

Babeş-Bolyai University

Faculty of Humanities

Doctoral School of Hungarian Studies

Doctoral Thesis in Humanities

**The Library of Zsuzsanna Bethlen:
Heritage of Women's Book Culture
in 18th-Century Transylvania**

Synopsis

Author: Klára Lázok

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Emese Egyed

Cluj Napoca, 2025

Table of contents

1. Introduction	5
1.1. Problem statement	5
1.2. Structure of the thesis	10
1.3. Methods and narratives related to the processing of women's libraries	11
1.4. Overview of the literature used	14
1.4.1. On Enlightenment aristocratic libraries, women's libraries, catalogues - the library history line	15
1.4.2. Literary sources used for the presentation of the contents of the library - the literary history and the history of science	21
1.4.3. the book networks of Zsuzsanna Bethlen - from the perspective of 18 th -century Transylvanian intellectual networks and the history of reading	25
2. Library of Zsuzsanna Bethlen - description of the collection	27
2.1. The legacy of Zsuzsanna Rhédei and Kata Wesselényi	30
2.2. Volumes received from Samuel Teleki (1770-1797)	39
2.3. Books in the library of Zsuzsanna Bethlen	40
2.3.1. Theology	41
2.3.2 Fiction	50
2.3.3. History books	53
2.3.4. Educational books, textbooks	54
2.3.5. Practical texts: farming, medicine, education, and textbooks	59
2.3.6. Representation: political science works, pamphlets, linguistic works, volumes on Catholic liturgy	61
2.3.7. Public and legal works	62
2.4. The chronology of the collection in terms of the years of publication and the period of acquisition	62
2.5. Distribution of books by printing place	66
2.6. The library's manuscripts	71
3. Zsuzsanna Bethlen, the bibliophile book collector: methods, book network and contemporary reception	73

3.1. Registration of books	73
3.1.1. Possessor entries and accompanying marginalia	73
3.1.2. Ex libris	76
3.1.3. Directories	77
3.2 Book acquisition methods and Zsuzsanna Bethlen's network	80
3.2.1. Family donations, bequests	84
3.2.2. Volumes acquired through the Teleki family client network	89
3.2.3. Volumes of grateful beneficiaries	92
3.2.4. Purchasers of the Countess's library	97
3.3. Users of books and the library's operating mechanism	102
3.4. Contemporary reception and afterlife of the Countess's library	105
3.4.1. Contemporary reception of the Countess and her library	105
3.4.2. Funeral orations and obituaries	108
3.4.3. The afterlife of Zsuzsanna Bethlen's library as part of her husband's library (1797-2024)	112
4. "...not only did he get them, but he filmed them." Impressions of Zsuzsanna Bethlen's reading habits	116
4.1. Recommended reading volumes in the Countess's library	116
4.2. Traces of reading in the Countess's correspondence and the contemporary press	122
4.3. Evidence of literate reading	125
4.4. Zsuzsanna Bethlen's "stories": narratological explorations	140
5. Comparative analysis: Zsuzsanna Bethlen's library and Transylvanian women's libraries	142
5.1. Kata Bethlen's book collection	143
5.2. Collection of books by Klára Gyulai and Zsigmondné Nemes Júlia Korda	146
5.3. Book collection of Eszter Ráday	147
5.4. Book collection of Krisztina Újfalvy	150
6. Conclusions	154
6.1. Library of Zsuzsanna Bethlen. The reasons for the library's foundation	154

6.2. Library organisation, book collection, library use. Zsuzsanna Bethlen's book network. Reception and afterlife of the collection	156
6.3. Traces of Zsuzsanna Bethlen's reading habits	160
6.4. The library of Zsuzsanna Bethlen in the context of the book culture of 18th century Transylvanian noblewomen	160
7. List of RMK volumes in the library of Zsuzsanna Bethlen	163
8. References and sources used	206
8.1. Manuscript sources	206
8.2. Contemporary printed sources	207
8.3. Bibliography	208

