The Edict of Torda

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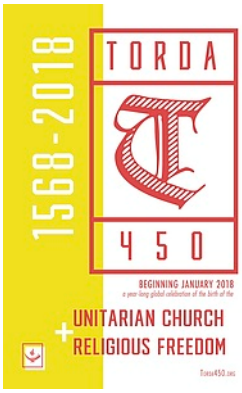
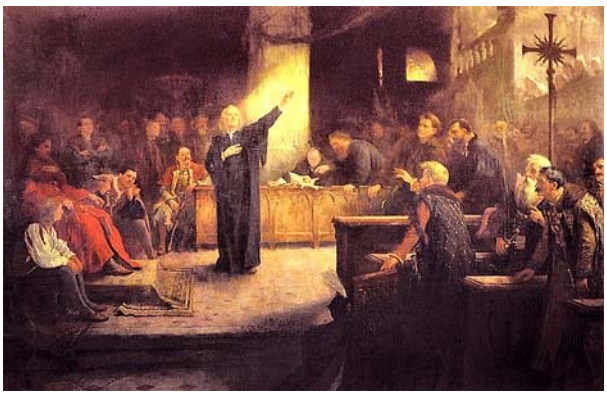


[Slide: UUA's 450th Anniversary of Torda logo.]

Today is the 28th of January, and (according to some sources) on this day 450 years ago, in 1568, the Royal Diet in concert with John Sigismund, the King of Hungary, sitting in the city of Torda (then considered part of Hungary but now in Romania), adopted a statement of religious freedom that sounds strikingly modern, especially given the tenor of the times, when religious conflict throughout Europe had fallen into armed violence as the Catholics and various factions of Protestants attempted to hash out their differences.

The Edict of Torda, as it became known, rejected that violence in favor of an uncommonly lenient view of religious differences. Today we Unitarians have a particularly mythological understanding of the Edict, since the man behind the king's determination to adopt it was a prominent Unitarian (though the term "Unitarian" would be invented only a few decades later), and since the edict for the first time gave Unitarians protection under the law. The Standard Mythology imagines heroic young Unitarian King John Sigismund proclaiming freedom of religious preference throughout his kingdom.



[Slide: Ferenc Dávid's speech to the Diet of Torda in 1568, by Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch, 1896]

This 1896 painting by Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch shows a modern interpretation of the Unitarian bishop Dávid Ferenc (or Francis David, as we know him in English, putting the surname last instead of first as the Hungarians do) as he addressed the king and the Diet where it met in the Catholic church of Torda – urging them, with the artistic support of Divine Light, to adopt the edict. Many Unitarian congregations in Eastern Europe have a copy of this painting.

Already in this painting we see some deviation from the Standard Mythology: the driving force has shifted from the king to the bishop. But the Standard Mythology in fact falls well short of what actually happened and what the Edict actually accomplished. To understand what it really meant, we have to invest some time in understanding what led up to Torda, and more generally what was going on in the amazing 1500s, when modern Europe was being forged.

Luther

[Slide: Luther with his theses on the church door, by Ferdinand Pauwels, 1872]

We need first to back up about 50 years, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the church of Wittenberg in eastern Germany. It sounds so provocative: *nailing* the theses to the door – a bold challenge to the church. But revolution was not Luther's intent at that point: he was still a Catholic monk, he was on the theological faculty at Wittenberg University, and he was simply following common practice: posting topics on the door for discussion at the next faculty meeting. Unbeknownst to Luther, however, someone copied the theses down and delivered them to a printer – and they were shortly fanning Europe's bitter resentment of the widespread corruption in the church.

Luther was not the first to challenge the church. The Waldensians in France as far back as the late 1100s, the Lollards following Wycliffe in England in the late 1300s, and the so-called Bohemian Reformation beginning about the same time in Prague are often grouped together as the "Pre-Reformation". Perhaps the biggest single issue they shared was the corruption and avarice of the church. All of Christendom resented the amount of land and money being siphoned into church coffers, and the way clerical positions were used for worldly advantage. The cynical appropriation of the Papacy by the French kings (the so-called "Babylonian Captivity" during the 1300s, when the popes were all French and all resided in Avignon rather than Rome) weakened the credibility and authority of the entire hierarchy. (This had been instigated by the decidedly un-saintly Philip IV of France, who also expelled the Jews from France and destroyed the Knights Templar – both groups he was deep in debt to.) The Babylonian Captivity ended only with a period of bitter chaos (the "Great Schism"), with rival popes

attacking one another. Clergy high and low were denounced for not setting better moral examples. Laymen and priests alike were woefully ignorant of church teaching in general and the Bible in particular. Several doctrines of the church came under attack as not being founded on Scripture.

The Reformation proper had already been set in motion in the late 1400s and early 1500s by liberal Catholics like Erasmus, who were inspired by the Humanism of Classical texts from Greece and Rome (now widely available in the West for the first time, due to the invention of printing and the influx of Greek scholars from the fall of Constantinople). They prodded the church to reform from within, though they did not often take dangerous public stands against the church hierarchy.

