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French tragedy in the Hungarian theatre

Dominique Gaspard's *Mercuriade* (1605)



ABSTRACT

The drama is one of the important historical sources of early modern national self-interpretations. After the Long Turkish War (1591–1606) historical dramas are able to enhance patriotism and patriotic education. The tragedy entitled *Mercuriade* written in 1605 by Dominique Gaspard puts on stage Philippe-Emmanuel de Lorraine, Duke of Mercœur (1558–1602) when he, after the conciliation with Henry IV and leaving the Catholic League, entered into the service of Rudolf II in 1599 and joined the anti-Turkish fights in Hungary. After his death Duke of Mercœur became a mythical hero and his memory was even mentioned at the end of 17th century. *Mercuriade* can be considered a masterpiece of 17th century school drama, through which it is possible to study the particularities of plays written with a didactic purpose for the students.

KEYWORDS

Long Turkish War, historical drama, Dominique Gaspard, *Mercuriade*, Philippe-Emmanuel de Lorraine, Duke of Mercœur, Catholic League, school drama

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The manuscript No. 687¹ of the *Condé Museum in Chantilly* is a volume of nearly three hundred pages without earlier source indication than the 19th century. It contains fifty-four different works in verse or prose written in the same handwriting. The running head and the continuous texts suggest that these texts were not included in the same volume without a thematic relationship. Among the French-language works, dating from the period between 1501–1623, sixteen items, taking up the first two thirds, are – with a few exceptions – literary texts, the rest (as well as the 5th, 6th, 13th item) is political and satirical writing about Louis XIII's reign dating mostly from the period between 1620–1622. This corpus from Lorraine also includes three tragedies, namely Fronton du Duc's *Pucelle*, Jean Robelin's *Thébaïde* as well as Dominique Gaspard's *Mercuriade*,² the subject of this paper.

The drama is one of the important historical sources of early modern national self-interpretations and images featured about other nations. In 1553, the first French tragedy, Étienne Jodelle's *Cléopâtre captive* [The slave Cleopatra] was published and this event at the same time indicated the beginning of the *humanist* tragedy and the historical theme on stage.³ In the 16th century the Italian directing habits significantly transform the traditional acting following the Antique model based on medieval traditions.⁴ Theatre is not only a literary genre, as historical dramas, especially those about national history, are able to enhance patriotism and patriotic education. We can speak about historical plays from the 16th century the earliest, but their number increased after the Long Turkish War (1591–1606), that is at the end of that century. When faith is threatened and there is uncertainty historical dramas become symbols of cohesion and hope in religious plays.⁵ The theatrical performance reflects the spirit of the age and provides many details to historians about the period when the Ottoman advance could still be a real danger even in West Europe. The situation of France was unique in the sense that Francis I and his successors established an Ottoman alliance system aimed at restraining the Habsburg hegemonic aspirations. However, the feeling of danger also existed in French thinking implicitly which can be seen in many tracts written in that period. The Hungarian campaign of Suleiman is a beloved topic of these writings and their anti-Ottoman tone is already indicated in the titles of these pamphlets. At the same time, in the central and eastern parts of Europe, the literature on Turkish threats is embedded in different context, because of the very realistic and perceptible threat.⁶ For such reasons, in Hungary, for example, school play had a special, dominant role, since two thirds of the country were under Turkish occupation until the end of the 17th century, neither Italian nor German road-companies ventured into the country.⁷

The tragedy entitled *Mercuriade*, besides its significance in Theatre History, is worthy of special attention because not forgetting its Lorrainian roots, it puts on stage Philippe-Emmanuel de Lorraine,

¹ Manuscrits de la bibliothèque du château de Chantilly, Recueil de pièces en vers et en prose, Ms. 687. Papier. 294 feuillets. 330×210 mm. Reliure veau fauve. Pamphlets historiques, pièces pour la plupart relatives à la Lorraine.

² Musée et bibliothèque du château de Chantilly, Ms. 687. Fol. 95v-129r. *La Mercuriade*, tragédie en cinq actes et en vers, par frère Dominique Gaspard.

³ POSTERT 19.

⁴ BIRKÁS 1927. 74.

⁵ VARGA – PINTÉR 2000. 47.

⁶ STAUD 1984. 6.

⁷ Even at the end of the 18th century there were several school dramas with a historical subject which studied the Long Turkish War looking back more than two hundred years. September 8th, 1772. in the Paulian college in Pápa the history of Vallonian mutiny was played. The printed program of the performance prevailed under the title: *The capture of the city of Pápa*. See: VARGA – PINTÉR 2000. 153.

Duke of Mercœur (1558–1602) when he, after the conciliation with Henry IV and leaving the Catholic League, entered into the service of Rudolf II in 1599 and joined anti-Turkish fights in Hungary. After his death he became a mythical hero and his memory was even mentioned at the time of reoccupation of Buda, at the end of 17th century, but this tragedy (or dramatized epic) is originated when his legend started to emerge in Lorraine. The tragedy about Duke Mercœur's exploits and death was written in 1605 based on Dominique Gaspard's personal memories, as well as reports and propaganda materials, including Alphonse de Ramberviller's writings that occurred in abundance 3-4 years earlier. In the edition of *Dévots Elancemens du poète chrestien* [Devout chagrins of a Christian poet]⁸ and the *Larmes publiques* [Public tears]⁹ there is a three-page-long dedication addressed to the readers summarizing the Hungarian adventures of the Lorrainian hero based on four different events. The first is that Kanizsa is occupied by the Turks in the fall of 1600, then they attack Mercœur's troops forcing their retreat. The second occasion happens in September 1601 when his soldiers take two Imperial fortresses, Csikvár and Csókakő, and then Székesfehérvár. The third event describes the recurring fighting, the upheaval in the enemy camp, the Turkish decampment and the death of their leaders. The fourth thematic argument refers to Mercœur's personal destiny, to his intention to return to Lorraine and then to his sudden death. This short recommendation to readers is just as much as *Mercuriade*, in other words, Dominique Gaspard's work is nothing more than Ramberviller's recommendation. Everything, including place and personal names is in it, actually is built around this four axes, so that we can be sure that the author read the 1603's edition of *Dévots Elancemens* and that Alphonse de Ramberviller was the inspiration for *Mercuriade*.

