62), Jeffrey R. Watt (1993:429–439, 1996:63–86, 2002:439–456, 2020:111–114) and Scott Manetsch (2005:1–21, 2006:274–314, 2010:283–307, 2017:103–117), whose basic intention was to investigate the operation of the Genevan civil and church administration with special emphasis on the consistorial

discipline (Cf. Lambert 1998), sexual sins, family and marital life, childhood and education in Geneva. It is worth saying that their good effort was to consult with the original manuscripts of the Geneva Archives.

Like the city of Geneva which was 'a burning lamp of faith' and that of the Swiss Reformation in the eyes of Calvin (Magyar 2016:375–386, 2019:209–220), the town of Debrecen was bearing the same role in the Hungarian Reformation. It would be a valuable contribution to publish a comparative study of the public morality of these two centres of Calvinism (cf. Baráth & Szabadi 2009:9–34). The similarities (for instance, population, economical orientation, relative political independence, closeness of trading routes, religious debates and early stages of reformation) give opportunity to investigate how crucial the implementation of Calvin's and his successors' moral thoughts was during the initiation of Protestantism in Debrecen (1547–1625). By the analysis of the Registers of the Magistracy of Debrecen, the question is raised, what was the practical outcome of sermons, letters and other theological treatises delivered by early Reformed pastors and preachers in Hungary? Consequently, this article intends to scrutinise the operation of the law court, the number of cases, the crimes and motives represented in the *Registers of the Magistracy of Debrecen* (location mark: MNL HBML IV. A. 1011/a–k. A IV. A. 1011/a, printed version: DVMJ) hosted by the Archives of Hajdú-Bihar Country of Hungary (*Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Hajdú-Bihar Megyei Levéltára*).

Judgement of sexual crimes in early reformed Hungary with special emphasis on Debrecen

Early period (ca. 1550–1620): Strong influence of John Calvin's theology

However, the members of the early Protestant synods, and in were discussing the main questions of marital impediments, bans and divorce, and the unified judgement of the sin of fornication and adultery remained unfolded. For instance, who was the most influential bishop of the Reformed Church in Debrecen argues in the first Hungarian Reformed confession, called *Confessio catholica* (Debrecen-Egervölgy Confession, 1562, see Illustration 1) (Méliusz 1562):

The Bible ordered to kill males and females for fornication, every fornicator should be punished with death (Lev 20, Deut 22) [...] So improper is to kill females because of their fornication, whilst males receive only rod or fine for their actions. (p. 25)

In the following year, when bishop Méliusz published *The Book of Ceremonial Remonstrance* (Szertartási intelmek 1563), he warns against sexual crimes, confessing (Méliusz 1563):

[A]dultery tears the covenant of marriage between husband, wife and God to shred, therefore it is lawful for a Lord or Prince to kill every adulterer. Fornicators should be killed indeed, so do not punish them with rod or fine. (p. 240)

Later on, when the members of the first Reformed Synod gathered in Debrecen, Méliusz framed his celebrated book, entitled *Articuli Maiores* (Major Articles 1567, see illustration 2) reminding the readers (Méliusz 1567):

The Words ordered to punish with death all the murderers, fornicators, traitors, adulterers, incestuous persons, whores, male fornicators, and males committing sodomy as says Lev 18. 19. 20. Concerning the general commandment related to fornication in Lev 18. 19, everybody, who indulged himself or herself in one of these crimes, either in marriage, or outside the marriage, either they are free or not: let the fellows die, because adulterers and fornicators are judged by God, who gives them for perdition. (pp. 75–76)

All these quoted materials show, from the beginning of the 1550, in Debrecen, where the influence of the Swiss reformation was very substantial, and the public morality of the local townsfolk was renewed based on the moral-ethical thoughts of John Calvin. It is not without good reason to point out, that Calvin, like Méliusz was strict in his argumentation concerning sexual sins. However, the reflection on sexual misconducts was a substantial element in Calvin's pastoral calling and ministry (Magyar 2021:109–142), only two major examples are cited. In his commentary on John 8,1–11 (1553), Calvin states: 'if adultery is not punished; for then the door will be thrown open for any kind of robbery, treachery, and for poisoning, murder, and robbery' (CO, 47:190–191. Translation: CTS, 17/2:323). As it is seen, Calvin produced a long 'sin catalog' in connection with fornication as Méliusz did in his *Major Articles* (cf. Méliusz 1567:75–76). Commenting on the story of Judah and Tamar (Gn 38:1–30) in 1554, Calvin confirmed his statements against adultery vehemently, arguing: death penalty is a (CO 23:499. Translation: CTS 1/2):

