When Luther died in 1546, the Reformation had really only begun to transform the ecclesiastical landscape in the kingdom of Hungary. Sixty years would pass before the Peace of Vienna (1606) extended freedom of confessional allegiance to the nobility, towns, and military settlements in royal Hungary. When, as a precondition for his coronation, Matthias II Habsburg accepted articles of the Hungarian diet that ratified this peace, he recognized the legal existence of Protestant churches in Hungary according to which they could elect their own ecclesiastical administrators.

During the following sixty years, Lutherans struggled to preserve their often-reaffirmed right to exist, which was abrogated during the 1670s, the “sorrowful decade”. Habsburg attempts to cleanse Hungary of “heretics and rebels” did not result in the extinction of Protestantism there. Foreign criticism, Turkish belligerence, and the hostility of many Hungarian nobles converged in the insurrection of Emmerich Thököly which compelled Leopold I to convene a diet in Sopron in 1681. It allowed Protestants to build churches in designated locations in royal Hungary and preserved them from the annihilation that had occurred in Bohemia.

This essay traces the complex, variegated development of Lutheranism in Hungary between the synod of Arud in 1545 and the diet of Sopron in 1681. The former date marks the beginning of the

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2 English equivalents are used for most given names of persons referred to in the text. Family names are provided in an appropriate native form. Place names are those currently used. This makes identification on a standard map easier. The use of Bratislava, a name dating from the 20th century for Pressburg, Prešporok, Pozsony or Posoniensis is anachronistic, but the use of one of the historic names would not make the location any clearer to the English speaking reader. A table comparing placenames is appended to this contribution.
confessional differentiation of the Reformation in Hungary. The second date marks the restoration of a legal, albeit very restricted, existence of Protestant churches in Habsburg Hungary. The focus is upon royal Hungary where the majority of the population became Lutheran and, to a lesser extent, on Transylvania, where Lutheranism became almost exclusively the religion of the Siebenbürgen “Saxons”. It notes the complex interaction of social, economic and political interests, personal ambition, family connections and status, ethnic identity, and religious persuasion that shaped the development of Lutheranism in the kingdom. It sketches changes in the legal status of Lutheranism, the development of its ecclesiastical institutions, and the major theological disputes that defined Lutheran identity and preserved its integrity.

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Luther’s emphasis upon the priesthood of all believers, justification by faith alone, and the active participation of believers in the worship and administration of a congregation, was congruent with the attitudes of many urban leaders and nobles in Hungary at the beginning of the 16th century. The educational and moral concerns of humanism, which emphasized eloquence and piety, and the effective use of the “black art” of printing likewise contributed to the dissemination of the Reformation. Hussite warriors, who invaded northern Hungary during the first half of the 15th century or who served as mercenaries in the “black legion” of Matthias Corvinus, did not directly influence the initial spread of the Reformation into Hungary. Slovak Lutherans did use Hussite hymnbooks, translations of the Bible, and theological literature in Czech in the later 16th century.3