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## Kings and Oligarchs in Hungary at the Turn of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries

In the decades around the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Hungarian royal authority sank into a deep crisis. While previously the king had been the exclusive supreme lord of the country, from the 1270s on some members of the nobility managed to build up powers in the possession of which they could successfully resist even the king. The present study explores the road which led to the emergence of oligarchical provinces. It presents both the common and the individual features of these provinces, defining the conceptual difference which apparently existed between the oligarchs who opposed royal power and the lords of territories who remained loyal to the ruler. Consequently, the study analyses the measures which were taken first by the last Árpáds, and then by the first member of the new, Angevin dynasty, Charles I, in order to neutralize oligarchical powers. By the end of the study it becomes apparent why it was Charles I who finally managed to break the power of the oligarchs and dismember their provinces.

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After successfully completing his mission to conclude a mutual marriage agreement sealing the alliance between the houses of Anjou and Árpád, Abbot of Monte Cassino Bernhard Ayglerius reported enthusiastically to his lord, King Charles I of Naples: “The Hungarian royal house has incredible power, its military forces are so large that nobody in the East and the North dares even budge if the triumphant and glorious king mobilizes his army.”<sup>1</sup> Weddings between scions of the two ruling dynasties soon took place: just a half year later, Ladislaus, the grandson of Hungarian King Béla IV (1235–1270) and son of future King Stephen V (1270–1272), married Elizabeth of Sicily, the youngest daughter of King Charles I of Naples, while the son of the latter king,

1 1269: “Domus Hungarie incredibilem habet potentiam, indicibilem quidem armatorum gentem, ita quod in partibus Orientis et Aquilonis nullus sit pedem ausus movere, ubi triumphator, rex scilicet gloriosus, potentem exercitum suum movit.” *Árpádkori Új Okmánytár* [Charters from the Árpád Age, New Series], 12 vols., ed. Gusztáv Wenzel (Pest–Budapest: Eggenberger Ferdinánd Akadémiai Könyvtársulás, 1860–1874) (hereafter *ÁÚO*), vol. VIII, 316.

the future Charles II of Naples, married Stephen's daughter, Mary. The latter marriage established the foundation for the claim of the Angevins of Naples to the throne of Hungary following the extinction of the House of Árpád. This claim to succession was by no means uncontested: although the Angevins of Naples considered the heirless death of King Ladislaus IV (1272–1290) to represent the extinction of the House of Árpád, an alleged member of the latter dynasty, known to the Angevins merely as “some Venetian named Andrew” [*quidam de Venetiis Andreatius nomine*], assumed the throne and ruled Hungary as King Andrew III for more than a decade (1290–1301).<sup>2</sup> Although nobody in Hungary questioned the extinction of the male line of the House of Árpád<sup>3</sup> following the death of this king of disputed origins,<sup>4</sup> Charles I (1301–1342), grandson of Mary of Hungary, Queen of Naples, struggled for more than two decades after coming to the throne to secure his rule over the country. Although reluctance to accept a prince supported by the papacy undoubtedly played a role in the difficulty which King Charles I had to face,<sup>5</sup> it was mostly the result of a situation which was later described in a royal charter from the year 1332 in the following way:

When we were in a tender age and had not yet acquired total rule over the country, the faithless barons and depraved betrayers of our predecessors, the illustrious former kings, committed with a hard eye cast upon the royal throne manifold felonies of high treason against the person of the king and seized all opportunity to forcibly usurp sovereign prerogative, murdering with horrible slaughter the most distinguished nobles of the country lest they bind themselves to us

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2 1291: *Magyar diplomacziái emlékek az Anjou-korból* [Hungarian Diplomatic Records from the Angevin Era], 3 vols., ed. Gusztáv Wenzel (Budapest: MTA, 1874–1876) (hereafter MDEA), vol. I, 76.

3 1303: *Anjou-kori okmánytár* [Charters from the Angevin Period], 7 vols., eds. Imre Nagy and Gyula Nagy (Budapest: MTA, 1878–1920), vol. I, 52.

4 Doubt on the legitimate descent of Andrew III is cast by the fact that the adult sons of Andrew II accused the last wife of their father, Queen Beatrix, who was pregnant at the time of the king's death in 1235, of adultery, and consequently never recognized the father of the future Andrew III, prince Stephen, as their half-brother. This remained the official opinion of the Hungarian royal court until the summer of 1290, when, upon the death of Ladislaus IV the clerical and lay leaders of the country declared Andrew, the son of prince Stephen and the Venetian Thomasina Morosini, to be a legitimate member of the royal family.

5 According to the Hungarian chronicler, the majority of Hungarians supported the son of Wenceslaus II of Bohemia over Charles I for the following reason: “Ne regni liberi libertatem amitterent in susceptione per ecclesiam dati regis.” “Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi XIV,” c. 188, *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum tempore ducum regumque stirpis Arpadianae gestarum*, 2 vols., ed. Imre Szentpéteri (Budapest: n.p., 1937–1938) (hereafter SRH), vol. I, 480.

and the Holy Crown with requisite zeal, destroying those of lower rank in various fashion as well.<sup>6</sup>

Developments that occurred in the half century beginning in 1269 provide an explanation for the conspicuous discrepancy between accounts in that year depicting the foreign power of the Hungarian king and reports describing the domestic weakness of the Hungarian sovereign in the first two decades of the fourteenth century.