The interesting question is why Luther succeeded in launching a real Reformation when others had fallen short. Why was it Luther who split the church? How was he different from those who had come before? For ironically, given what was to come, Luther's original program was what we might now call a conservative, strict-constructionist reading of Scripture, to clear away the non-Scriptural practices that had accumulated over 1500 years of church history.

But he brought also one wedge idea that pushed him to more and more radical positions as time went on: namely (somewhat like St. Augustine over a millennium earlier) the overwhelming sinfulness of mankind. From his *own* sinful nature and from observing his parishioners, Luther became convinced that no attempt by humans could make them worthy of salvation: the fundamental Catholic teaching of salvation by works was simply unattainable. Ever since Adam's fall we are too deeply enmeshed in the sinful world. Salvation could only come from above as a gift of God's Grace.

Luther therefore denied that the church had any special authority: it is merely human. Only the Scriptures – God's Word – are reliable. No priest has the authority to intercede between God and Man: it is the ability and *duty* of every man to examine Scripture for himself to determine its true meaning. This is the so-called "priesthood of every man". Priests are ordained *only* for their vocation to help others – and ordination confers no spiritual authority or magical theological power. *Anyone* can hear confession, for example; it does not require an ordained priest. But *no* human, ordained or otherwise, can absolve sinners, even confessed sinners. Only Christ can do that. The indulgences sold by the church to pardon people of sins or to lessen their time in some dubious place called Purgatory were worse than worthless: not only did they fleece money from the flock, they led his parishioners away from the faith they *must have* in Christ's power of redemption – and indeed it was largely Luther who changed our relationship with Christ, so that He was no longer an implacable judge we meet only at the End Time, but a loving Redeemer, helping us every day along the road to salvation.

I think it is largely this notion of the "priesthood of every man", this *theological* basis for undermining the authority of the church, that was Luther's significant contribution. Discontent with the church was widespread, but heretofore arguments against its apostolic authority were primarily *moral*, not theological. At a stroke, Luther put Christ rather than the pope at the head of church, and the priesthood of every man became the convenient high ground for anyone disputing church authority – for any reason.

Luther's influence was also enhanced by his powerful translation of the Gospels into German. Again, it was not the first attempt, but its simple, direct language made it by far the best. His insistence on returning to the authority of the Evangelists was taken to be the defining nature of Lutheranism, and to this day Lutheran churches in Germany are called "Evangelical" churches.

Habsburgs

But Luther also had the advantage of timing: several factors were coming together to foster the rise of the nation-state, and one family in particular was driving that dynamic: the Habsburgs.

[Slide: The family of Maximillian, by Bernhard Strigel, ca. 1515]

Originally from a minor feudal domain in Switzerland, the family acquired the Duchy of Austria, and over time grew in influence until the Habsburg Duke of Austria was elected Holy Roman Emperor as Frederick III in the mid 1400s. The imperial throne was not an inherently powerful position, because by itself it conferred no land. But this touching domestic portrait from 1515 illustrates well why people had begun watching the Habsburgs with some alarm.

- Maximillian [upper left], aged 56, son of Frederick III, succeeded him as Emperor; but more importantly, he scored a big coup by marrying:
- Mary of Burgundy [upper right], the most eligible heiress of her day, bringing under Habsburg control the large and rich Duchy of Burgundy, reaching from the North Sea to the Alps, including the commercial hub of the Netherlands. (In fact, she had died in a riding accident at the age of 25 some 33 years earlier, so we see that this is not just a simple family portrait: it has a message.) Her inheritance passed to:
- Philip the Fair [center back], their son, who then married Juana, the daughter and heiress of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, thereby adding not only Spain but most of the New World to the Habsburg possessions. He too has already died, some 9 years earlier, leaving Burgundy, Spain, and the New World to:
- Charles [center front], aged 15, who upon his grandfather's death in about 4 more years will succeed him as Emperor Charles V, the personal owner of a huge chunk of Europe and a fair amount of the known world. He will marry Isabella, "the most beautiful woman in the world" – but also the heiress of Portugal, thereby bringing in the rest of the Iberian peninsula, Brazil (the rest of South America), and the Portuguese empire in Africa, India, and China, leading to the

Spice Indies in the east. He will offload the now relatively minor Habsburg possession of Austria to his younger brother:

- Ferdinand [left front], aged 12, who will figure later in our story – because the occasion of this painting in 1515 is yet another Habsburg marriage alliance, this time to:
- Louis [right front], aged 9, who already has some Habsburg blood thanks to earlier marriages, and has already been crowned co-ruler by his father as King of Hungary, Croatia, and Bohemia. He is being married to Charles's and Ferdinand's sister Mary, aged 10 (not in the painting). Louis's health is not robust, so for good measure, young Ferdinand is being married to Louis's sister Anne (also not in the painting) – and the Habsburgs are betting that she will become Louis's heiress. So Ferdinand is being set up to become master of Louis's wide lands to the east of Austria. This marriage is in fact the root of the Austro-Hungarian Empire of modern times.