Synopsis

The library of Zsuzsanna Bethlen, wife of Chancellor Samuel Teleki, is a "Hungarian biblioteca" comprising nearly 1,300 titles. This collection forms a distinct sub-library within the Teleki Téka in Târgu Mureș. The aim of this thesis is to explore the book-collecting practices, network, and literary pursuits of Zsuzsanna Iktári Bethlen, positioning her contributions within a virtual map of 18th-century Transylvanian women's literacy. Research into early modern and modern women's libraries holds particular significance, as this group of sources—alongside related collateral materials such as book lists, correspondence, accounts, and order forms—offers substantial insights from a social history perspective.

The thesis addresses four fundamental questions based on what is known about Zsuzsanna Bethlen:

1. What motivated an 18th-century Protestant aristocratic woman in Transylvania, the wife of library founder Samuel Teleki, to collect books for nearly three decades? The hypothesis suggests that Bethlen's library reflects a distinct blend of functionality—serving the practical needs of the Countess—and rare acquisitions encouraged by Samuel Teleki. By tracing the chronological development of the library, the study uncovers an evolution both in the collection's content and in the Countess's bibliographical expertise.

To answer this question, the initial step was to delineate the collection's content and establish a comprehensive inventory of the books collected by the Countess. While Gabriella Somkuti conducted an earlier descriptive study (Somkuti, 1991), her analysis required enhancement, as it relied on the printed catalogue of Samuel Teleki (1811)—a document reflecting the library's later state—and partially referenced the Countess's manuscript catalogue. Through a comparative analysis of the manuscript catalogue and an autopsy of the collection (including ownership inscriptions, marginalia, and archival sources), a more accurate picture emerged of the books that belonged to the Hungarika sub-collection.

This examination identified 720 of the 1,292 titles in the Hungarika collection as definitively acquired during the Countess's lifetime—these volumes feature her ownership inscriptions or are recorded in her book indexes. Additionally, the provenance of these titles

was analyzed, revealing how Bethlen's collection compares with later acquisitions by Samuel Teleki and subsequent librarians.

By understanding the composition of Zsuzsanna Bethlen's library, the thesis answers the first question posed. Her book-collecting motivations were complex and multifaceted. As a devoted companion to her husband, Bethlen actively contributed to Teleki's passion for acquiring rare books—searching for Hungarian works, compiling lists, and organizing thematic sub-collections. Her acquisitions of historical volumes and theological manuscripts reflect a deliberate strategy, although the thematic structure evolved further after her passing.

Furthermore, Zsuzsanna Bethlen sought to establish a functional library suited to the diverse contexts of her life. Her collection includes educational textbooks and practical guides for nurturing her children and household, as well as specialized works to support agricultural modernization. She displayed particular concern for the health of her family and community, evident in her acquisition of medical manuscripts and reference books widely used among aristocratic circles. Volumes related to etiquette, public representation, and political awareness also feature prominently in her library, underscoring their utility as tools for both personal and societal engagement.

Finally, research highlighted the personal, intrinsic motivations behind Bethlen's book collecting. The composition of her library reflects her individual intellectual pursuits, with religious texts—including recently published prayer books—and an extensive selection of works on physical theology dominating the collection. Strikingly, these acquisitions often entered her library soon after publication. Fictional works, another notable aspect of her library, dynamically align with her interactions within aristocratic circles in Vienna, Bratislava, and Pest.

2. What were the practical ways in which this library was created, how it was recorded, how it grew, and how it was built in 18th-century Transylvania? The hypothesis posits that while Bethlen's 27 years of book collecting were carried out under the supportive authority of her husband, Samuel Teleki, her efforts were sustained by a network of connections she cultivated independently. This network occasionally intersected with Teleki's own acquisition network, creating a collaborative dynamic.