Charles I did, indeed, inherit from his predecessors the situation described in the 1332 charter: over the last third of the thirteenth century, the king was frequently compelled to take up arms in order to force his will upon rebellious subjects, if at all he had sufficient power to do so. The significant decline in the once nearly limitless power of the Hungarian king was due to several historical factors that emerged during this period, first acting independently, then over time reinforcing one another.

The process that produced a fundamental change in relations between prominent landowners and the king began around the beginning of the thirteenth century. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the nobility possessed a relatively modest amount of personal wealth, their power and means stemming primarily from royal office and the income it provided. However, as a result of the largesse of King Emeric (1196–1204) and, to an even greater degree, King Andrew II (1205–1235), those who enjoyed royal patronage were able to accumulate a relatively vast personal fortune. The transformation of land-ownership proportions progressed inexorably in favor of the nobility to the detriment of the king throughout the thirteenth century. Moreover, the major land-owning nobility aspired to an ever-greater degree during the second half of the century to concentrate their holdings geographically, which resulted in the formation of larger, enclosed estates in place of previously scattered domains of various size.

The construction of modern stone castles, which in Hungary began in the second half of the thirteenth century, contributed significantly to the

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6 1332: “Nobis in etate tenera constitutis et nondum regni gubernaculum plene adeptis, dum infideles barones et nostrorum progenitorum condam illustrium regum Hungarie nefhandissimi proditores commissoresque in eorum regum personas multiplicis criminis lese maiestatis, oppresso regali solio regnum et regia iura undique occupata detinerent manu violenta, fideles regni nobiles potiores, ne nobis et sacre corone devocione debita adhererent, dire necis perimentes excidio ceteros inferioris status fine vario consummentes.” *Urkundenbuch des Burgenlandes und der angrenzenden Gebiete der Komitate Wieselburg, Ödenburg und Eisenburg*, 5 vols., eds. Hans Wagner et al. (Graz–Cologne–Vienna: Hermann Böhlau Nachf., 1955–1999) (hereafter UB), vol. IV, 135.

transformation of the nature of great landed estates in the kingdom. The building of such castles, a lesson learnt from the shock caused by the 1241–1242 Mongol invasion, was expressly supported by the royal power. Although royal authority was responsible for the construction of some of these stone castles, members of the kingdom's major land-owning nobility had the majority of them erected on their estates. Although no precise data exists as to how many stone castles were built in Hungary during this period, according to a reasonable estimate their number was already around 100 at the time of the death of King Béla IV in 1270, and increased to nearly 300 by the end of the thirteenth century. The construction of castles, though officially requiring authorization from the king, soon slipped from the control of central royal authority. Fear from a castle-building neighbor, rather than the need to strengthen the kingdom's defensive capabilities, provided the main motive for building stone castles at this time, as landowners gradually realized the equation of castle with power. A veritable castle-building race developed in Hungary during the final decades of the thirteenth century, in which it was highly advisable to participate. Moreover, during the civil war that took place in the 1260s between King Béla IV and his eldest son, the future King Stephen V, these castles proved able to withstand the siege of royal armies if their defenders possessed enough water, food and determination.

Meanwhile, an increasing number of smaller landowners placed themselves in the service of the castle-owning nobility, either in the hope of profiting from their growing power or because of the fear it caused. Those who allied themselves with more powerful landowners in this way were referred to as *familiars*: they belonged to the broader family of their lord (the word itself stems from the Latin word for family), and thus owed him obedience even over and against their loyalty to the king. If necessary, the *familiaris* went to battle alongside his lord, managed his estates in time of peace, represented him in various capacities, and acted as his deputy in some of his offices. In compensation, the *familiaris* received military protection and support and occasional material or monetary remuneration. It was in the paramount interest of the major landowners to turn the greatest possible number of the neighboring nobility into their *familiars*: this not only provided them with more soldiers, but also extended the area over which they exercised influence beyond the borders of their own estates. The large estate, the castle and the army of *familiars* constituted the three pillars upon which some of the most powerful nobility managed by the 1270s to construct considerable private power structures, sometimes extending over several counties