Dominique Gaspard wrote the *Mercuriade* in Lamarche in 1605 as a simple Trinitarian monk. Very little is known about his life but it is known that he was born in Châtenois¹⁰ in 1583 and studied in the Trinitarian Monastery of Lamarche.¹¹ The Trinitarian monastery of Lamarche, founded in 1239 by Henry II, count of Bar (1214–1239), was the scene of great clashes during the religious wars, partly due to its location at the French-Lorrainian border, partly because of the disorderly atmosphere and moral decline of the convent. It is certain that after 1605 Gaspard did not stay in Lamarche since in 1607 he published a leaflet in Paris for the death of Charles of Lorraine,¹² bishop of Metz and Strasbourg, younger son of Charles III, Duke of Lorraine (1545–1608). In this poem, in addition to the usual reproaches to „*cruel death*”, he poeticizes the merits of the deceased person, which in all respect condescend with a descendant of Charles the Great and Godfrey of Bouillon. In Paris, he most probably lived in the Saint Maturinus monastery of the Latin Quarter in the immediate vicinity of the university. At that time, he did not yet have any political experience, he went to Turkey and North Africa later, around 1610.

⁸ Les Dévots élancements du poète chrestien, présentés à très chrestien, très auguste et très victorieux monarque Henri III, roy de France et de Navarre. Pont-a-Mousson, par Melchior Bernard, 1603.

⁹ Les Larmes Publiques Sur Le Trespas de ... Philippe Emanuel de Lorraine ... Lieutenant General ... es armées d'Hongrie contre les Infideles. Avec Le Polemologue, ou Priere guerriere dont il usoit, & le narre de la Pompe funebre, faicte en ses obseques a Nancy. Pont-a-Mousson, Melchior Bernard, 1602.

¹⁰ Châtenois (Vosges department) originally was part of the Duchy of Lorraine and his the first capital about thirty kilometres north from Lamarche. For the biography of Dominique Gaspard see CULLIÈRE 2009. 18–27. Henceforth the published texts from the tragedy were taken from the edition of Cullière.

¹¹ The convent of the Trinitarians dealing with the redemption of Christian captives was established by hermits St. John de Matha, baron of Provence (1160–1213) and Felix de Valois (1127–1212). They were named Mathurians in France because their Monastery was close to the chapel of Saint Mathurin in Paris.

¹² GASPARD 1607.

In 1613 he published a small pamphlet¹³ on the vicissitudes of his Algerian mission saying thanks – according to the age – to Charles III for the financial support he received for two literary works, including *Mercuriade*. This work indicates his interest in the Ottoman invaders. He outlines the cruel trials of the Christian prisoners of the Turks before their release, and publishes a letter written by a Spanish Trinitarian detained in Algiers. In the opening lines Gaspard – addressing the General of the Order – also writes that he wanted to publish his work because he thinks it has a great significance for universal Christianity. We also know that at this time he became the secretary of Louis Petit¹⁴ the new General, elected on July 7, 1612 and after filling this position returned to Lorraine in 1616. Here, after the death of Pierre de Brye, he received a pastoral assignment. The reform movement inside the Trinitarian order created a number of conflicts, and as a result in 1622 Louis Petit General sent for the pastor of the problematic monastery of Lamarche, and then suspended Dominique Gaspard at the beginning of 1626.¹⁵ After some litigation, in 1627, Gaspard gave up his position and went to Paris. By this time he once again exploited his poetic talent incited by the death of the young-died Marie de Bourbon-Montpensier (1605–1627), Duchess of Orléans¹⁶ in the form of a dialogue between the royal court and Death.

Although Nicolas de Montreux (1561–1610),¹⁷ French poet, novelist and playwright has two Antique mining tragedies that are based on events of the period with clearly applicable allusions to Mercœur's feat, the plays of the era are basically still the revitalizations of the Greek-Latin dramas. One of the major peculiarities of *Mercuriade*, however, lies in the fact that it is one of the rare tragedies that elaborates on events of its period. We can predict even without a more precise exploration of its literary sources that the author plagiarizes significantly and skilfully build his borrowings into his work. It is likely that this play was written for a stage of an educational institution, because it can be said that school plays in the 16th and 18th centuries were a pan-European phenomenon.¹⁸ In any case, it perfectly meets the requirements of school plays, and contrary to the tragedies typical of the era,¹⁹ was written without any further political intentions, its sole purpose was to glorify Duke Mercœur. In the first act²⁰ Mercœur is compared to Skanderbeg²¹ and refers to it in several places that like the House of Lower Lorraine²²

¹³ GASPARD 1613.

¹⁴ CULLIÈRE 2009. 21.

¹⁵ DESLANDRES 1903. 238–240.

¹⁶ GASPARD 1627.

¹⁷ La tragédie de Cléopâtre. Paris, G. Des Rues, 1595.; La Sophonisbe, tragedie. Rouen, Raphaël Du Petit Val, 1601.

¹⁸ TŰSKÉS – KNAPP 2007. 343.

¹⁹ CHANTELOUVE [n. d.]; MATTHIEU 1589.

²⁰ CULLIÈRE 2009. 69.194.