[P]roof that adultery has been greatly abhorred in all ages. The law of God commands adulterers to be stoned. Before punishment was sanctioned by a written law, the adulterous woman was, by the consent of all, committed to the flames. (p. 286)

To find fresh insights into the reception of John Calvin's thoughts in Hungary, it is important to cite the results of the research concerning the presence of Calvin's volumes in the early modern Hungarian private and church libraries. According to the main recognitions of the project, Calvin's commentaries were more prevalent than his systematical works, for instance, the *Institutes* (cf. Fekete 1996:95–116; Hörtsik 2009:26–29; Köntös 1996:117–128; Oláh 2011:116–148; Ósz 2014; Szentimrei 1996:129–132). Calvin's exegetical works certainly paved the way for the renewal of public morality in Hungary.

Nevertheless, besides the powerful outcome of Calvin's legacy in Debrecen, one item has to be cited in the operative collection of 'territorial laws', which shows the strict Reformed control of sexual morals was far from being unique in early modern Hungary. As the Ofner Stadtrecht of Buda (1421) made clear (Magyar 2021):

[M]embers of the law court should persecute adulterers. So, let them to be named not only in the private, but in the public sphere as well. Magistrates must unfold the justice in case of torture even. A pit should be grubbed for them right next to a gibbet and let them to be laid down alive in it, then a stick should be run through either of them (288. §). (p. 192)

It was only a judicial framework.

Latter period (ca. 1620–1681): Strong influence of Theodore Beza's theology

According to the church synods and visitations in the territory east of the river Tisza or Transylvania, the great number of acquaintances related to the growing number of offences against family life and sexual moral made later Reformed pastors constantly anxious (cf. Sípó 2012:127–158). Thus bishop Steven emphasised later in the 71st paragraph of his collection of church canons (1649) (Kiss 1881):

[A]dultery gives opportunity for divorce and for second marriage, if only, when the wicked party is prosecuted, otherwise the lack of judicial consequences gives a mockery against God, who commanded clearly that adulterous man and woman should be killed. (p. 36)

In 1667, just a few years after the publication of Steven Geleji Katona's canons, the Reformed preacher, Andrew Szilágyi Tarpai released the first Hungarian monography on the proper Christian and Reformed way of separation and divorce, titled, *Libellus repudii et divortii Christiani*. Studying the direct references of the book, readers will find that Tarpai cited three times Theodor Beza's argumentation on marriage (Tarpai 1667:94, 106, 146) and seven times Calvin's (Tarpai 1667:81, 89, 97, 106, 108, 137, 145). All these circumstances show that later Hungarian Reformed pastors and congregations were familiar with the main social thoughts of the Swiss Reformation by the interpretation via Beza (Magyar 2018:121–135). Moreover, it is worth pointing out, just 2 years after Calvin's death, the *Petit Conseil* adopted a strict law on adultery. This edict reveals that adultery was a serious crime according to Beza and his colleagues, so (Rivoire & Van Berchem 1933):

[I]f the man and woman were both married, they were both to be put to death. But, if the woman alone was married, she was to be put to death. (p. 170)

It is not surprising that later pastors and church synods in Hungary, like Beza in Geneva, gave effect to more severe decisions on adultery. However, the magistrates in Geneva practiced 'active charity' (as Calvin said: CTS 16,1:355–356); therefore, most of the fornicators were suspended from the church for a term, but they were certainly not executed (– cf. Manetsch 2013:203; Watt 2020:106). So it will be interesting to scrutinise in detail what the practical fulfilment of these severe laws was on sexual misconducts in Debrecen. Did the members of the *Magistracy of Debrecen* perform Christian love and charity towards sinners as the Genevans acted? Were they following every regulation of the law literally? Let us concentrate on the records themselves!

Taking a closer look at the Registers of the Magistracy of Debrecen

Until now, the detailed study of the early *Registers of the Magistracy of Debrecen* (Rácz & Gazdag (eds), 1981–2010) has been a neglected, unexplored part of the research concerning the social and political history of the Central and Eastern European reformation (cf. Antalóczy 1996:67–92, 1997:57–86, 2001; Erdélyi 2012:31–60, 2015, 2017a:183–208, 2017b:120–137, 2020:595–623, 2022:41–58). This study aims to raise historical and judicial questions related to the early history of Protestantism in Hungary. To begin with, in spite of the peculiar circumstances of the reformation in Geneva, it is important to mention that in Debrecen, until the middle of the 18th century, the consistorial discipline did not exist, so every criminal act (for instance, robbery, murder, witchcraft and fornication) went before the city magistrates (Zoltai 1903:170–172). Moreover, in spite of the operation of ministers in Geneva (cf. Boer 2004a:331–342, 2004b:57–87, c:651–670; Manetsch 2013:38–67), there is no *Registers of the Company of Pastors* at that time in Debrecen. However, the population of Debrecen was about 10000 (Rácz 1997:46); it was a hard task to find a good, qualified notary for the advance of the city. Its main reason was the strong economical orientation of the town. Her portfolio was based not on the academic training, but on the operation of the 6 annual trade markets and the several guilds (for instance, tailors and skimmers) of the local 'light industry'. Besides this, the records bear special features, namely:

- Statements were recorded after the sessions from the memory of the notary, which means there was no strict administration of the minutes at that time.
- Proceedings of criminal and civil cases were not noted down separately until the second half of the 18th century.
- The administrative year began on 24th April every year.
- Criminal cases give only a small part of the registers, which are full of statements (for instance, bill of sale, leasing, injury, settlements of a succession, agricultural questions, lending and insults-slander) worth for public registration.
- Chronological problems (recorded cases from the past).
- Mixed Latin–Hungarian languages and
- Certain reference to non-written judgement.

In point of fact, like the Registers of the Genevan Consistory, in Debrecen, legal procedures sometimes were negotiated and considered orally without a registered item. It is evident from the folios of the Magistracy of Debrecen that so many cases, ended with the death penalty for adultery, were not actually documented in the minutes of the Magistracy. Hence readers can find in the records that for example 'Stephen, whose wife was beheaded, formerly, sold his house to the Szabó family' (1575). So, this kind of 'hidden information' proves the volumes of the Registers of the Magistracy of Debrecen are not complete in every aspect. Moreover, it is hard to deny that some cases (related to divorce or adultery) went before the local and partial synods of the early *Hungarian Reformed Church* (territory east of the river Tisza or Transylvania). Another difficulty occurs when readers have

to consult with 'complex cases', which were far beyond the horizon of a normal offence. In a general sense, these were criminal suits that ended with capital sentences when the crime of adultery was mixed with for instance whoring, witchcraft, thievery or infanticide. The main, relevant part of the 'complex cases' was surely not the fornication but the crime of cruelty. Finally, to make it worse, because of the several attacks of Turks and Hajdú troops, together with the sorrowful effects of huge local fires, the collection of the registers is partial. There are no sources from the following periods: between August and November in 1552, between August 1557 and April 1564 and finally between April 1569 and April 1570. In general, one book of the registers counts approximately 500 records, so readers must take this shortage into account.

Sexual crimes in the city of Debrecen: Facts, figures and statistics

The basic intention of this study is to examine all the available records of the local magistracy from the period between 1547 and 1625. During this work, almost 3000 minutes have been classified in the following order offences:

- Against religion.
- Related to witchcraft and superstition.
- Against family and sexual morals.
- Against life and security.
- Threatening the community and,
- Against wealth and property.

The results show that the presence of sexual misconducts was quite perceptible in the city of Debrecen because 10% (302 records) of the total number of legal cases was associated with family and sexual morals (see Table 1). Nevertheless, if the general term of crime against property not as a part of the criminal, but an intensive part of the civil law (as it is done it nowadays) is considered, the percentage of sexual misconducts becomes more measurable, reaching the figure of 16.4%. Turning to the analysis of the requested topic, it is found that the sorrowful behaviour of bigamy (5 records: 1.7%), elopement (6 records: 2%), sodomy (7 records: 2.3%), infanticide (9 records: 3%) and rape (15 records: 4.9%) were quite rare in the first 80 years of the Protestantism in Debrecen. Unfortunately, it was not the case with the observation of fornication (94 records: 31.1%) and adultery (127 records: 42%), which were quite popular among the citizens of Debrecen.

Surprisingly, in spite of the strict moral codes on sexual behaviour, published by the Reformed magistrates and preachers (for instance, Méliusz), it seems, in Debrecen, the practical realisation of the capital punishment of (serious) fornication or adultery was often neglected. It was because of the deep-seated sense of clemency of the local townsfolk. Certainly, residents of Debrecen were taking pains to put into practice what they learned in God's 'Reformed' school about the importance of His Mercy. As Calvin taught in his comments on the 'golden rule' (Mt 7:12): 'Perfect justice