It was said of the Habsburgs that they weren't very good generals, but were remarkably effective in bed.

When Maximillian died shortly after the 95 Theses appeared, Charles was elected Emperor at 19, and the rest of Europe began to be worried. At the Diet of Worms in 1521 (not yet 4 years after the 95 Theses), Charles put Luther under imperial ban in a futile effort to silence him, but Lutheranism had become, in effect, a means of *political* resistance, a means to challenge the Catholic hegemony of the Habsburgs.

We are all familiar with the political use Henry VIII made of Protestantism, but a more typical case was the Elector of Saxony, a major magnate of the Empire, who became Luther's protector and used Luther's Reformation to keep the Habsburgs at bay. France remained a bitter adversary of the Habsburgs, and to the east a new threat arose: the Ottoman Turks took Constantinople in 1453 and subsequently began incursions into Europe, to the point of besieging Vienna itself in 1529.

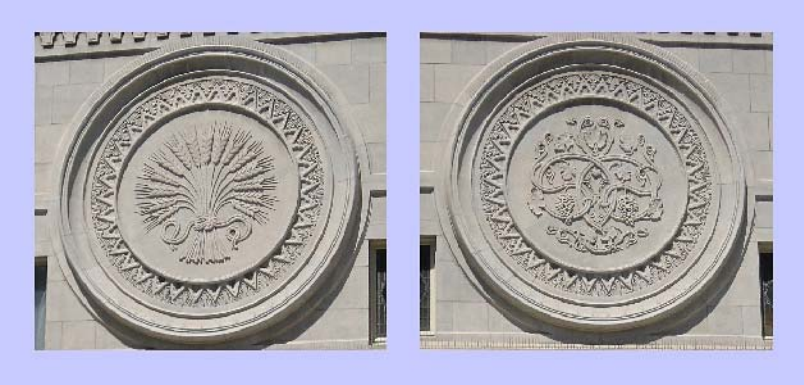
[Slide: The Chancellor reads the Confession of Augsburg to Charles V at Augsburg, by Christian Beyer]

So at the Imperial Diet of Augsburg in 1530, Charles V tried desperately to keep things under control: he sought to unite Europe against the Ottoman threat; he wanted to address the economic problems that spurred a rash of peasant revolts throughout the Empire; and he had to come to some terms with the

rapidly spreading Reformation. It was here, in response to Charles's invitation to return to Catholic doctrine, that Luther's close friend Philip Melanchthon composed the Augsburg Confession, the standard definition of Lutheranism – and from it the Lutheran princes would not budge. (This contemporary woodcut, in fact, shows the Imperial Chancellor reading Melanchthon's document to an increasingly frustrated Emperor, as it became clear that a peaceful solution would not be possible.)

Sectarianism

But Luther's program had a fatal weakness. He failed to anticipate that reasonable people attempting in the light of reason to properly understand the Gospels for themselves could come to *different conclusions*. Lutheranism took the universities by storm, and in almost no time competing ideas began to emerge, again reinforced by classical texts. The topics were many. Should infants be baptized? Is religious art idolatrous? Are religious celebrations heathen? Which sacraments actually had basis in scripture? How often should one take Communion? (Once a year had been typical before.) Should the laity be offered communion in both bread and wine? Perhaps the most contentious of all: What really happens in the Eucharist when we take Communion?



[Slide: Symbolism of the Eucharist, Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, San Francisco]

(Not being raised a practicing Christian, I was unaware how deeply the symbolism of the Eucharist figures in Christian doctrine – and I have difficulty understanding how anyone can attach a deeper magic to it than Christ's own words: "Do this in remembrance of me." But arguments about the meaning of this ritual, and especially the possibility of the transformation of wheat and wine into actual flesh and blood – terms Christ surely used metaphorically – have confounded Christians from Luther's time on.)

So within a few years, not only did Catholicism have to deal with Protestants, Protestants had to deal with a bewildering array of contradictory opinions on a multitude of topics. There were almost as many nuances as there were preachers, but some began to coalesce around the theology of John Calvin, who settled eventually in Geneva when Paris became too hot for his ideas.

[Slide: John Calvin, by a Flemish school painter, 16th century]

Calvinism is a conservative, almost repressive, version of Lutheranism. I don't have time to go into the differences; they mostly involved a different reading of the Eucharist and a more coercive authority for the church, as well as the old notion of predestination: according to Calvin, God knows in advance who will receive His Grace and be saved, and the rest of us can just go to Hell. It is the Calvinist churches that are known in German as "Reformed", in contradistinction to the Lutheran "Evangelical" churches.

[Slide: Michael Servetus, by Christian Fritzsch, ca. 1740]

But there were also outlying ideas about the Godhead that were more universally labeled heretical and therefore punishable. To some extent, these were influenced by the newly available ancient texts discussing the old heresies about the nature of Christ and the Trinity. What was the relationship between God and Christ? Was Christ truly divine? Did Christ exist from eternity, or did He begin at the Conception? What was the nature of the Holy Spirit? Was any of this really supported by Scripture?