²¹ The comparison of the two characters can also be found in works of Ramberviller and Montreux. See: DE RAMBERVILLER 1602. 12., 16.; resp. de MONTREUX 1608. 685. Later, in 1689, Bruslé de Montpleinchamp mentioned Scanderbeg in his work written on the Duke Mercœur among the famous Turk-destroyer heroes, besides the Hunyadis. See: BRUSLÉ DE MONTPLEINCHAMP 1689. 2.

²² The House of Lorraine descended from Guillaume de Boulogne, the brother of Godfrey of Bouillon. The annalists initially mixed up the Upper and Lower Lorrainian dynasties which originated from the division of the Empire of Lothair II. Later they wrote that Duke Adalbert, and his brother, Gérard d'Alsace, the Dauphin come from the branch of the Dukes of Metz. They were members of the Upper Lorrainian dynasty nominated by Henry III, Holy Roman Emperor. On the other hand, Godfrey of Bouillon was originated from the House of Lower Lorraine (later the Duchy of Brabant).

descended from Guillaume de Boulogne and his brother, Godfrey of Bouillon,²³ Mercœur himself is a descendant of them.²⁴ Gaspard lists masterly the main exploits of the Duke into the lines of the introductory dialogue between Mercœur and Rudolf Emperor.²⁵

Lorraine is my country, Mercœur is my name,
 Lorraine is my cradle, France is my glory,
 Philippe is my first name, as Emmanuel the second,
 I am a descendant of Godfrey, whose fame is spreading
 from the East to the black West, when forced
 his will on the great Jerusalem.
 The great prince, Charles,²⁶ is my first cousin,
 who was a peaceful ruler of Lorrainians,
 I am the last Valois Henrik's brother-in-law,
 who wore the yoke of Gauls in France,
 I am the son of the great Vaudémont, who made
 his glorious memory immortal in the sky with many victories.²⁷
 I am the one who showed the strength of my
 animated arms to the formerly lucky Bretons,²⁸
 and to the bloodthirsty Swiss in their striped uniforms,
 who left their cantons to attack the French troops.²⁹
 The Lorrainians, Bretons, Germans and Picardians³⁰
 can testify how good a soldier I am.³¹

Mercœur is depicted as an ideal strategist who is good at several scientific fields,³² who is defended by Pallas Athene and Mars³³ and who, after his death, is characterized with the greatest respect by Archduke Matthias.³⁴ The Turkish Kiaia also refers to the great victor

²³ CHAMPIER 1510.

²⁴ CULLIÈRE 2009. 71.242., 83.519.

²⁵ CULLIÈRE 2009. 71.239–256.

²⁶ Charles III, Duke of Lorraine (1543–1608)

²⁷ Nicolas of Lorraine, Duke of Mercœur, the father of Duke Mercœur may have played a role in the occupation of the Three Bishoprics (Metz, Toul and Verdun) in 1552 and in the preparation of the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559.

²⁸ Refers to the victory at Craon, 23rd May, 1592.

²⁹ Refers to the battle at Dormans (10th October, 1575) when Duke Guise repulsed one part of the troops of John Casimir, Count Palatine of Simmern where many Swiss mercenaries were serving. In that time Duke Mercœur was only the marquis of Nomeny and took part in his first campaigns on the side of Henry I, Duke of Guise.

³⁰ Refers to the battle in September, 1580 in La Fère which made it possible for the Royal troops to recapture the strategically important protestant location.

³¹ As far as Mercœur's heroic military deeds Gaspard is using the text of Francis de Sales when describing the different battles. See: DE SALES 1767. 204.

³² See: RAMBERVILLER 1602. 15.

³³ According to the words of Archduke Matthias Mercœur is the embodiment of the mind (Athena) and power (Mars), 83.532–533, 147–148.2313–2314, 147.2285–2286. (conf. 121.1613–1614.), the Kiaia compared him to Mars (111.1344).

³⁴ The Scourge of Ottomans (*le fléau des Ottomans*, 2327), Pearl of Lorrainians, the Honour of our weapons./ the Phoenix of our age, the Gendarme of gendarmes (*Perle des Lorrains, le bonheur de nos armes./ Phénix de notre temps, gendarme des gendarmes*, 1973–1974.), the Terror of Turks (*la terreur des Turquois*, 2000.).

of Székesfehérvár as Mars³⁵ and compares him to Hercules,³⁶ Alexander the Great³⁷ and due to the homophony that offers an easy association to Mercury³⁸ too and talks about him appreciatively.³⁹ The evidences of the deep religious submission of Mercœur are his prayers before the battles⁴⁰ and his confessions in which he sees himself as a tool in the hands of God.⁴¹ In spite of the fact that the author is a Trinitarian monk and therefore is more sensitive to the war between the Christians and Muslims at the gate of Europe, he does not use religious and political approaches. Characterizing the enemy, following the habit of authors of the era,⁴² he uses several negative attributes and, for example, constantly refers to the Ottomans as „dogs”.⁴³ He uses strongly pejorative epithets when talking about „swollen-headed Ottomans”, „loathsome infidels”,⁴⁴ „circumcised”,⁴⁵ „bastards”⁴⁶ or during the Wars of Religion midst of battles „foreigners”.⁴⁷ He does not have an extensive knowledge about Hungary therefore uses smaller publication that were published in Paris in 1601 and 1602 which described numerous miraculous natural effects on the Hungarian sky.⁴⁸ In the topography the effect of models, especially Virgil is always noticeable. He most probably borrowed the picture of the Danube (Danou) river’s⁴⁹ water muddled with yellow sand⁵⁰ from Georgics.⁵¹ The attributes connected to the country (*poor, captive, puny*)⁵² are mainly pejorative, however, the word *Hungarian* always refers to the Imperial Army or the united power of Christianity.⁵³ Finally the death of the hero is painful, but not irretrievable, and there are no negative sentiments attached to the Hungarian territory as the events go along in time. Gaspard is following the real line of history and escapes being pretentious. He carefully uses the language of the theatre and gives a new colour to the story. The *Mercuriade* does not keep the classical dramatic form and therefore it is a mixed-style tragic renaissance story which tells the events in a poetic form.