within the kingdom, in which the only will in operation was that of the lord who dominated the lands and castles and commanded the familiares. The first such major landowners to establish personal power of this magnitude emerged during the reign of King Béla IV (1235–1270). Among them was Pál of the Geregye kindred, who immediately recognized the advantages to be gained from the building of castles, and accordingly constructed at least two on the western slopes of the mountains dividing Transylvania from the Great Hungarian Plain, another two being erected in the region by either himself or his sons. It soon appeared, however, that Pál was not satisfied with the fruits of the king's grace, and already in the 1250s many landowners in the area felt the consequences of his greed. Although the king compelled Pál to return some of the territory he had seized,<sup>7</sup> his four sons continued to expand the family's domains until the army of King Ladislaus IV defeated them in battle at the end of the 1270s.<sup>8</sup> During the latter conflict, local nobles who had not previously dared to resist the Geregye, including some members of the distinguished, though not particularly wealthy Borsa family, allied themselves with the king. The significant contribution of Tamás Borsa and his six sons, who had not previously played a role in the kingdom's politics, to defeat of the Geregye, did not go unrecognized: King Ladislaus IV not only granted them almost all of the defeated family's estates and castles, but offered them positions within his royal administration, appointing the eldest Borsa son, Roland, as voevode of Transylvania, while his younger brother Jakab, most often referred to simply as "Kopasz" [Bald], entered the royal council as Master of the Horse.<sup>9</sup> King Ladislaus IV felt that he may have found in the Borsa family allies "whose loyalty, bravery and industry—as enunciated in one of his diplomas—successfully governed and defended Hungary during the time of our forefathers."<sup>10</sup> The king was not initially disappointed: Roland and his brothers proved to be brave and successful commanders of royal armies on several occasions.<sup>11</sup> However, the Borsa family found the taste of power to its liking, prompting them to seek independent authority and turn against their king. In the spring of 1287, the Borsas and their confederates routed the forces

7 1256: *ÁÚO*, vol. VII, 458.

8 1278: *ÁÚO*, vol. IX, 196–97.

9 Attila Zsoldos, *Magyarország világi archontológiája 1000–1301* [Hungarian Secular Archontology] (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 2011), 40, 58.

10 1274: "Quorum fidelitate, virtute et industria ipsum regnum Hungarie defensatum fuerat predecessorum nostrorum temporibus et feliciter gubernatum." *ÁÚO*, vol. XII, 98.

11 1285: *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis*, 11 vols., ed. György Fejér (Budae: Typis Typogr. Regiae Universitatis Ungaricae, 1829–1844) (hereafter: CD), vol. V/3, 258–61.

of King Ladislaus IV in a relatively small-scale engagement.<sup>12</sup> From this time on, relations were hostile between the Borsa family and the king, whose control over Transylvania and the central portion of the Trans-Tisza region became scarcely more than nominal.

The Borsa family supported the claim of King Andrew III, the grandson of King Andrew II, to the throne of Hungary following the death of King Ladislaus IV in 1290, thus laying the foundation for several years of smooth relations with the Venetian-born monarch. In the middle of 1294, however, Roland Borsa, voevode of Transylvania, decided to expand his estate to the detriment of the Bishop of Várad (Oradea, Romania), and lay siege to one of the castles belonging to the bishopric. The defenders finally decided to surrender the fortification to Roland and his brothers on terms.<sup>13</sup> In response, King Andrew III retaliated by taking the castle of Adorján, the Borsa family's headquarters, following a siege, though it is not known whether the king's armies launched campaigns against the Borsas elsewhere in Transylvania or eastern Hungary. The Borsa family submitted to royal authority following the fall of their castle, and the king deprived Roland of his office as voevode of Transylvania. However, both Roland and his brothers continued to exercise authority over a large portion of the Trans-Tisza region for decades thereafter.<sup>14</sup>

King Andrew III appointed László of the Kán kindred to replace Roland as voevode of Transylvania. László was also the member of a great and powerful noble family that possessed large estates in southern Transylvania and southeastern Transdanubia and whose members had belonged to the political elite of the kingdom for generations. László governed Transylvania for more than two decades following the king's suppression of the Borsa uprising.<sup>15</sup>

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12 1287: *Oklevelek bontvármegyei magán-levéltárákból. Első rész: 1256–1399* [Documents from Private Archives in Hont County. Part One: 1256–1399], ed. Ferenc Kubinyi (Budapest: n.p., 1888), 30.

13 1294: *ÁUO*, vol. X, 153–54.

14 For a summary of the history of the Geregye and Borsa families see Zoltán Lenkey and Attila Zsoldos, *Szent István és III. András* [Saint Stephen and Andrew III] (Budapest: Kossuth, 2003), 130–31, 142–43 and 188–89. For information regarding the Borsa family see Vince Bunyitay, “Kopasz nádor: életrajz a XIII–XIV. századból” [Palatine Kopasz: Biography from the Thirteenth–Fourteenth Centuries], *Századok* 22 (1888): 15–32 and 129–55.

15 Antal Pór, “László erdélyi vajda (1291–1315): rajzok Erdély múltjából a középkorban” [László Voevode of Transylvania (1291–1315): Sketches from the History of Transylvania in the Middle Ages], *Erdélyi Múzeum* 8 (1891): 433–81; Mór Wertner, “Újabb nemzetségi kutatások VIII: a Kán-nemzetség erdélyi vagy vajdai ága” [New Research on the Kindreds VIII: the Transylvanian or Voevodal Branch of the Kán Kindred], *Turul* 26 (1908): 122–29; and Gyula Kristó, “Kán László és Erdély” [László Kán and Transylvania], *Valóság* 21 (1978): 83–96.