Michael Servetus was the best known proponent of these ideas. A Spaniard trained in law, he became interested in theology, and already as a very young man was attached to the court preacher of Charles V. Servetus was exposed to the religious work of the Catholic court, in particular its wrestling with the problem of the Moriscos, Muslims in Spain whom Ferdinand and Isabella had forced to convert to Christianity. It occurred to Servetus that the tripartite God of Christianity would be particularly foreign to Muslims (and hence a barrier to their true conversion), and the more he thought about it, the more bizarre his answers became. Servetus was also revolted by the pomp of the church he witnessed at the coronation of Charles V. Again, I don't have time to go into details, but he shortly left the service of Charles V and in 1531 published *On the Errors of the Trinity*. He made the mistake of publishing it

under his own name, and in the uproar that followed he went underground under an assumed name. Settling in France, he pursued a degree in medicine.

He was brilliant at medicine and anatomy. He discovered the mechanism of the circulatory system a century before Harvey. But he couldn't resist theology, and he sent an advance version of another treatise to Calvin, with whom he had corresponded earlier. Calvin, now in Geneva, wanted no part of these dangerous ideas, and when Servetus persisted and published, a friend of Calvin betrayed Servetus to the French Inquisition. Servetus escaped – unfortunately to Geneva. There he was recognized, and Calvin had little choice but to prosecute him as a notorious heretic. He was sentenced to death. Calvin recommended beheading, but the court insisted on burning him alive, along with all the copies of his work that could be found. Servetus bore this bravely, and it was not so much his ideas that survived, but the notion that Calvin had gone too far.

There were, however, other people with unorthodox ideas about the Trinity – though it is premature at this point to talk about "Unitarians", a word that had not yet been invented for people whose faith was not yet fully formed. Most of them did not go as far as Servetus, but they learned from Servetus to be circumspect, and to promote tolerance for divergent ideas. The Sozzini family in northern Italy were perhaps the most influential; they traveled widely, particularly to Poland, where a movement later known as Socinianism became established, featuring several common anti-Trinitarian notions:

- That Christ, who was not God, was not coeval with God but began with the Virgin Birth.
- That mankind was *created* mortal; Adam's sin in Eden did not introduce death, and did not plunge our entire race into a state of original sin.
- That Christ's death on the cross was *not* a propitiation to God to atone for our sins.
- That our lives are *not* predestined: God's omniscience cannot extend to "contingent" events.
- That a lot of magical thinking inherent in Catholic practice (from the Eucharist to holy water) is not really very reasonable.

Hungary

And with this move into Poland and Eastern Europe, we turn finally to Hungary.

[Slide: Árpád leads the Magyar to settle in Hungary (detail), by Mihály Munkacsy, 1893.]

The Magyar, led by Árpád, burst onto the European stage in 895, when they were invited from the Ukrainian steppes by the Byzantines to keep the Bulgarians along the Danube under control. We call

them Hungarians, owing to the false impression – which the Hungarians to this day are happy to promote – that in their ferocity they must be related to the Huns of old. They took over the broad Hungarian plain, and became the scourge of the day, like the Vikings before them, but on horseback rather than longboats. Under Árpád and his successors they hounded the eastern borders of the Holy Roman Empire and exacted tribute.

[Slide: Map of Greater Hungary]

- The principal geographic feature of Central Europe is the Carpathian mountain system, an extension of the Alps, but not as high, with passes far easier to traverse.
- From the Pontic steppes the Hungarians moved through Moldavia and up the Danube past the Iron Gate, and into the Hungarian plain, subjugating its far more numerous indigenous population.
- They built capitals on high promontories along the Danube: at Visegrad, where the Danube turns south, and a bit further south at Buda, where a tall hill riddled with limestone caverns provided a spot perfectly defensible against any siege. (The town of Pest grew up in the flat land across the river at its foot, and eventually the royal and commercial towns merged as Budapest.)
- They expanded in all directions, even to the Yugoslavian coast, where they contested Venice's control of the Adriatic.
- They pushed eastward beyond the forested slopes of the western Carpathians into the land beyond, which was enveloped snugly by the arc of the mountains. This territory became known as the "land beyond (*trans*) the woods (*silva*)", which we know today as Transylvania in central Romania. Torda in Transylvania is marked on the map with a red dot.

The Hungarian leaders adopted Christianity, but cunningly courted both the Orthodox Byzantine Emperor in Constantinople and the Pope in Rome, playing one off against the other, until in the year 1000 Árpád's great-great-great-grandson, St. Stephen (who was anything but a saint) officially enforced

Catholicism on the Magyar (though the vast majority of the non-Hungarian peasantry remained Orthodox).

[Slide: The Holy Crown of Hungary]

Though there's no record of it in Rome, legend has it that the Pope sent a crown to Stephen, who adopted the title of "king" and inaugurated the Kingdom of Hungary. Today the "Holy Crown of Hungary" now on display in the Parliament Building in Budapest is actually a mishmash of older pieces assembled in the late 1200s: the circular base is Byzantine, while the arches bear Latin inscriptions. The cross at the top replaced an earlier piece of the True Cross, which was lost in battle. (The cross acquired its characteristic tilt when the crown was shut inside a box that was too small for it.)