The first subsection of the chapter provides a descriptive account of the Countess's ex libris, possessor's notes, and annotations. Examples demonstrate how Bethlen, with Teleki's assistance, developed systematic rules for marking her ownership in books. By analyzing the three book registers attributed to Bethlen, the study reveals the Countess's progressive improvement in bibliographic expertise, with her cataloguing practices becoming increasingly clear and detailed over time. Comparisons of data across the catalogues also illuminate why Bethlen maintained several catalogues with nearly identical content within short timeframes—the newer catalogues signal the mobility and evolution of the collection.

The second subsection draws upon correspondence, archival documents from Teleki's manuscript collections, and entries in Bethlen's books to trace the procurement process. These sources also illuminate the individuals who interacted with Bethlen during the library's creation and management, shedding light on her network of book enthusiasts. The network is categorized into three layers:

- *Family Members*: This inner circle included grandparents Ferenc Wesselényi and Zsuzsanna Rhédei, aunt Kata Wesselényi, father Domokos Bethlen, husband Samuel Teleki, and son Domokos.
- *Direct Contacts*: This group comprises individuals who donated books, offered them for purchase, or had direct associations with Bethlen's library. It includes authors who dedicated their works to her—either in print or handwritten form—and important figures of 18th-century Hungarian linguistic and scholarly renewal, who acknowledged Bethlen's support for their work. Some gifted books as a gesture to strengthen ties with Samuel Teleki.
- *Indirect Contacts*: This broader circle involves Reformed pastors, officials linked to Teleki, and intermediaries through whom books were acquired. While these individuals may not have had personal connections with Bethlen, their involvement often coincided with the family's movements.

The study uncovered additional insights into Bethlen's book suppliers. Correspondence revealed that Sámuel Türi, a Reformed Viennese agent, procured books for Bethlen in Vienna during the early 1780s. Meanwhile, Samuel Zilahi sourced volumes from various estates for both the Reformed College and Bethlen's library. The autograph book index and correspondence further identified users of the collection within the inner circle of its network.

The third subsection delves into the period's press to analyze the reception of Bethlen's library. Publications such as *Hadi and other notable historical records* not only highlight her patronage of publishing but also recognize her as a figure of influence in contemporary fashion and behavior. Obituaries and funeral orations honoring Bethlen also praised her book-collecting achievements, enumerating her contributions to cultural literacy.

The fourth subsection is among the thesis's most critical parts, as it examines the reception and legacy of Zsuzsanna Bethlen's library. It details the contributions of Samuel Teleki and subsequent librarians who preserved, supplemented, and reinterpreted her collection over the 19th to 21st centuries.

3. Did Zsuzsanna Bethlen approach her books as a bibliophile collector or as a knowledgeable reader? In the third part of this dissertation, traces of Zsuzsanna Bethlen's reading habits were investigated by examining her books through autopsy and analyzing her previously unpublished letters to Samuel Teleki. The hypothesis was that Zsuzsanna Bethlen not only collected books but also integrated reading into her daily routine.

Concrete evidence uncovered during the research confirms that the Countess was indeed a skilled reader of her books. Analyzing the external features of her collection revealed that, unlike the conventions of her time, Bethlen did not employ a fixed motto. Instead, 24 biblical quotations and paraphrases are discreetly embedded on the title pages—and occasionally on the front endpapers—of 26 books. The mottos were identified, their associated volumes examined, and their thematic alignment analyzed. In many cases, these mottos reflect the content of their respective books, offering insights into the Countess's intellectual engagement.

The study further explored the genres that may have been Bethlen's favorites. Findings suggest her attraction to works of physical theology, alongside volumes promoting domestic worship. Additionally, her preferred reading material included Bible commentaries, sermons resembling live speeches, and prayer books tailored to enduring illness. These selections reveal a thoughtful and purposeful approach to her reading, deeply intertwined with her personal and spiritual life.