would undoubtedly prevail among us, if we were as faithful in learning active charity as we are skillful in teaching passive charity' (CTS 16,1:355–356). Indeed, the people of Debrecen believed that ethical and judicial discipline touched by Christ and the ancient church have been given for edification and not for destruction; therefore, in the everyday life, the faithful partner could practice pardon, suspending the legal procedure, saying solemnly: 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked' (cf. EzK 33,11)! This should be the cause, why the members of the *Magistracy of Debrecen* could render punishment for only 77 persons, while the total number of supposed fornicators and adulterers was 293, including 165 women and 128 men. The practical realisation of 'the active charity' in Debrecen often resulted in forgiveness when the members and magistrates of the society did allow the guilty to go unpunished. Most of the punishments related to all sexual crimes were certainly not the capital sentences, because the registers are mentioning the following 'colorful types' of judgements: carrying the rod or labor service (2.6%), switching (14.3%), spanking by rod or flogging (1.3%), spanking on wheel (3.9%), putting to shame: riven shirt or stone of shame (1.3%), church penitence (10.4%), banishment (19.5%), segregation (3.9%) and fire-ordeal (1.3%). Unfortunately, in 32 cases, the documents mentioned death penalty for fornication and adultery (23 persons: 13 women and 10 men), infanticide (5 women) and rape (4 persons: 3 men and 1 woman). The research concerning the figures of capital punishments shows: 'only' 41.55% of the punishments were fatal. Nevertheless, the most suggestive recognition is the following: 68.75% (22 persons) of the executed prisoners were women. In other cases (58.45%), the Magistrates rather preferred penalties without capital sentence, which was, they believed, a fruitful education for the public morality.

As a result, only five cases are known from the early history of the Protestantism (cf. Koncz 1913:24) in Debrecen, when the faithful spouse did not want to show mercy for his or her unfaithful wicked partner. Get to know three of them! The most serious case was the legal procedure of Miklós Tóth and his wife Anna in 1575. According to the registers, Anna was found in adultery with László Szabó in a barn. Though both ran away, they were named and recognised by the local townsfolk. Because of this public concern, the husband, Miklós cleared the way for the emergence of the general civil rule of capital punishment related to adultery, so Anna and her lover were beheaded immediately on that day (see Illustration 3). Similarly, in 1586, Balázs Szabó found his wife, Anna, in adultery with one of his servants. However, Anna was crying for mercy, Balázs did not grant it. Seemingly, the most well-known case was the legal procedure against Erzsébet Mórís in 1586. She was found guilty of thievery and in whoring several times. She was beheaded immediately.

Short account of sexual immorality in Geneva and Debrecen (1541–1625)

At first sight, it seems unusual to compare the public life and morality in Debrecen and Geneva, because of their very

TABLE 1: Trials related to family life and sexuality in the City of Debrecen (1547–1625).

| Year | Rape | Promise | Fornication | Elopement | Harlotry/ Whoredom | Sodomy | Bigamy | Adultery | Desertion | Infanticide | Σ |
|-----------|------------|---------|-------------|-----------|-----------------------|--------|--------|----------|-----------|-------------|-----|
| 1547 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1548 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1549 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 1550 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1551 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| 1552 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| 1553 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| 1554 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1555 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1556 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 1557 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1558–1563 | No records | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1564 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1565 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| 1566 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| 1567 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| 1568 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 11 |
| 1569 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 1570 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 1571 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 12 |
| 1572 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| 1573 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| 1574 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| 1575 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| 1576 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 1577–1585 | No records | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1586 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 6 |
| 1587 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 1588 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| 1589 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| 1590 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| 1591 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1592 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| 1593 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| 1594 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| 1595 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| 1596 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| 1597 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| 1598 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 12 |
| 1599 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 10 |
| 1600–1605 | No records | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1606 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 9 |
| 1607 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 10 |
| 1608 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| 1609 | 2 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 16 |
| 1610 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| 1611–1617 | No records | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1618 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 9 | 1 | 1 | 19 |
| 1619 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 14 |
| 1620 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| 1621 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| 1622 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 7 |
| 1623 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| 1624 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 12 |
| 1625 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Σ | 15 | 3 | 94 | 6 | 18 | 7 | 5 | 127 | 18 | 9 | 302 |
| Σ% | 4.9 | 1 | 31.1 | 2 | 6 | 2.3 | 1.7 | 42 | 6 | 3 | 100 |

different political, social and historical status. Nevertheless, their similar circumstances (population, economic orientation, young-relative independence of the city, closeness of trading

routes, religious debates and early stages of Reformation) can pave the way for the comparative analysis of their public morality related to family life and sexual morals. Because of