Now a Christian monarchy, Hungary rapidly integrated into the political life of Europe. It was one of the largest nations, and more powerful, unified, and prosperous (with its wide, fertile plain) than most of the others. The royal family intermarried into all the great houses, and when the direct dynasty of Árpád ended in 1301, the throne was taken by a lateral descendant from the Angevin house of Sicily. Marriage alliances tied the throne especially to the houses of Poland, Bohemia, and Austria, and the politics becomes really complicated. One of the kings, Sigismund, was even elected Holy Roman Emperor, and was largely responsible for negotiating an end to the Great Schism of rival popes in 1415.

Transylvania, however, was a weak spot in the Hungarian defenses against invaders from the east: the Carpathians were too porous, and the province too isolated from the central plain. So early on, in addition to ordinary Hungarians, one particular Magyar tribe, which had always been somewhat distinct from the others and to this day maintains its own ethnic identity, was settled in Transylvania explicitly to the guard the borders. They are called *Székelys* (pronounced SAY-kayz), a Hungarian word meaning "guardians" or "defenders". The kings also invited settlers from Germany, who built seven fortified towns in Transylvania that became the focal points of extensive areas of German settlement. These Germans were called Saxons, though they came from all over Germany, not just Saxony.

[Slide: Coat of arms of Transylvania]

These three groups constituted the "Three Nations" of Transylvania. Each was represented in the Diet, and also in the Transylvanian coat of arms: for the Hungarians, a "turul" (a kind of falcon from Hungarian folktale); for the Székelys, a sun and moon (an ancient pairing that appears even on pagan grave stones in Hungary); and for the Saxons, the seven fortified cities. The much more numerous peasants, of course, didn't count and were not represented in the Diet.

John Zápolya

By the end of the 1400s, however, Hungary began to fall on hard times. Like Poland and Bohemia, Hungary was in principle an elective monarchy, and whenever an able-bodied heir was lacking, the Diet, representing the interests of the greater and lesser nobility, tended to elect weak kings who wouldn't challenge them. Unlike the monarchies of the west, stable central government never really developed.

[Slide: Suleiman, by Cristofano dell'Altissimo, ca. 1537]

For our purposes, the critical turning point came in 1526. I've already mentioned the siege of Vienna in 1529, but to get to Vienna, the Ottomans had to come through Hungary. They had already been pushing into the Balkans after the conquest of Constantinople, and in 1526 the young sultan, Suleiman, soon to be known as The Magnificent, began a major campaign up the Danube.

[Slide: Louis II of Hungary, by Hans Krell, ca. 1522]

Louis II, the young Hungarian king whom we saw earlier in the Habsburg family portrait, now barely 20, sounded the alarm, but the nobles assembled slowly, with insufficient forces, and when they met Suleiman on 29 August at Mohács (where the Danube crosses the southern border of modern Hungary), they were overwhelmed. At a stroke, almost the entire Catholic ruling class of Hungary, clergy and laity alike, was wiped out, and Louis himself drowned in the Danube marshes in the aftermath.

[Slide: John I Zápolya, by Erhard Schön, 16th century]

The one magnate left standing was John Zápolya, the largest landholder of Hungary and the governor of Transylvania. Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, the emperor's brother and Louis's brother-in-law, claimed the crown by right of the Habsburg marriage plan, and managed to secure election to one of Louis's crowns in Bohemia; but a hastily assembled Diet in Hungary, fearing Habsburg domination, elected Zápolya instead, as John I of Hungary. Louis's widow Mary, the Archduke's sister, persuaded another assembly to elect Ferdinand king, and over the next 14 years (from 1526 to John's death in 1540) there was intermittent civil war in Hungary as the two kings fought it out. The kingdom fell into three parts: the northwestern provinces closest to Austria were controlled by Ferdinand, while the eastern provinces and Transylvania (where John had been governor) supported Zápolya. Suleiman retained control of the central Danubian plain.

And here we see another dynamic at play. One would think that the Hungarians would unite with the Austrians against the threat of Turkish domination, but the Slavs and Hungarians of Eastern Europe had been fighting German domination practically since the dawn of history. The final eastern border of the Carolingian empire in the 9th century, separating the Germans in the west from the Slavs in the East, has

been remarkably persistent; it corresponds quite closely to the line of the Iron Curtain in modern times. Although the royal family of Hungary was intertwined with western European families, the nobles by and large were not, and they resisted Ferdinand not only because he was a Habsburg, but because he was German. The counter-argument – that the Austrians could assist the Hungarians against the Turks – carried almost no weight, for the Hungarians had been resisting the Turks for a hundred years, and had heretofore received almost no support from Vienna.