4. To what extent does Zsuzsanna Bethlen's book-collecting profile align with 18th-century practices? The final chapter of this dissertation examines the extent to which Bethlen's

book-collecting and library management habits, her attitude towards books, her self-declared goals, the community's reception of her collection, and her representation among the great women of Transylvania—including Kata Bethlen, Eszter Ráday, Klára Gyulai, Zsuzsanna Bethlen, and Krisztina Újfalvy—correspond with our historical understanding of book culture. The hypothesis posited that these women represent a distinct type in the Transylvanian spectrum, defined by their preferences, attitudes, and competencies in book collecting and literary engagement.

In the comparative study, we found that Zsuzsanna Bethlen aligns with the family background, upbringing, and financial means typical of 18th-century Transylvanian women collectors. However, in terms of her collecting habitus and her motivation for founding a library, she represents a unique type among 18th-century aristocratic women collectors. Due to her modest, quiet character and the dominant personality of her husband, Samuel Teleki, who held substantial influence over family life, Bethlen's personal voice is largely absent. Unlike Kata Bethlen's autobiography, Zsuzsanna left behind no self-representational writings.

Nonetheless, her developmental journey as reflected in her book indexes, the subtle but significant exchanges about books with her husband and others, and references to her collecting activities in contemporary sources all suggest that her contributions marked a step forward in female collecting practices compared to Kata Bethlen and her circle. Zsuzsanna Bethlen's book-collecting activities—through her bibliographical development, her complex network of acquirers, and the public and intended uses of her books—demonstrate an evolution in the approach to library curation among women of her era.

As an appendix to this thesis, we have published the list of RMK (Régi Magyar Könyvtár) volumes in Zsuzsanna Bethlen's library, aligning with the titles in her most comprehensive book catalogue (*Names of My Books Which I Began to Acquire with the Help of My God G. Iktári Bethlen Susanna from 1770 Onwards, Târgu Mureș, Archives of the Teleki-Bolyai Library, Teleki Personal Archives, II. c. 835.*). It is important to note, however, that the cataloguing of her complete collection is ongoing, with efforts to organize and integrate the Countess's three book catalogues. Additionally, the appendix includes items currently in abeyance but tentatively identified, providing as comprehensive a view as possible of the RMK volumes held by the Countess.

The exploration of Zsuzsanna Bethlen's library and her personality is not just a research task but a journey to uncover the roots of Transylvania's collective consciousness today—a

means of self-discovery. The interests of a Transylvanian woman 250 years ago, a mother and wife of a public figure who, despite her modesty, influenced the thinking of Transylvanian women, girls, and mothers-to-be, undoubtedly shaped society and, indirectly, the history of this region.

Keywords: *Zsuzsanna Bethlen, Samuel Teleki, 18th century, Transylvania, book collecting, library, bibliographical development, women collectors, RMK volumes, book catalogues, collecting network, female collecting practices, Transylvanian history, reading habits, community reception.*