the profound research on the operation of the Genevan Consistory and the Small Council (Manetsch 2013:182–220; Naphy 2003:107, 114; Watt 2020:100–137), it is perceptible that fornication and adultery were definitive crimes in Calvin's town (cf. Sewell 2012). According to Naphy, between 1541 and 1557, precisely 263 people were called before the Council, which was 20.93% of the total number of defendants (Naphy 2003:107, 114). Besides Naphy, Robert M. Kingdon and John de Witte produced the following figures: in the Registers of the Genevan Consistory, the presence of fornication and adultery was 30% (94/309 cases) in 1546, 24% (94/390 cases) in 1552 and 17% (97/566) in 1557 (Kingdon & Witte 2005:75–76). Their average figure shows: 23.6%. Another perspective had been examined by Scott Manetsch, who was scrutinising the background of suspensions from the Lord's Supper in Geneva after the death of John Calvin. Manetsch, concentrating on the complete and partial registers of the years between 1568 and 1582, pointed out that 208 males and 153 females (in 361 cases) were called before the Consistory, which yielded almost 10% of the total suspensions (Manetsch 2006:295). Later on, focusing on the whole period of ca. 1542–1596, Manetsch was taking pains to mark the 'patterns' of suspensions (Manetsch 2010:293). He found that during the time of the Genevan consolidation (1542–1551), almost 18% of the cases were related to fornication and adultery; later, in the period of the expansion (1560–1569), this figure eased for 9% and finally in the term of the contraction (1570–1596) raised for 12%. Based on these figures, he could provide a detailed analysis of suspension from the years 1542–1596. So, the average figure is 13%. Doing so, he found 1174 cases connected to fornication and adultery. According to his results, 636 males and 538 females had to act as defendants at that time, which means almost 13% of the suspensions were associated with sexual moral and family life in Geneva.

In order to construct a proper comparative study of the sexual morality of Geneva and Debrecen, in terms of Calvin's town, the following concrete figures are summarised: between 1542 and 1596, the main cause of suspension was the crime of fornication and adultery because 636 males and 538 females were accused. Another main research, done by Naphy, concerning this early period demonstrates that between 1541 and 1557, almost 21% of misconducts (before the Small Counsel) were associated with fornication and adultery. But one thing makes the things worse in Geneva. In the case of sexual misconducts, it was not easy to escape the observation of the Consistory and the Small Council, while in Debrecen the consistorial discipline did not exist until the middle of the 18th century. Thus the faithful spouse could practice pardon, suspending the legal procedure, saying solemnly: 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked' (cf. Ezk 33,11)! At the same time, besides the missing Registers of the Company of Pastors, the archives of Debrecen do not hide lists from the suspected people, but it is well known that church penitence was a recognised practice in the Registers of the Magistracy at that time. It is taken for granted that the lack of these registers are sore spots of the research because these documents would allow a much more comparative study of the public morality of Geneva and Debrecen.

Dealing with the practical realisation of the Reformation in the city of Debrecen between 1547 and 1625, readers will find 94 cases in connection with fornication and 127 cases related to adultery, which provided 7.5% of the total number of offences. But if the records related to the issues of civil law (inheritance, loan and financial quarrels) are not dealt with, this figure increases for 12%, which does not reach the Genevan results (20.93%) illuminated by Naphy (Naphy 2003:107, 114), but accords the average figure of suspensions (12%) pointed out by Manetsch (Manetsch 2010:293). As a personal strain, it is worthy to emphasise that in Debrecen, altogether 128 males and 165 females were accused of fornication and adultery. Nevertheless, traces can be found referring to oral cases which were considered orally without registering them.

Conclusions

According to the deep-seated study of the local registers, and of the secondary literature, the presence of offences against family life and sexuality was substantial in the early period of the reformation not only in Geneva but in the city of Debrecen as well. It is not surprising that the main disposition of the reformers and jurists at that time was: one is ignoring God and His commandments in covering up the crime of fornication and adultery and allowing the guilty to go unpunished. However, early Hungarian reformers had a strict view of sexual misconducts in theory. Although they were trying to implement the strong theological and ethical insights of the Swiss Reformers, they still did not want to exceed the biblical limits of discipline, which offered a Christian way of Mercy. They were teaching the people of Debrecen forgiveness day after day. Hence, the interesting close reading of the Records of the Magistracy of Debrecen reveals: residents of Debrecen were taking pains to put into practice what they learned in God's 'Reformed' school about the importance of His Mercy. As a result, in most cases, the faithful spouse did practice pardon and suspended the legal procedure; therefore in Debrecen, like in Geneva, the capital sentence was used only in the case of serious fornication when the main character of the vice was related to toughness, perversity or infanticide. So, the people of the "*Calvinist Rome*" (Debrecen) confessed: '*Soli Deo Gloria*', even not at the expense of 'Mercifulness'!

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