John quickly realized that he did not have the strength to resist both the Austrians and the Turks, so he approached Suleiman for protection. This was not unprecedented: the Turks by this time had several client Christian domains in the Balkans. These were largely self-governing, but owed allegiance and tribute to the sultan. The Turks tolerated Christianity: Christians were regarded, like the Jews, as "people of the book" who worshipped the same God as the Muslims. Indeed, Christians *within* the Ottoman empire had almost complete religious freedom: Ottoman law did not allow them to persecute one another, and the officials left them alone as long as they paid the religious tax imposed on non-Muslims.

So the eastern Hungarian kingdom, centered on Transylvania, came under Suleiman's protection, and Suleiman intervened several times against Ferdinand's forces. The attack on Vienna in 1529 was as much about keeping Ferdinand's hands off Transylvania as it was about Turkish conquest. John was not entirely happy about his client status, and in 1538 he contracted a secret treaty with Ferdinand to cede his crown to Austria upon his death, for John was unmarried and had no heir.

[Slide: Isabella Jagiełłowonka, by Lucas Cranach the Younger, ca. 1565]

But to strengthen his important alliance with Poland against the Habsburgs, John married Isabella, the daughter of king Sigismund I of Poland. It was a May/December marriage: John was 52, Isabella only 22; but shortly thereafter, in 1540 they had a son: John Sigismund.

Isabella and John Sigismund

Now that he had an heir, John repudiated his deal with Ferdinand – but John died only 15 days after his son's birth. John's treasurer, Giorgio Martinuzzi, immediately pushed the Diet to elect the infant John Sigismund king as John II, with Isabella and Martinuzzi as regents. Ferdinand's forces invaded, but could not capture Buda. Suleiman himself intervened to forestall Ferdinand, and at his suggestion mother and son moved east from Buda to safer territory; first to Zápolya estates and then into Transylvania itself.

Behind all this political turmoil, a religious transformation was also in progress. The decimation of the Catholic nobility at Mohács left a religious vacuum into which Protestants expanded. In Transylvania a split developed: the Saxons became Lutherans, the Hungarians Calvinists, while the Székelys tended to remain Catholic – but increasingly adopted anti-Trinitarian ideas. The common modern view that the Transylvanians had learned to be tolerant of one another is largely false: the arguments and debates were furious; only the political vacuum and consequent absence of strong government prevented the factions from persecuting one another.

For eleven years Isabella tried to hold the fort for her son. But during this time the Catholics of Europe began to mount the Counter-Reformation, the concerted Catholic assault on Protestantism starting with the Council of Trent (convened in 1545 when John Sigismund was 5). As Protestants continued to gain ground in Transylvania, Isabella's co-regent Martinuzzi, a Catholic bishop, evidently tried to maneuver things to Ferdinand's advantage, but he had to tread carefully to avoid provoking the Protestants or Suleiman. Isabella quarreled frequently with him, but in 1551 he persuaded Isabella to cede the Holy Crown to Ferdinand, and she returned with John to the court of Poland, where her brother was now king – and this is where young John Sigismund grew to manhood.

Though Catholic, it was an enlightened court, suffused with the light of Humanist reformers in the tradition of Erasmus. There was also Protestant influence from neighboring Bohemia, and as in Hungary, Protestant preachers had come from the west. The Sozzini family had preached tolerance and non-Trinitarian ideas in Poland for several years. One man in particular, often overlooked in the history of Torda, was the Italian Giorgio Biandrata, who became Isabella's physician. He was influenced by the Sozzinis and owned one of the few remaining copies of Michael Servetus's burned books.

(Isabella's retreat to Poland might appear a blow to John Sigismund's future prospects, but had he stayed in Poland, the young man might well have inherited the Polish crown from his childless uncle.)

Meanwhile, Ferdinand had grown impatient with Martinuzzi and had him assassinated. He could not however establish control of Transylvania, and by 1553 Suleiman was suggesting pointedly that Isabella and John Sigmund should return to Hungary. By 1555 he was leaning heavily on the Diet, and they swore allegiance to John II. Isabella returned to Transylvania with John the next year.

[Slide: Emperor Ferdinand I (detail), by Hans Bocksberger the Elder, mid-16th century]

That same year the Emperor Charles V, grown weary with fighting all over Europe, resigned, and his brother Ferdinand was elected to replace him. All the rich Habsburg lands, however, went to Charles's

son Phillip II of Spain. Ferdinand was left with little more than the poor lands of Austria and Bohemia. He desperately needed the income of Hungary to support his imperial ambitions, but the Hungarians resisted both his politics and his religion. By 1557, the religious chaos in Transylvania had reached a point that the Diet proposed an edict forbidding people from killing one another over religion, and established formal debates as an alternative. Isabella ratified this, and John Sigismund evidently attended many of the debates.

[Slide: John Sigismund, by an unknown engraver, ca. 1600]

Isabella died shortly thereafter, in 1559, after a long illness, only 40 years old. At 19 John Sigismund began his personal reign as King of Hungary – though his territory was largely restricted to Transylvania. He had become, by all accounts, a fine young man: intelligent, well mannered, and brave. He spoke a fistful of languages, including Turkish, and had acquired a taste for religious debate.