The biblical picture of the benignant God is somewhat modified by Gaspard⁵⁴ and by other authors of the time suggesting that the Christians have to tolerate the sufferings caused by the Ottomans

³⁵ CULLIÈRE 2009. 111.1344.

³⁶ CULLIÈRE 2009. 82.481.513., 139.2076.

³⁷ CULLIÈRE 2009. 106.1155.

³⁸ CULLIÈRE 2009. 106.1157.

³⁹ CULLIÈRE 2009. 106.1161., 109.1273., 111.1337., 113.1417.

⁴⁰ First prayer lines 213–216, 2nd prayer lines 395–412, 3rd prayer lines 552–553, 4th prayer lines 1953–1960, 5th prayer lines 2081–2085.

⁴¹ CULLIÈRE 2009. 79.407–412., 84.564–566.

⁴² It occurs many times in the works of Ramberviller. See: Ramberviller 1602. 21., 22.

⁴³ CULLIÈRE 2009. 63.16., 66.107., 77.355., 77.371. Another version is a „Castrated Dog” (*chien châtré*) 91.743, which is a frequently used curse word by Ancient authors. Confer. Semivir Phryx (Phrygian eunuch) Virgil, Aen. XII. 99.

⁴⁴ CULLIÈRE 2009. 65.88.

⁴⁵ CULLIÈRE 2009. 67.132., 131.1882.

⁴⁶ CULLIÈRE 2009. 91.725.

⁴⁷ CULLIÈRE 2009. 91.726.

⁴⁸ *Histoire memorable...* 1602.

⁴⁹ CULLIÈRE 2009. 67.130.

⁵⁰ CULLIÈRE 2009. 68.159–160.

⁵¹ „... where the wild Danube throws up its yellow sand ...” Virgil, Georg. III. 350.

⁵² CULLIÈRE 2009. 69.190., 72.274., 92.762.

⁵³ E.g. CULLIÈRE 2009. 70.228: *le bon droit des Hongrois*, in fact it is the right of Emperor.

⁵⁴ CULLIÈRE 2009. 64.33–40.

because of their heresy.⁵⁵ This motive constantly occurs in texts of the period, e.g. Pierre Matthieu says in his *French History*: „*God slashed down on the Christians by the hand of Ottomans the same way as the father shows his rage by allowing the servant to punish his children*”.⁵⁶ In this context even the Holy Roman Emperor is powerless under the pressure of Ottoman yoke and calls on God by saying „*Merciful Father look at our debased hearts*”.⁵⁷ The first act starts with a long and sad prayer of the Emperor asking God to succour his subjects and to achieve this send the hero whom he saw in his dream and who can bring victory.⁵⁸ Mercœur is characterized as an oneiric hero and the Emperor offers him to lead his army together with Archduke Matthias. The scenes that depict the ruins of Kanizsa and the fortunate retreat of the Imperial Army remind us of landscapes of Virgil’s *Aeneid*.⁵⁹ In spite of the lack of food and the high number of the enemy Mercœur leads the retreat very cautiously. His faith in the final victory makes the defeat under a positive judgment and he gives an excellent speech to motivate the soldiers. The Duke is surrounded by officers and soldiers who respect him, and they are similarly glorified by him at length. Gaspard underlines the heroism of Mercœur which is obvious because of his constant presence during the retreat.⁶⁰ Never forgetting his gratitude to God Mercœur joins Archduke Matthias and renews his oath to the Emperor.⁶¹ Because the 16 000 brave Hungarian and French soldiers have to face 120 000 Turks,⁶² Archduke Matthias cautions Mercœur⁶³ against the unreasonable hopes and warns him about the location of Székesfehérvár:⁶⁴

Do not think that such a well-positioned place surrounded with
fortresses and walls can be taken very quickly.
The hopes of the great Duke have to be re-evaluated.
It is nearly impossible because there is no way to get
close to it due to the surrounding marshes.

⁵⁵ Confer. PÁL, ÁCS: „Isten haragja – magyarnak példája”: A hun történet két értelmezése. [„The rage of God – the example of Hungarians”. Two interpretations of the History of the Huns]. In: GERGELY, TÓTH (szerk.): *Clio inter arma. Tanulmányok a 16–18. századi magyarországi történetírásról*. Budapest: MTA BTK Történettudományi Intézet, 2014. 23.

⁵⁶ „*Dieu s’est seruy du bras des Ottomans, pour chastier les Cherstiens, comme volontiers le pere pour monstret plus son courroux, permet qu’vn valet chastie ses enfans.*” Pierre Matthieu: *Histoire de France et Des choses memorables, aduenues aux Prouinces estrangeres Durant sept années de Paix, du regne de Henri VIII Roy de France et de Nauarre divisée en sept Livres*. Paris, Jamet Metayer, 1605. 322.

⁵⁷ CULLIÈRE 2009. 66.104.

⁵⁸ CULLIÈRE 2009. 63–69.1–212.

⁵⁹ CULLIÈRE 2009. 82.501–504. The well-known lines from *Aeneid* (Aen. II, 55–57) are cited word for word by Francis de Sales in his work: „*Troiaque nunc staret, Priamique arx alta maneret.*” Cf. DE SALES 1767. 208.

⁶⁰ Francis de Sales writes about the presence of Mercœur at the retreat of rear-guard: DE SALES 1767. 209.

⁶¹ CULLIÈRE 2009. 85.576–578.