The “Kőszegi” branch of the Héder family, known as such because the center of its estates was the town of Kőszeg, represented another early example of the establishment of oligarchical power in the Kingdom of Hungary. The ancestors of the family migrated to the kingdom from Styria in the middle of the twelfth century. The foundations for the power of the kindred’s Kőszegi branch were laid by Henrik, who, characteristically, later came to be known as “the Great”.<sup>16</sup> Henrik, just as Pál Geregye, was one of the most trusted followers of King Béla IV. His family estates were located in Vas County, where he built his first castles, receiving at least two more as grants from the king. In this way, Henrik gained control over the county located in western Transdanubia, making it possible for his descendants to extend their authority over a large portion of the region.<sup>17</sup> Unlike Pál Geregye, Henrik Kőszegi was able to build his personal power without coming into conflict with his king, Béla IV. He did oppose Béla’s successors, Stephen V and Ladislaus IV, however. Following the death of Henrik “the Great” two years later in battle against a rival,<sup>18</sup> his sons Miklós, Iván (or János) and Henrik Jr. assumed control over their father’s estates, while another son, Péter, became Bishop of Veszprém.<sup>19</sup> The two eldest sons, Miklós and Iván, took possession of Henrik’s most valuable Transdanubian domains, dividing his Vas County castles between themselves and apparently striking an agreement regarding further expansion of the family holdings. Miklós extended his authority in a southeasterly direction, over Zala County, while Iván did so in a northerly direction, over the entire northwestern part of Transdanubia. Miklós disappears from the historical records after 1299, presumably due to his death,<sup>20</sup> while his son “Kakas” Miklós appears in the year 1314,<sup>21</sup> thus producing a gap of a decade and a half in the known history of this branch of the Kőszegi family. In the meantime, Henrik Jr. used his base in castles located on the southwestern corner of the kingdom to expand his power south of the Drava river in the region of Slavonia. Though the stages and first results of

16 1332: CD, vol. V/3, 258–61.

17 Kristó Gyula, “A Kőszegiek kiskirálysága” [The Principality of the Kőszegis], *Vasi Szemle* 29 (1975): 251–68; Heide Dienst and Irmtraut Lindeck-Pozza, eds., *Die Güssinger. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Herren von Güns/Güssing und ihrer Zeit (13./14. Jahrhundert)* (Eisenstadt: Burgenländisches Landesmuseum, 1989).

18 1274: ÁÚO, vol. XII, 89.

19 Zsoldos, *Archontológia*, 101.

20 See János Karácsonyi, *A magyar nemzetségek a XIV. század közepéig* [The Hungarian Kindreds until the Middle of the Fourteenth Century] (Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 1995), 599; and Pál Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája 1301–1457 – Középkori magyar genealógia* [Hungarian Secular Archontology, 1301–1457—Medieval Hungarian Genealogy], CD-ROM (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 2001). Héder nem, 4. tábla: Kőszegi [és Rohonci].

21 1314: *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. I, 335.

this expansion are unknown, sources show that he possessed the title of ban of Slavonia from 1301 until his death in 1310, and together with it the greatest part of the province. Henrik Jr. chose southeastern Transdanubia as the area for his further territorial expansion, in all certainty in order to avoid encroaching upon the spheres of interest of his older brothers and their descendants. The sons of Henrik Jr, János and Péter, the latter known as “Herceg,” continued to extend their zone of influence in southeastern Transdanubia. Thus, two of the sons of Henrik “the Great,” namely Henrik Jr. and Iván (and their scions) managed to carve out real provinces of their own, which virtually dwarfed the territory over which the third son of Henrik, Miklós (and his son, “Kakas” Miklós) exerted authority.<sup>22</sup>

Over time, local potentates emerged in the northern part of the Kingdom of Hungary as well—one in the east and one in the west. One of them was Finta, son of Dávid of the Aba kindred, which descended from King Samuel Aba, ruler of the kingdom for some years in the middle of the eleventh century (1041–1044). Finta served as palatine, the highest-ranking official in the Kingdom of Hungary, for a brief period during the reign of King Ladislaus IV before coming into conflict with the monarch. Although Finta disappears from sight in the middle of the 1280s, his younger brother, Amadé, took the leadership and emerged as the unrivaled lord of the northeastern regions by the last years of king Ladislaus IV’s reign. His power extended gradually and almost unpercieved to the territory between the river Tisza and the northeastern marches of the kingdom, where his remained the dominant authority until his death in the year 1311.<sup>23</sup>

The northwestern part of the Kingdom of Hungary was brought by Máté of the Csák kindred under his control in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The Csák, one of the most illustrious kindreds in the Kingdom of Hungary, had split into a dozen branches by the thirteenth century. There were few regions of the kingdom in which members of one of the offshoots of the kindred did not possess bigger or smaller estates. Máté began to make his voice heard in the politics of the kingdom in 1291. In 1293 he was appointed by King Andrew III as Master of the Horse, and as palatine three years later. However, after establishing his power base around his inherited estate of Tapolcsány (Topolčany, Slovakia), in Nyitra County, Máté Csák broke with King Andrew

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22 Attila Zsoldos, “A Henrik-fiak: A Héder nembéli Kőszegiek családi története” [The Henrik Sons: The Family History of the Kőszegis of the Héder Kindred], *Vasi Szemle* 64 (2010): 651–61.

