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The Black Legend of Hungary?
Ferenc Forgách (1535–1577) and his *Commentarii*

According the sceptic sentence of Francesco Patrizi (1529-1597) in his *Fifth dialogue* of *Della historia dialoghi diece* (1560), the history or any histo–rical narrative can never correspond to any historical reality, beacuse if it is written by insiders, i.e. the public men, it will necessarily take a political side instead of „reporting just the facts" while the outsiders, the private men will never understand the proper reasons and motives behind the facts, so their narratives will be more like rumours picked up in a barber-shop instead of authentic history, which according Patrizi's pessimistic conclusion, cannot ever be written.

Ferenc Forgách and his *Commentarii* seem to be an exception to this rule. The author is a well-educated humanist, who held first at the court in Vienna, then in Gyulafehérvár important administrative positions, so he knew as a proper insider the world he has written about. And what he did write was mostly more than unflattering for the treated ones. Among the events between 1551 and 1572 dealt in the *Commentarii* annalistically, Forgách reveals to his readers a real catalogue of mortal sins, weaknesses and moral decay. Alcoholism, rapiny, murder, adultery and corruption – these are the main features and motives of the Hungarian and partly the European contemporary history by him, for those the unique solace could be only a predestinarian hope in God's vengeance. These stories are in fact what one could pick up in a barber-shop anywhere in Hungary in the 16th century; in most of the cases they do not (or only partly) correspond to historical reality, but open a window into a lost mentality of a whole community: the early-modern Hungarian gentry and especially their politico-historical ideas, beliefs or fears.