⁶² This data at Ramberviller is 14 000 for Imperial troops, against 120 000 enemy soldiers; Francis de Sales estimates the number of Christian troops 13 000 against the Ottoman overpower counting 120 000–140 000 persons. Cf. RAMBERVILLER 1603. 231.; DE SALES 1767. 207.

⁶³ CULLIÈRE 2009. 87.627–632.

⁶⁴ RAMBERVILLER 1602. 11.; resp. DE SALES 1767. 212., resp. HUSSON 35.: „*This town lies in the middle of a marsh, not controlled at all, surrounded by good and strong walls, and by two large suburbs. These are defended by terraces containing dense oak forest and heaps of faggot in a way that the cannonballs can make only holes in it. Sebastian Münster describes the town saying that it is surrounded by the rivers of Danube and Sár; but he took the town of Pressburg with these two rivers for Belgrade (also called Veissenburg), since here no river, but only the marsh is flowing, which is 8 miles long on this side ...*”

Influenced by Antique examples the exhortations given by Mercœur before the battles include the names of Christian and Antique Gods.⁶⁵ The chorus of the French and Lorrainians refers to the end of the civil war in their home country and expresses the willingness of the soldiers to wage war in a new territory.⁶⁶

At the 3rd act⁶⁷ Mustafa, the Turkish Sultan, shows proudly his authority and promises that he will overthrow the Emperor.⁶⁸ He is the aggressive usufructuary of Iron Age and the devastator of natural landscape⁶⁹ who is able to direct everything with a twinkling of his eye. The sultan who is acting like a God is definitely sure about his victory because Mercœur is only a human being.⁷⁰ The Pasha of Buda brings the report of the recapture of Székesfehérvár and the loss of Csíkvár and Csókakő as well as about the operations of the Imperial Army. The offensive described in the narrative of Kiaia takes place at noon which is exactly the time when Mercœur broke into the fortified redoubt on September 20, 1601. At the same time Gaspard's description of siege mentions some events which appeared earlier,⁷¹ actually during the attack of the first suburbs, the conquest of the lower town, the attack on downtown, between September 10 and 20. At that point Mustafa's revenge is directed against Mercœur⁷² who represents the Imperial Army with his French troops.⁷³ The pictures of the stampedes inevitably remind us of the massacre of Trojans in Virgil's Aeneid.⁷⁴ The scene of the destruction of suburbs is very painful as well as of the attacks against the lower town and the upper town, during which the fear and the desperate opposition of the assaulted is also shown. Besides the excellent strategy applied by the fearless Mercœur the cruelty of the victorious troops of the Emperor is also described, which reality is based on the report of Husson.⁷⁵ After the victorious march of the Imperial troops⁷⁶ the story is appreciably outlined only in rough lines because Gaspard's main information source, Ramberviller himself does not include too many details, either.⁷⁷ However, after the declaration of the victory of Mercœur it sounds very strange from Mustafa's mouth,⁷⁸ to use almost the same words as Mercœur in the 2nd act: „*Oh Belgrade, once upon a time it was the unique and most favourite seat of the Hungarians kings!*”⁷⁹

The structure of the 4th act differs from the rest in that it shows alternately the camp of the Emperor and its enemies, and the outcome of the battles causes a terrific upheaval on the scene.

⁶⁵ CULLIÈRE 2009. 90–92.691–760.

⁶⁶ CULLIÈRE 2009. 94–95.815–856.

⁶⁷ The 3rd act containing 738 lines starts with Mustafa's 140-line monologue and later the Kiaia and the Pasha of Buda join in the conversation and take turns speaking in well-rounded sentences.

⁶⁸ CULLIÈRE 2009. 97–100.857–998.

⁶⁹ According to Ancient authors the Golden Age was followed by the Silver, the Brass and the Iron Ages. See: Ovid, *Met.* I. 89–162.

⁷⁰ CULLIÈRE 2009. 100.985–986.

⁷¹ CULLIÈRE 2009. 106.1170–1171.

⁷² CULLIÈRE 2009. 117.1521–1526.

⁷³ CULLIÈRE 2009. 112.1368.

⁷⁴ CULLIÈRE 2009. 113–114.1399–1440.

⁷⁵ HUSSON 40.

⁷⁶ CULLIÈRE 2009. 113.1411–1422.

⁷⁷ RAMBERVILLER 1603. 232.

⁷⁸ CULLIÈRE 2009. 115.1471.

⁷⁹ CULLIÈRE 2009. 87.621–622.

Gaspard finds an opportunity to recollect the events of the past when a Christian ambassador on his way to Prague⁸⁰ remembers the unsuccessful attempts of the Turks to recapture Székesfehérvár.⁸¹ One important part of the tragedy is the episode when the Grand vizier condemns the cowardliness of the leaders of his army, mainly of the Pasha of Buda⁸² because the captured town belonged to his administrative area. He calls him „*Marrano*”, which insult is used to suggest perfidy, treason, weakness of soul, and continuously uses an ironic language with him (heroic deeds, sloth and courageous soldier). The Pasha tries to defend himself against the harsh words of the Grand vizier saying⁸³ that the success of the Imperial troops was the consequence of a tweak simulating the siege of Buda. The Pasha is discussing the value of heroism using the stereotypes of his time⁸⁴ and feeling his self-respect offended, plans another attack on Székesfehérvár.⁸⁵ To his exhortation speech⁸⁶ that evokes Mercœur⁸⁷ the soldiers reply in a self-sacrificing manner.⁸⁸ The Imperial Army⁸⁹ that was previously identified with the French soldiers is labelled here as Lorrainians⁹⁰ and therefore Mercœur’s figure becomes blatantly dominant. Gaspard was definitely influenced by Ramberviller who wrote that the cavalry regiment of Mercœur was composed of six separate cornets, one of them was his own and two others were commanded by two Lorrainians noblemen.⁹¹ However, it is a surprise in the Pasha’s speech that he addresses the Hussar as *dear friend* and *soldier companion*⁹² and the calls for a common fight against the invader Emperor. The connection between the two camps is assured by a spy who runs to Mercœur to warn him about the threatening attack.⁹³ Mercœur, Matthias and their soldiers bravely deploy⁹⁴ and the victory of the Lorrainian hero becomes obvious. The end of the battle and the death of the two Ottoman leaders – the Pasha and the Kiaia – is registered by the author’s blocking.⁹⁵ During the celebration of the Christian troops Mercœur is planning the siege of Buda⁹⁶ and reminds the Emperor that as a descendant of Godfrey he fulfilled his sacred mission.⁹⁷ His thanksgiving to God cannot be left out of the scene and he tells Matthias his willingness to return home for a brief period. The chorus of the Hungarians