23 See Gyula Kristó, *A rozgonyi csata* [The Battle of Rozgony] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1978), 27–39; and Attila Zsoldos, “Kassa túsza: Pillanatfelvétel 1311-ből Aba nembéli Amadé familiájáról” [The Hostages of Kassa: 1311 Snapshot of the Amadé Family of the Aba Kindred], *Történelmi Szemle* 39 (1997): 345–62.



and entered into armed conflict with forces loyal to the king in the second half of 1297.<sup>24</sup> King Andrew III proved unable to subjugate Máté, who by the first years of the fourteenth century had extended his influence all the way to the Danube in the south and the Garam and beyond in the east.<sup>25</sup>

Hungarian historiography most often refers to those listed above and others who exercised similar local power within the Kingdom of Hungary as “provincial lords” [*tartományúr*] or “oligarchs” [*oligarcha*]. (In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the term “petty king” [*kiskirály*] was also used, but by now has become obsolete.) However, due mostly to the lack of clarity surrounding these very terms, it is difficult to determine precisely who among the kingdom’s more powerful landowners belonged to these categories in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The confusion becomes even greater if one approaches the question from the perspective of the institution of the province. The existence of institutionalized authority over a portion of the Kingdom of Hungary as the sole representative of the royal will there had certainly not been unknown since at least the beginning of the thirteenth century, as this was the very essence of both the voevodship of Transylvania and the banate of Slavonia. Transylvania and Slavonia can therefore legitimately be qualified as provinces, just as the voevode and the ban, with their extensive official authority, as lords of their respective provinces.<sup>26</sup> The system of governing parts of the kingdom at the provincial level proved to be so successful that King Charles I (1301–1342) decided to extend this system to other parts of the realm where, contrary to Transylvania and Slavonia, it had never previously existed. Thus emerged from the mid-1310s a province of ever growing extension in the northeastern part of the kingdom under the Apulian Fülöp Druget, who had arrived to Hungary together with Charles I himself<sup>27</sup> in the year 1300.<sup>28</sup> In the western marches of Transylvania Charles entrusted a

24 1297: CD, vol. VI/2, 82–83.

25 For more information regarding Máté Csák see the following works: Antal Pór, *Trencsényi Csák Máté 1260–1321* [Máté Csák of Trencsény] (Budapest: Méhner Vilmos, 1888) and Gyula Kristó, *Csák Máté tartományúri hatalma* [The Oligarchical Lordship of Máté Csák] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1973).

26 See Pál Engel, “Honor, vár, ispánság: Tanulmányok az Anjou-királyság kormányzati rendszeréről” [Honor, Castle, Ispánate: Studies on the Governing System of the Angevin Kingdom], *Századok* 116 (1982): 902; and Pál Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen. A History of Medieval Hungary 895–1526* (London–New York: I. B. Tauris, 2001), 124–25.

27 1317: *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. I, 445–48.

28 „Historia de gestis Romanorum imperatorum et summorum pontificum a Micha Madio de Barbazanis de Spalato,” *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum veteres ac genuini*, 3 vols., ed. Johann Georg Schwandtner (Vienna: Kraus, 1746–1748) vol. III, 638.

considerable stretch of territory to the government of Dózsa Debreceni,<sup>29</sup> and he built up the southern province of the ban of Macsó (Mačva, Serbia) between 1319 and 1333.<sup>30</sup> The provincial status of these territories was secured by the fact that the barons who headed them governed their counties with palatinal authority even when the office of palatine was held by someone else.<sup>31</sup> Dózsa Debreceni's province survived for the shortest period of time among the three, gradually declining after his death in late 1322 or early 1323.<sup>32</sup> Fülöp Druget's province existed until 1342, enduring for 15 years under his son Vilmos until King Louis I, the successor of King Charles I, decided to abolish it for unknown reasons.<sup>33</sup> The province of the Ban of Macsó persisted for the longest period of time, expanding in size even in the late fourteenth century, long after the death of its founder.<sup>34</sup>

There must obviously have existed conspicuous differences, perceptible even at the time, between the various locally governed provincial territories in the kingdom if King Charles I chose to eliminate some of them at the cost of more than two decades of war, while founding others himself.

The reason for this contrast may seem obvious: because King Charles I had put Dózsa Debreceni, the Drugets and the Bans of Macsó in charge of their provinces, the authority they exercised over these regions sprang directly from royal power, thus ensuring that they would faithfully provide their lord with the military support and strategic counsel expected of loyal barons in the Middle Ages. Amadé Aba's power rested upon this same foundation, however. At the

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29 Attila Zsoldos, "Debrecen mint igazgatási központ a 14. század elején" [Debrecen as Administrative Center at the Beginning of the Fourteenth Century], in *Debrecen város 650 éves: Várostörténeti tanulmányok* [The City of Debrecen Turns 650: Studies on Municipal History], ed. Attila Bárány et al. (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Történelmi Intézete, 2011), 53–65.