Selected bibliography

- Bajáki, R., & Báthory, O. (eds.) (2015). *Women and Old Hungarian religiosity*. Budapest, MTA-PPKE Baroque Literature and Spirituality Research Group.
- Bányai, R., & Kimpián, A. (eds.) (2024). *Musis patriis....: studies for the 200th anniversary of the death of Samuel Teleki*. Târgu Mures, Teleki Téka Foundation.
- Baranyai, K. (2014). A women's library from the 18th century. Based on Kata Wesselényi's book index. In Baranyai, K. : *Ecclesiastical, family and women's libraries: theses on library history* (pp. 6-132). Szeged, Primaware.
- Benkő, J. (1988). *Correspondence of József Benkő*. In Szabó, G. & Tarnai, A. (eds.), *Correspondence of József Benkő*. Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute of Literature.
- Bepler, J. (2013) Women's Books and Dynastic Networks in Early Modern Germany: Practices of Collecting and Bequeathing. In Rode-Breymann, S. & Antje, T. (eds.), *Der Hof. Place of Cultural Action of Women in the Early Modern Period* (pp. 295-313), Cologne, Böhlau.
- Bepler, J. (2017) Making Books Matter. Dynastic Women and the Material Culture of Book Objects in Early Modern Germany. In Gleixner, U., Baum, C., Münkner, J., & Röbler, H. (eds.), *Biographies of the Book* (pp. 250-274). Göttingen, Wallstein.
- Bíró, F. (1995). *Hungarian literature of the Age of Enlightenment*. Budapest, Balassi.
- Borsa, G., & Hervay, F. (1983). *Régi Magyarországi Nyomtatványok* (Volume 2). Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Csikós, J. (2013). Contributions to the reconstruction of Eszter Ráday's library. *Acta Siculica*, 2012-2013, 443-474.
- Csikós, J. (2013). Eszter Ráday's library. In Egyed, E., Pakó, L. & Weisz, A. (eds.), *Certamen I. (Lectures at the Day of Hungarian Science in the Transylvanian Museum Association, Section I)* (pp. 81-89).
- Deé Nagy, A. (1976). *Samuel Teleki and the Teleki-Téka. Dir., ed., annot.* Bucharest, Kriterion.

- Deé Nagy, A. (1996). Women book collectors in the 18th century. In Kovács, A., Sipos, G., & Tonk, S. (eds.), *Commemorative book on the eightieth anniversary of the birth of Zsigmond Jakó* (pp. 134-147). Cluj-Napoca, Transylvanian Museum Association.
- Deé Nagy, A. (1997). *The founder of the library, Samuel Teleki*. Cluj, Transylvanian Museum Association.
- Deé Nagy, A. (2017). *Baroness Kata Hadadi Wesselényi, a Reformed woman of faith*. Cluj Napoca, Kriterion.
- Deé Nagy, A., & László, L. (2019). Cluj Napoca, Kriterion.
- Ecsedy, J. V. (1999). *Book printing in Hungary in the age of the manual press: 1473-1800*. Budapest, Balassi Publishers.
- Egyed, E. (ed.) (2017). *"Becoming a letter": the poetry circle of Krisztina Ujfalvi (1795-1797)*.
- Fehér, E. (1995). *Hungarian textbooks: 1777 - 1848*. Budapest, National Pedagogical Library and Museum.
- Fülöp, G. (2010). *Reading culture and publishing in Hungary during the Enlightenment and the Reform Era (1772-1848)*. Budapest, Hatágú Síp Alapítvány.
- Gazda, I. (2005) *Pannonian Phenix, or the Hungarian language attacked from the ashes. Our first printed scientific books, 16th-19th century*. Budapest, National Széchényi Library.
- Heltai, J. (ed.) (2000). *Régi Magyarországi Nyomtatványok* (Volume 3). Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Heltai, J. (2008). *Genres and works in Hungarian publishing in the 17th century (1601-1655)*. Budapest, National Széchényi Library.
- Horváth, I., Balázs, M., Bartók, Z. Á., & Margócsy, I. (eds.) (2020). Budapest, [Gépeskönyv].
- Jakó, Z. (1976). History of the Odorheiu Secuiesc Scientific Library. In Jakó, Z. (ed.), *Writing, books, intellectuals* (pp. 219-251). Bucharest, Kriterion.
- Jakó, Z., & Juhász, I. (1979). *Nagyenyedi students. 1662-1848*. Bucharest, Kriterion.