⁸⁰ This retrospective narrative technique makes it possible to revisualize the events in the present, the same way as Virgil gives to the mouth of Aeneas to narrate the story of the Trojan War and their escape. Cf. „*quamquam animus meminisse horret luctuque refugit, incipiam*” Virg. Aen. II. 12–13.

⁸¹ CULLIÈRE 2009. 121–122.1595–1646.

⁸² CULLIÈRE 2009. 123.1675–1683. 82. This disagreement is mentioned by all the French sources in detail, but the other Hungarian and Turkish reports remain silent on this issue and Ibrahim Peçevi just refutes these rumours.

⁸³ CULLIÈRE 2009. 128.1799.

⁸⁴ CULLIÈRE 2009. 125–131.1733–1886.

⁸⁵ CULLIÈRE 2009. 125–131.1733–1886.

⁸⁶ CULLIÈRE 2009. 132.1887–1897.

⁸⁷ CULLIÈRE 2009. 92.763–770.

⁸⁸ CULLIÈRE 2009. 132.1898–900.

⁸⁹ CULLIÈRE 2009. 112.1368.

⁹⁰ CULLIÈRE 2009. 132.1890.

⁹¹ RAMBERVILLER 1603. 233.

⁹² CULLIÈRE 2009. 132.1893.

⁹³ CULLIÈRE 2009. 132.1901–1918.

⁹⁴ CULLIÈRE 2009. 133.1919–1932.

⁹⁵ CULLIÈRE 2009. 133.1933–1934.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Ample discours...* 12.

⁹⁷ DE SALES 1767. 193.

closes the act who – as supporters of renewal and peace⁹⁸ – would like to express their will that instead of the Turks the whole country should be placed under Imperial rule, as the Emperor had formerly given voice to. The chorus is singing about Mercœur as the „*boulevard of Christianity*” as Gaspard could read it in Francis de Sales’s funeral oration.⁹⁹

The whole last act is devoted to Mercœur’s elevated and heroic words. Gaspard takes the description of the agony of Mercœur from Francis de Sales’s¹⁰⁰ and Ramberviller’s¹⁰¹ description, as later, for example, Palma Cayet will do.¹⁰² As Mercœur is dying in Nuremberg, he says farewell to each of his family members including his wife, his daughter, as well as his sister Marguerite of Lorraine (1564–1625) and brother Eric of Lorraine (1576–1623), bishop of Verdun.

As the hero’s death crowns Gaspard’s work, Francis of Sales makes a similar connection¹⁰³ between the end, that is the culmination of the work as well as the end of Mercœur’s life, that is his apotheosis. After the death of the protagonist Gaspard also takes the floor:

The end has crowned Mercœur
this same end crowns my lines.

The long monologues and the constant presence of choruses suggest an archaic feature and makes the acts rather disproportionate. Gaspard faithfully follows the narratives of Ramberviller, and leaves out some dramatic prerequisites. In spite of this the drama has two undoubtedly great merits that praise the talent of the poet. On the one hand, the act is constantly stirring and eventful showing a real epic power despite of the slightly unnatural rhetoric. The agony of Mercœur, for example, together with the moaning of nobles present remind us of an action movie in the sense that building from simple images and emotions we have the feeling that the hero must experience this new test after Kanizsa and Székesfehérvár. On the other hand, there are some details in the piece that the subject does not necessarily require. Dominique Gaspard namely does not malign the enemy consciously and all persons in the Turkish camp are presented as human beings, which makes the confrontations more exciting. In the 4th act, for example, the Grand vizier and the Pasha follows a very intelligent conversation based on rational arguments. Through the women’s chorus of Székesfehérvár Gaspard writes that there is only one humanity, one courage, and one innocence.

Dominique Gaspard displays the whole of Duke Mercœur’s Hungarian activity from October 1599 to February 1602 starting with the events in Esztergom as consequence of which he will get the mission from the Emperor that will last till his death. The time frame of the drama is shortened so that it can produce the effect that the military events are occur in rapid succession. So, for example, the siege of Kanizsa immediately appears from the first conversation of Mercœur and the Emperor, although this will take place only a year later. In the same way the attack on the two fortresses, Csíkvár and Csókakő, is immediately discussed. There is, however, no mention of Mercœur’s return to France in the winter of 1600 or of the months spent in Vienna in 1601 since minimizing the idle time accelerates the rhythm. The battles take place between the acts, the siege of Kanizsa happens between the 1st and 2nd, the recapture of Székesfehérvár

⁹⁸ CULLIÈRE 2009. 136–137.2001–2045.

⁹⁹ DE SALES 1767. 222.

¹⁰⁰ DE SALES 1767. 220–221.

¹⁰¹ RAMBERVILLER 1603. 125, 243.

¹⁰² CAYET 1612. 278r.