30 Engel, "Honor, vár, ispánság," 914; Pál Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája 1301–1457*, [Hungarian Secular Archontology 1301–1457], 2 vols. (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 1996), vol. I, 27; and Gyula Kristó, *Tájszemlélet és térszervezés a középkori Magyarországon* [Regional Perspective and Spatial Organization in Medieval Hungary] (Szeged: Szegedi Középkorász Műhely, 2003), 149.

31 Zsoldos, "Debrecen mint igazgatási központ," 56–66. It should be noted that Dózsa Debreceni (1322), Fülöp Druget (1323–1327) and his successor as governor of the province, his nephew Vilmos Druget (1334–1342), also served as palatine. See Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, vol. I, 2–3.

32 See Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, vol. I, 2.

33 Engel, "Honor, vár, ispánság" 907; and idem, *A nemesi társadalom a középkori Ung megyében* [Noble Society in Ung County during the Middle Ages] (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 1998), 43–44; and Ferenc Piti, "Az 1342. évi nádorváltás" [The 1342 Change of Palatines], *Századok* 140 (2006): 435–41. Also see Pál Engel, "Nagy Lajos ismeretlen adományreformja" [Louis the Great's Unknown Reform of Land Grants], *Történelmi Szemle* 39 (1997): 145–48.

34 Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, vol. I, 206.

beginning of his reign in 1290, King Andrew III confirmed Amadé in all of his estates,<sup>35</sup> and he remained steadfastly loyal to both King Andrew III and his successor, Charles I, never rising in rebellion against them as one might expect from an oligarch.<sup>36</sup> But if Amadé did not rebel against royal power, why then did his sons do so?

The answer can be sought in distinguishing between the concepts of “provincial lord” and “oligarch.” Hungarian historiography has until now used these terms as synonyms, though it would be more accurate to use them according to the well-defined differences in their meaning as demonstrated clearly in the example of the Treaty of Kassa (Košice, Slovakia).

The burghers of Kassa murdered Amadé of the Aba kindred while he was staying in their town in early September 1311.<sup>37</sup> Representatives of Charles I mediated an agreement between the burghers of Kassa and the widow and sons of Amadé in order to assuage the resulting discord. However, this agreement<sup>38</sup> represented a de facto dictate aimed at liquidating the deceased magnate’s power.<sup>39</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Amadé’s sons accepted the agreement only under the weight of temporary compulsion, rising against the king at the first available opportunity. The Treaty of Kassa, drafted in the name of Amadé’s wife and sons, regulated the future relationship between the king and the sons of Amadé, stipulating that the latter should cede Újvár and Zemplén counties to the king and permit the nobles residing in the counties that remained under their authority (*nobiles quoscunque in quibuscunque comitatibus et terris sub potestate nostra constitutis*) to freely serve the king or anybody else. These provisions make it clear that King Charles I, while aiming to reduce the size of the province dominated by the Amadé sons, did nevertheless reckon that there would continue to be some areas “subjected to their authority.” The further conditions imposed on the sons of Amadé in the agreement constitute

35 1290: ÁÚO, vol. XII, 496–98.

36 See Gyula Kristó, *A feudális széttagolódás Magyarországon* [Feudal Fragmentation in Hungary] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1979), 143.

37 See 1312: *A zichi és vásonkeői gróf Zichy-család idősb ágának okmánytára* [Archives of the Senior Branch of the Zichy Family of Zich and Vásonkeő], 12 vols. eds. Imre Nagy et al. (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1871–1932) (hereafter: Zichy), vol. I, 137; and 1312: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára [Hungarian National Archives, hereafter MNL OL], Diplomatikai Levéltár [Medieval Charters, hereafter: DL], 68 680.

38 1311: *Regesta diplomatica nec non epistolaria Slovaciae*, 2 vols., ed. Vincent Sedlák (Bratislava: Sumptibus Acad. Scient. Slovacae, 1980–1987) (hereafter: RDES), vol. I, 391–93. Also see CD, vol. VIII/1, 405–12.

39 Kristó, *A rozgonyi csata*, 40–47; and Pál Engel, “Az ország újraegyesítése. I. Károly küzdelmei az oligarchák ellen (1310–1323)” [The Reunification of the Country. The Struggles of Charles I against the Oligarchs (1310–1323)], *Századok* 122 (1988): 89–144, 98–100.

an itemized list of criteria defining the “oligarch” as opposed to the “provincial lord”: they should return the unlawfully acquired royal lands to the king; suppress customs levied arbitrarily and promise not to establish new ones; obtain royal permission to build new castles; let the royal judges try the nobility instead of compelling them to appear before their own tribunals; promise to remain loyal to the king.<sup>40</sup> At the same time these stipulations indicate that King Charles I, while clearly determined to suppress the sons of Amadé as oligarchs, was willing to tolerate their continued existence in the kingdom as provincial lords. They also provide clear evidence of the difference in the definition of “provincial lord” and “oligarch” that made itself felt on a practical, everyday basis in the fourteenth century: an oligarch was a provincial lord who excluded the power of the king from his domains and engaged in the arbitrary exercise of royal authority.