- Keresztési, J. (1868). *Chronicle of the civil and ecclesiastical public life of Hungary at the end of the 18th century*. Pest, Ráth Mór.
- Kispál, M. (1887). The library of an old Hungarian writer. *Egyetemes Philológiai Közlöny*.11(2), 184-188
- Kosáry, D. G. (1996). *Művelődés a XVIII. századadi Magyarországon*. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Kőszeghy, P. (ed.) (2003-2014). *Hungarian cultural history lexicon I-XIV*.
- Madas, E., & Monok, I. (2003) *A könyvkultúra Magyarországon*. Budapest, Balassi Publishers.
- Monok, I. (2015). Book culture in the basic works of cultural history. In I. Monok (ed.), *Mérföldkövek a magyar művelődés-historical-writing: tanulmányok* (pp. 4-52).
- Montoya, A. C. (2024). Women's Libraries and "Women's Books", 1729-1830. In Bolufer Peruga, M. Bolufer, M., Guinot-Ferri, L. & Blutrach, C. (eds.), *Gender and Cultural Mediation in the Long Eighteenth Century: Women Across Borders*. Cham, Springer Nature, Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-46939-8_12, accessed 12 April 2025.
- Pogány, G. (2008). Views on women's reading in Hungary in the first phase of the Enlightenment. *Library Journal*, 54(3), 450-461.
- Simon, M., & Szabó, Á. (1997) *Reconstruction of the library of Kata Bethlen. The Early Modern Libraries of the Carpathian Basin (2)*. Szeged, Scriptum.
- Somkuti, G. (1983). Krisztina Újfalvy and her library. A forgotten 18th century poetess. In *The Yearbook of the OSZK 1981* (pp. 449-484). Budapest, National Széchényi Library.
- Somkuti, G. (1991). Women book collectors in 18th century Hungary. *Könyvtáros*, 41(5), 290-296.
- Szabó, Á. (2023). *Reconstruction of the libraries of the Bethlen Kata circle of women*. Budapest, Martin Opitz Publishers.
- Szabó, M., & Szögi, L. (1998). *Transylvanian students at European universities 1701-1849*.

- Tonk, S. (1994). *The students of the Reformed College of Târgu Mures 1653-1848*.
- Tüskés, G., & Lengyel, R. (2010). Religious, educational, social and artistic thought in the 18th century. In Tüskés, G. & Lengyel, R. (eds.), *Hungarian thinkers of the 18th century: the humanities* (pp. 1349-1408).
- V. László, Z. (2020). *exemplary women: the changing roles of women in Protestant funeral orations (1711-1825)*.
- Weis, J. (2024). "Fait à mes heures de loisir": Women's Private Libraries as Spaces of Learning and Knowledge Production. In N. Klein Käfer & N. da Silva Perez (eds.), *Women's Private Practices of Knowledge Production in Early Modern Europe* (pp. 105-128). Cham, Springer Nature, Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-44731-0_5, accessed 12 April 2025.
- Wittmann, R. (2000). A revolution in reading at the end of the 18th century? In G. Cavallo & R. Chartier (Eds.), *The cultural history of reading in the western world* (pp. 327-329).
- Zoványi, J. (1977). *Hungarian Protestant church history lexicon*. Budapest, Press Office of the Synodal Office of the Reformed Church of Hungary

Publications of the author used for this thesis:

- Lázok, K. (2022). Books of Zsuzsanna Bethlen Iktári with owner's inscription. In Bányai, R., László, L. & Simon, Z. (eds.), *Civis, scriptor, historicus. Studies in honour of Mihály Sebestyén-Spielmann, seventy-five years old* (pp. 293-307). Marosvásárhely, Studium.
- Lázok, K. (2023). The evolution from collector to connoisseur of an 18th century Transylvanian noble woman, Countess Zsuzsanna Bethlen de Iktár: traces, phases and analogies. In Krász, L. & Pesti, B. (eds.), *Die Frau als Gönnerin: Kulturvermittlung, Repräsentation und (weibliche) Fördernetzwerke in Habsburg territories of the early modern period* (pp. 226-238). Vienna, Praesens Verlag.
- Lázok, K. (2024). The web of book connections of Zsuzsanna Bethlen Iktári. In Bányai, R. & Kimpián, A. (eds.), *Musis patriis....: studies for the 200th anniversary of the death of Samuel Teleki* (pp. 134-153).