¹⁰³ DE SALES 1767. 219.

and its suburbs between the 2nd and 3rd, the Turkish counter-attacks between the 3rd and 4th. Only in the middle of the 4th act takes place a decisive battle which provisionally confirms the position of the Imperial Army and entails the death of the Turkish leaders. The 5th act that shows the agony of the hero without a transition, is also a skilful abbreviation. If this does not correspond to the ideal tragic time, it can still describe simultaneous actions that do not interfere with historical facts. Gaspard faithfully presents the events and he obviously read the publications written between 1600 and 1602, including Francis de Sales's funeral oration and Ramberviller's above mentioned works. Based on these he can exactly talk about the exact power of the participating armies, the retreat from Kanizsa and the deployments around Székesfehérvár. In the spring of 1601, the opposition in the Turkish military leadership gave the idea of a long debate between the Grand Vizier and the Pasha of Buda in the 4th act, which was reported by several French correspondents. The other discussed adventures, such the appearance of a Christian who escaped from a Turkish prison and who reports in a moment of strategic importance to his camp,¹⁰⁴ or Mercœur's negotiation with the renegade enemy¹⁰⁵ also seem credible.

However, the epic genre, in addition to simplification, often includes amplification, especially when the available facts are limited. For example, Gaspard wishes to describe the occupation of the fortress of Csikvár and Csókakő as a majestic event, however the eyewitnesses only briefly said that the Turks quickly surrendered after short negotiations. The lack of information brings with itself the requirement of „enrichment” or credible lyricism, which has the risk of losing more than we gain. In this case the text will be too talkative and the reader will not know at a certain point in time whether he is still in Hungary, whether he is reading about the pillage of Troy or the siege of Jerusalem. However, this is not a problem because the multitude of battles reinforces rather than undermines the tragic mood. Occasionally less available information makes a longer preparation of historical events necessary, for example, Mercœur's soldiers cautiously advance with the help of faggots in the swamp of the fortress of Csókakő, although works of the time place this event later, near the walls of Székesfehérvár. The author notes this detail, but rather places it somewhere else, probably in order to add more colour and weight and to expand a passage for which he doesn't have enough data. Let us also note that the play does not give a realistic depiction of the political conflict, it seems as if only French or Lorrainians stood up against the Turks defending the Hungarian homeland. However, as the play progresses, the scene becomes more and more blurred, and finally the Imperial frame completely disappears. Mercœur gets a superhuman magnitude who is so fearful like an Antique God crossing the battlefield. However, these are acceptable changes because in Gaspard's play history comes to the service of the tragedy genre. Nevertheless the play contains an obvious mistake. The Turkish Sultan, Mehmed III (1595–1603) is named Mustafa, although there was no Turkish sultan named like that before 1617. According to Alain Cullière, a French researcher, this mistake would be too obvious not to be deliberate.¹⁰⁶ In his view, the designation of the sultan by a different, but similar sounding name casts on the one hand doubt about the long-term validity of his rank, and on the other hand, shows the deceitfulness of the character. In any case it is certain that besides Mercœur there are three historical characters: the Emperor, whose name is never given, the Archduke, who is always referred to by his first name, and the Sultan, who has an incorrect name. Following the logic of Cullière by omitting the name of the Emperor the author underlines the strength of the empire

¹⁰⁴ CULLIÈRE 2009. 103.1069.

¹⁰⁵ CULLIÈRE 2009. 113.1411–1422.

¹⁰⁶ CULLIÈRE 2009. 30–31.

in the context of a weak power such as II. Rudolf's reign. In contrast Archduke Matthias's designation places him back in his worthy historical place and makes him a real political actor.

Gaspard's work draws Mercœur's portrait in rough lines, rather characterizing him as an idol, proving that the piece was written for a young audience. *Mercuriade* fulfils the requirements of a school drama in every respect, and gives a morally acceptable example for the young. A larger emphasis is given to the orations by the many monologues, the long tirades and the lengthy choruses. More than half of the play is composed of texts which are told by the actors facing to the audience, and conversations are – in the majority of cases – only role changes. In fact neither of the actors has any effect on the other by speaking, they appear only next to each other. The military exhortative speeches which by their nature should strengthen courage, are heard by experienced soldiers who are themselves sufficiently determined. The meeting of the Emperor and Mercœur in the first act quickly changes into a listing of stereotypes in verse form and the conversation with Matthias is similarly constructed in the next act.

In the second half of the last act the Emperor and Archduke Matthias are together to glorify the deceased hero, but they do not speak to each other even if they both share similar thoughts and their words are in line. In the 4th act the conflict between the Grand Vizier and the Pasha, two heavily caricatured actors replay the eternal scene of *Miles gloriosus*. The number of choruses which is doubled from the 3rd act, produce a performance which can be beautifully recited, their tone is pathetic and exalted. The almost always reciting tone is not necessarily the consequence of Gaspard's clumsiness, especially if he intended the play for a student performance. He puts the emphasis on the speaking, which does not need to be played only recited, proper for young and shy actors who are unable to show the story by the power of their body, to perform the events.

The *Mercuriade* is an ideal school drama because it provides a good casting for the students of a 17th century Catholic boy school. The presence of no female actor encumbers the work of the stage director. The chorus of women of Székesfehérvár appears only as a distant group and in their case the message is more important than their presence. The main characters of the two camps are on the one hand, the Emperor, Duke Mercœur and Matthias, on the other hand, Mustafa, the Pasha, the Kiaia and the Grand vizier all of them talk more than 100 lines. Their roles are played by students who are not primarily expected to be actors, but to recite well. The actor who plays Mercœur's role has to mark 427 lines and the Kiaia's actor has to memorize 353 lines. The other actors have shorter roles on stage which does not require too much memory.