The debates continued, and John persuaded the Diet to grant legal recognition first to the Lutherans, and then to the Calvinists. John formally converted to Lutheranism in 1562. He retained Biandrata as his own physician, and appointed him to lead an inconclusive debate between Lutherans and Calvinists. Through Biandrata's influence both the king and one of the Calvinist bishops, Francis David, began to warm to anti-Trinitarian ideas. Together with Biandrata, Francis David wrote several anti-Trinitarian books, mostly rehashes of Servetus. He switched denominations again to became the bishop of the anti-Trinitarian faction among the Székelys, which was growing rapidly. John made the royal library and printing press available to him, and began founding schools promoting non-Catholic and non-Trinitarian theology.

In 1564, Emperor Ferdinand died at age 61, and his son was elected Emperor as Maximillian II. Transylvania attempted to recover the Hapsburg provinces of Hungary, but the Austrians counter-attacked and forced them to a stalemate. John Sigismund and Maximillian signed a treaty by which John retained control over Transylvania but ceded the royal title to Maximillian in return for marriage to Maximillian's sister.

[Slide: John pays homage to Suleiman, 1566, by an anonymous Turkish painter, ca 1566]

But Suleiman immediately put the kibosh on that, and in 1566 Suleiman personally led a campaign up the Danube against the Austrians. John joined him at Belgrade. They renewed their relationship most warmly – but it was to be Suleiman's last campaign: within two months, Suleiman, now 71, finally gave out and died.

In many ways, this was the end of an era. Though the Turks were still strong, and would again besiege Vienna even more fiercely in the next century, Suleiman represents the apex of their power and influence. Several later sultans would prove forceful and decisive, but none were as effective.

John and the Turkish forces carried on to recover more of Habsburg Hungary the following year, but in the process John fell gravely ill and returned to Transylvania.

The Edict

And (finally) we reach the momentous year of 1568, which saw two important developments:

First, the Austrians and the Turks made peace, and the Austrians acknowledged John's suzerainty over Transylvania and the lands he had recovered. For the first time, John Sigismund enjoyed real security in his kingdom.

Second, John again turned his attention to religion.

[Slide: View of Torda]

In January the Diet met with the king in Torda, and religion was the topic of the day. They met in the old Catholic Church of Torda.

[Slide: Old Catholic Church of Torda]

The interior has been spiffed up a bit since John Sigismund's day, but the exterior is much the same as it was then.

Publicly John Sigismund was still Lutheran – anti-Trinitarianism was still not a "received" religion sanctioned by law. So the likelihood is that John's main purpose was to make his anti-Trinitarian ideas legally acceptable. But probably influenced by Francis David and Biandrata – and perhaps also by the general tolerance of the Ottomans – the language of the Edict as it was drawn up sounds far more universal, and does not even bother mentioning the anti-Trinitarian sect by name:

[Slide: Text of the Edict.]

> *His majesty, our Lord, in what manner he—together with his realm—legislated in the matter of religion at the previous Diets, in the same matter now, in this Diet, reaffirms that in every place the preachers shall preach and explain the Gospel each according to his understanding of it, and if the congregation like it, well. If not, no one shall compel them for their souls would not be satisfied, but they shall be permitted to keep a preacher whose teaching they approve. Therefore none of the superintendents or others shall abuse the preachers, no one shall be reviled for his religion by anyone, according to the previous statutes, and it is not permitted that anyone should threaten anyone else by imprisonment or by removal from his post for his teaching. For faith is the gift of God and this comes from hearing, which hearings is by the word of God.*

(The "superintendents" here are the bishops of the various denominations, who were supposed to keep churches in line and preachers true to the dogma of their respective denominations.)

It is easy to see in this something like a 1st Amendment guarantee of religious freedom. But we have to read it carefully. In the first place, it does not speak of an individual freedom of religion, but rather of the freedom of *preachers* to preach as they interpret *the Gospel*. So only Christianity is being protected here; in practice Jews and Muslims were tolerated but not guaranteed legal protection.

Second, your average parishioner was not free to choose what to believe, only to find a congregation with a preacher he or she approved. The model is still clearly one where everyone goes to one of the established churches, whose preachers will have had theological training.

Third, the edict applies only to those who are represented in the Diet; namely, Hungarians, Saxons, and Székelys. In particular, it does not apply to the peasants (a majority of the population), who are mostly Orthodox: again, their religion is tolerated but not guaranteed by law. In fact, a few years earlier John Sigismund had a appointed a Calvinist to be the "bishop" (overseer) of the entire Orthodox population, presumably to be sure that the Orthodox priests didn't get out of line.

The following year, John Sigismund formally converted to anti-Trinitarianism, and most of his court followed suit, especially the Székelys, who were always the core of Unitarianism in Transylvania. John negotiated a treaty with Maximillian similar to the earlier one: he abandoned the royal title and acknowledged Habsburg authority over all of Hungary, but retained control of Transylvania with the new title "Prince of Transylvania". (Some versions of the Standard Mythology call him "King of Transylvania", but there was never such a title.) By the time he ratified the treaty in 1570, however, John was again gravely ill, unmarried, and without an heir. He died in March of 1571, just 30 years old, after guaranteeing the Diet the right to elect his successor.