The essential difference between the provincial lord and the oligarch did not, therefore, lie in their degree of loyalty toward the king,<sup>41</sup> an issue that characteristically represents only a minor element in the Treaty of Kassa. The main distinction between the provincial lord who supported the king and the loyal oligarch becomes evident if one compares the measures that King Charles I took between 1301 and 1311 affecting the lands, on the one hand, of the Borsa clan and, on the other hand, those of Ugrin Csák, the latter located in the southern portion of the kingdom between the towns of Pozsega (Požega, Croatia) and Temesvár (Timișoara, Romania). King Charles held the counties located in the latter region firmly under his jurisdiction,<sup>42</sup> bestowing property and the right to impose customs duties,<sup>43</sup> granting judicial<sup>44</sup> and tax exemptions<sup>45</sup> as well as maintaining the prerogative to assume control over estates whose owners died without heirs.<sup>46</sup> The king also made donations in the Borsa-held territories, though in this instance to the benefit of only one of the Borsa brothers, Beke,<sup>47</sup> and a powerful Borsa

40 RDES, vol. I, 391–92.

41 See, on the other hand, Kristó, *A feudális széttagolódás*, 139–44.

42 1303: MNL OL, DL, 91 154; 1308: MNL OL, Diplomatikai Fényképgyűjtemény [Collection of Photocopies, hereafter: DF], 285 246; 1308: *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. I, 155–56.

43 1302: MNL OL, DL, 33 726; 1303: MNL OL, DL, 91 154; MNL OL, DL, 2071; 1304: *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. I, 80–82; *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae*, vols. II–XV, ed. Tade Smičiklas (Zagreb: Tiskom D. Albrechta, 1904–1934) (Hereafter: CDCr), vol. VIII, 91; 1307: MNL OL, DF, 285 245; 1308: *Monumenta ecclesiae Strigoniensis*, 3 vols., ed. Ferdinánd Knauz et al. (Strigonii: n.p., 1874–1924) (hereafter: MES), vol. II, 582–83; 1310: CDCr, vol. VIII, 259–61 and MES, vol. II, 628–29.

44 1303: *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. I, 67; 1304: MNL OL, DL, 91 155; 1310: MNL OL, DF, 208 960.

45 1311: CDCr, vol. VIII, 296.

46 1303: MNL OL, DL, 91 154; and 1308: MES, vol. II, 582–83.

47 1302: MNL OL, DL, 40 285; 1307: MNL OL, DL, 40 308; and *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. I, 131–33.

familiaris.<sup>48</sup> Royal mandates of inquiry were directed exclusively at resolving legal infringements committed to the detriment of the Borsa family.<sup>49</sup> When the king ordered the Bishop of Várad to transfer litigation to the royal court, the prelate refused to comply,<sup>50</sup> presumably, as other sources explicitly state, because the Borsas were directly implicated in the matter<sup>51</sup> and he thought it unwise to raise their ire. It is thus clear that whereas Charles I was able to exercise the full array of established royal prerogatives on the estates of Ugrin Csák, the Borsas, though staunchly loyal to the throne—one of the Borsa brothers, “Kopasz” Jakab, in fact served as the king’s palatine<sup>52</sup>—allowed the king to intervene in the affairs of their dominions only if it was to their advantage.

The difference between the provincial lord and the oligarch becomes evident from another perspective in connection to the issue of inheritance. Although Ugrin Csák had a son,<sup>53</sup> royally appointed ispáns appear at the head of the counties which belonged to his province following his death.<sup>54</sup> Although in the case of the Drugets, Fülöp’s nephew, Vilmos, became the heir to his estates, his inheritance was preceded by and conditional on a special royal order,<sup>55</sup> and when Louis the Great decided to eliminate the Druget province, the heirs of Vilmos, his two younger brothers, acknowledged the king’s will without protest even though it entailed the loss of a significant portion of the family’s private property.<sup>56</sup> Conversely, the descendants of the oligarchs regarded the inheritance of their father’s power as a self-evident right, as is reflected in a charter issued by the oligarch András Kőszegi, grandson of Iván, in which he explicitly stated that

48 1311: Zichy, vol. I, 132–33; MNL OL, DL, 1783; *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol I, 235–36. See Zsoldos, “Debrecen mint igazgatási központ,” 49–51.

49 1310: *Anjou-kori Oklevéltár*, [Charters of Angevin Hungary], 32 vols., ed. Tibor Almási et al. (Szeged–Budapest: n.p., 1990–2012), vol. II, no. 1014; and 1311: Zichy, vol. I, 130, 131.

50 1310: MNL OL, DL, 40 327.

51 See: 1311: *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. I, 219–20.

52 Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, vol. I, 2; see also Attila Zsoldos, “III. András hat nádora” [The Six Palatines of Andrew III], in *Erősségénél fogva várépítésre való. Tanulmányok a 70 éves Németh Péter tiszteletére* [By its Strength Fit for Castle-Building. Studies in Honor of Péter Németh on His 70th Birthday] ed. Juan Cabello and Norbert C. Tóth (Nyíregyháza: Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Megyei Önkormányzat Múzeumok Igazgatósága, 2011), 298–99.