The high number of the historical school dramas can be explained by the lack of History teaching and at the same time by the importance of history. Certainly the popularity of the war theme can also be explained by the fact that the 16–18th century colleges educated only 10–18-year-old boys who were particularly interested in military history, battles and the fate of famous historical personalities. And of course – as we mentioned it before – the practical advantage of the historical theme is that the main characters are always men, and the drama can be performed without female actors. The staging of a historical theme is also a gratifying task, because there is no need for dramatic inventions, as there is no such drama writing fantasy that could compete with the excitement and the twists and turns of real historical events.¹⁰⁷ We do not know whether or not Gaspard's piece has been performed, but there is a high probability that it was written for the previously mentioned school stage. Especially as theatrical education at colleges began in the early 17th century and not only the most frequently mentioned Jesuits were outstanding in this field.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ VARGA – PINTÉR 2000. 46–47.

¹⁰⁸ On the Catholic schools performances and their main representatives in France in the second half of the 16th century and at the beginning of the 17th century see HARASZTI 1904., 1908. V–LXX.

The lack of dramatic accessories facilitates the work of the director, as *Mercuriade* does not need any theatrical inventions. Since there is no unity of place, the external and internal scenes are freely mixed with each other without any settings, unless we assume the existence of a medieval stage machinery. The first act in all likelihood takes place in Prague, the second in the Imperial camp, and the third in the Turkish camp. The 4th act brings us to the battlefield and presents the two camps one after the other, between which the movement is mediated by the ambassador and the spy. The 5th act begins in Nuremberg, Mercœur's death site, ends in the Imperial court where the hero is lamented, and the transition between the scenes is ensured by the chorus. The stage can be left without a setting, but actors need a make-up and a costume so that they can be easily recognized.

Apart from the boasts of Mustafa and the ridiculous clashes between the Grand vizier and the Pasha, he describes the two camps in a similar way. He does not mock the Turks continuously and sometimes their humanitarian behaviour also appears. The Iron Age which makes the war possible is blessed by both camps.¹⁰⁹ On both sides there is some xenophobia sometimes, which is actually a certain form of patriotism.¹¹⁰ When the Pasha gives an exhortation speech to his soldiers,¹¹¹ his words sound just like Mercœur's or Matthias's words.¹¹² Courage and glory are appreciated on both sides using nearly the same words (cf. Mercœur – line 648, Kiaia – line 1871). The similarities of opponents which take repetitions and a kind of monotony in the piece, might be intentional. Gaspard might have been trapped in the tragic language, and with little knowledge of the Ottoman civilization he was not able to distinguish between actors and situations. In any case, the similarity of the enemies suggests that in the midst of the difficulties and the struggles there is only one humanity in the drama, in which denigrating the enemy would reduce the value of victory.

The dramaturgically and thematically original *Mercuriade* is far less significant from a poetic point of view. In terms of the epic language we certainly have to count with the Pléiade poets' influence, although the author does not overextend frills, and, for example, he does not use too many compound adjectives, Greek-Roman loanwords. The language is simple, but pure, there is no archaism or provincialism and only a few outdated expressions can be observed reminding the romances.¹¹³ From time to time the verses exposed to unnatural syntax are well-paced, sometimes easier, sometimes uneasier, but rhymes alternate well with each other. The *Mercuriade* basically relies on four works, of which it borrowed significantly. Its starting point – as mentioned above – is the work of Ramberviller, *Dévots élancements du poète chrétien* from 1603. In addition to the title poem, this volume includes several pieces that discuss Mercœur's Hungarian adventures. It is also clear that he knew Ronsard, Du Bellay, Du Bartas and beside Garnier the theatre of Pierre Matthieu was also known for him. He was also interested in works written and published twenty years earlier in Lorraine, such as Fronton du Duc's *Pucelle* or Jean Robelin's *Thébaïde*, which also shows the influence of Du Bartas. Of course, he was also affiliated with Antique literature, inspired by several lines of Virgil, sometimes the influence of Ovidius and Seneca can also be felt, although it is also true that in the era of Gaspard Aeneid's influence could be traced in almost every work. The extensive knowledge of the author, despite his borrowings, assures the originality of the work.

¹⁰⁹ CULLIÈRE 2009. 91.747–756., 97.867–874.

¹¹⁰ CULLIÈRE 2009. 79.404, 91.726., 115.1470., 117.1520.

¹¹¹ CULLIÈRE 2009. 132.1887–1897.

¹¹² CULLIÈRE 2009. 92.761–768.

¹¹³ CULLIÈRE 2009. 35.

Although Dominique Gaspard's poetic talents are beyond doubt,¹¹⁴ *Mercuriade* cannot be considered a lost masterpiece. However, the three main merits of the tragedy cannot be debated. Gaspard elaborates on the presentation of Mercœur's personality as an observer of the same era, especially for the period when the Duke – discharged from Henry IV's bond – goes in Imperial service. It is not negligible that the tragedy was written when the legend of the Lorrainian hero was unfolding, so it can be interpreted as one of the brick of Mercœur's myth-making. Finally, since it is almost certain that we are dealing with a masterpiece of 17th century school drama, it is possible to study through him the particularities of plays written with a didactic purpose for the students.

The volume containing the single manuscript of *Mercuriade* was previously part of Alexandre Martineau de Soleinne's (1784–1842) library, an amateur French book collector.¹¹⁵ The *Mercuriade* may have been printed in its own time, although the manuscript does not hold any typographic information. The many typos, repeated or missing lines, and hypometric lines probably justify Alain Cullière's conclusion¹¹⁶ that the only manuscript left was a secondary „back-up copy”, originally destined for destruction. Due to its unique position, however, its significance is indisputable both from a literary and a historical point of view, and like all pieces of the collection – including Dominique Gaspard's *Mercuriade* – deserve special attention from the perspective of more than four centuries.

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¹¹⁴ LACROIX 1843. 166.

¹¹⁵ LACROIX 1843. 165–166.

¹¹⁶ CULLIÈRE 2012.

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