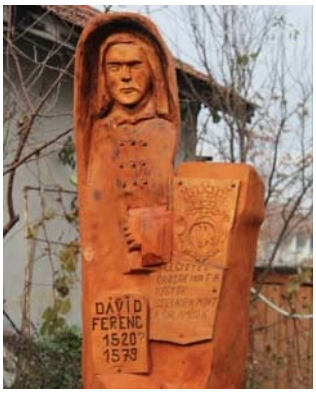
[Slide: Alba Iulia]

He was buried in the old Catholic church in modern Alba Iulia, a Transylvanian city whose history goes back to Roman times. (The Catholic church is on the right; the newer church on the left is the Orthodox church.) John and his mother Isabella are entombed next to each other in this Catholic church, though his burial followed anti-Trinitarian rites.

[Slide: Tomb of John Sigismund and Isabella]

Aftermath

To succeed John, the Diet elected Steven Báthory, a Polish nobleman and one of John's generals. He was Catholic, but immediately pledged to support John's edicts on religious freedom. Báthory went on to become King of Poland by the simple expedient of marrying Isabella's sister Anna, who was the last of her line. Báthory, and his brother and nephew, retained the Principality until the turn of the 1600s.



[Slide: Monument to Francis David]

The Standard Mythology suggests that this Catholic line came down hard on the Unitarians, and that they martyred Francis David in their repression of John Sigismund's religious freedoms; but that has only a grain of truth. Báthory did exercise tighter control over the denominations, but the outspoken Francis David increasingly pursued the most extreme ideas of Michael Servetus. He entered really dangerous territory by preaching non-adorantism, the view that Christ should not be worshipped or even invoked in prayer. His Unitarian colleague Giorgio Biandrata began to fear that Francis would go too far and provoke Báthory to revoke the official tolerance of Unitarianism. One of the Sozzinis came from Poland to mediate, but Francis David would not yield, and Biandrata reluctantly called him out as a heretic in 1579.

[Slide: Deva Citadel]

Francis David was sentenced to prison, and incarcerated here at the Citadel of Deva, where he soon died at the age of 59. I have seen no account of the cause of his death, but today he is revered as a martyr by the Transylvanian Unitarians, and a monument to his memory has been erected in the Citadel:

[Slide: Monument to Dávid Ferenc at Deva Citadel]

The monument reads: "Dávid Ferenc, 1520?–1579, the founder and first bishop of the Unitarian Church, was martyred in the prison of this castle."

In the 1600s, the Principality passed from the Báthory family to a string of powerful local Hungarian Calvinists, who more than honored John Sigismund's edicts: they widened religious freedom and extended it to the Orthodox and to the Jews, who no longer were forced to wear the identifying badge with the 6-pointed star. This was the so-called "Golden Age of Transylvania", when the country became a major Protestant force in the terrible religious wars of that century. But after the defeat of the Turks at Vienna in 1683, Turkish power in the area began to fade and the Habsburgs' power to grow. By the mid 1700s Austria finally won control of all of Hungary. The independent Principality of Transylvania came to an end, and Catholicism again became the dominant religion among the upper classes. Economically, the area stagnated; most of the lands that would eventually fall behind the Iron Curtain reverted to an almost medieval agrarian feudalism.

Much of Greater Hungary became part of Romania because Hungary was on the losing side in both World Wars. To this day, the Unitarians are a minority among the Hungarians of Transylvania, who in turn are a minority even in Transylvania. The ethnic Romanians, mostly Orthodox, whose religion John Sigismund ignored, won out in the end.

[Slide: Unitarian Dove and Ouroboros]

But Unitarianism survived in Transylvania. Most Unitarian churches there display the emblem of the denomination, featuring the Dove of Peace standing firmly upon the Mountain of Strength, surrounded by the Serpent of Wisdom (in circular form, signifying its eternal persistence), all surmounted by the Crown of John Sigismund. It recalls Christ's admonition to his apostles in Matthew 10:16 – "Behold I am sending you forward as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be therefore wise as serpents and innocent as doves." Whether deliberately or not, the Crown shown is not the Holy Crown of Hungary, for Isabella had surrendered that to Ferdinand when she returned to Poland, before John had grown old enough to be crowned with it. John was one of only two Kings of Hungary who never wore it.

Typically the Unitarian emblem also bears the motto *Egy az Isten* (edge az ISH-ten), meaning roughly "God is one" – though the word order more closely follows the Islamic proclamation: "There is but one God" – leaving one to wonder whether it echoes Michael Servetus's early encounter with Islam.

Finally I leave you with a conundrum: who, in the end, bears the greatest responsibility for the spirit of religious tolerance in Transylvania? You can point to several people: John Sigismund, Isabella, Francis David, Giorgio Biandrata, the Calvinist successors of the Báthory family – all would be high on the list. But I want to be sure that you remember this man, Suleiman the Magnificent, as one of its important protectors.

[Slide: Statue of Suleiman at the Suleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul]

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