53 1317: CDCr, vol. VIII, 469–70; see Engel, *Középkori Magyar Genealógia*. Csák nem 8. Újlaki ág.

54 Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, vol. I. 100, 122, 142, 164, 199, 202, 221.

55 1327: *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. II, 316–18; 1328: MNL OL, DF, 209 870; 1330: CD, vol. VIII/3, 512–14; and 1332: MNL OL, DL, 1798.

56 Engel, “Honor, vár, ispánság,” 907; Piti, “Az 1342. évi nádorváltás,” 437–38.

he had lawfully inherited the governance, i.e. the province, of his ancestors.<sup>57</sup> The exclusion of royal authority from the province and the claim to inheritance which necessarily stemmed therefrom provides an explanation for the as yet largely unexamined fact that on some occasions it was not the oligarchs themselves but their sons who rose up in revolt against the king, and precisely right after the death of their father.

Based on the considerations outlined above, one can identify six oligarchical provinces in the Kingdom of Hungary, those under the control of the following oligarchs: Iván Kőszegi (and his successors); Henrik Kőszegi Jr. (and his successors); Máté Csák; Amadé Aba; László Kán; and the Borsa brothers. Pál Šubić and the Babonić family also controlled oligarchical provinces that developed under significantly different circumstances along the Adriatic coast of Croatia, which had become part of the Kingdom of Hungary only at the end of the eleventh century, and extended into Slavonia and Dalmatia, respectively.

Little is known about the internal political relations within the oligarchical provinces. However, the sporadic sources and data that exist make it possible to determine some of the common and unique traits regarding the exercise and distribution of power within these regions. It is clear that a single person typically held total control over provinces within the kingdom. In the case of Amadé Aba, László Kán and Máté Csák, their exclusive authority stemmed from the early deaths of brothers who also possessed legitimate claims to power within the given province, whereas the Kőszegi, as previously mentioned, divided the family-held province into individually controlled territories and thereafter refrained from encroaching upon one another's domains. Only the province of the Borsa family represents an exception from this standpoint. The six sons of Tamás Borsa—Roland, István, Jakab (or “Kopasz”), László, Benedek (or “Beke”) and János—worked in close cooperation with one another to establish the province, yet even in this case the evidence suggests that the brothers divided the castles located in the territory among themselves. Naturally, this situation changed over time: among the sons of Tamás Borsa, István was no longer living in May 1294,<sup>58</sup> Roland last appears in historical sources at the beginning of 1301,<sup>59</sup> and is proclaimed dead

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57 1314: “nos, cui gubernacula predictorum predecessorum nostrorum de iure pervenerant.” *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. I, 337.

58 1294: *ÁUO*, vol. X, 153.

59 1301: *Budapest történetének okleveles emlékei (1148–1301)* [Charters Relating to the History of Budapest], vol. I, ed. Albert Gárdonyi (Budapest: A székesfőváros kiadása, 1936), 351.

by October 16, 1303,<sup>60</sup> while János fell in battle during the 1304 Bohemian campaign of King Charles I,<sup>61</sup> and the last evidence indicating that László was still alive comes from the year 1307.<sup>62</sup> Among the sons of Tamás Borsa, only Kopasz and Beke lived to see the collapse of the family's province, whereas their nephews all survived until that time: Roland's sons István, János and László; István's son István Jr.; László's son János; to whom the son of Kopasz himself, called Bekcs, can be added.<sup>63</sup> Governing the Borsa province essentially required the coordination of the interests and ambitions of all these members of the family. However, cooperation between two members of the province's founding generation—Kopasz and Beke—was occasionally far from harmonious: the latter, subverting the family solidarity, sometimes seized the opportunity to challenge the authority that his older brother exercised over the family province in accordance with the established order among Hungarian noble families, treating the lands he had acquired in the northern section of the territory as his exclusive property over which his brothers could have no claim. Serious conflict erupted between Kopasz and Beke as a result of this situation at the end of 1308, which, however, was resolved through the mediation of prominent Borsa familiars. There is vague evidence to suggest that the accord between Kopasz and Beke was based on the division of territory within the province, similar to that which occurred within the Kőszegi family.<sup>64</sup>

The immediate examples for the organisation of administration in the oligarchical provinces should be looked for in the governmental peculiarities of the two royally established provinces of the kingdom, Transylvania and Slavonia. It was by the middle of the thirteenth century, that is, shortly before the process of establishing oligarchical provinces began in the kingdom, that the situation obtained in which the voevode of Transylvania and the ban of Slavonia could appoint the ispáns who governed the counties under their jurisdiction. These ispáns, then, unlike those at the head of counties to the west of Transylvania and north of the Drava river, did not receive direct appointment from the king, whereas the royal castles in the latter provinces were also under the control of the voevode

60 1303: MNL OL, DF, 255 287.

61 1307: *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. I, 132.

62 1307: CD, vol. VIII/1, 220; see Engel, *Középkori Magyar Genealógia*. Borsa nem 1. Kopasz ága 1. tábla.

63 Karácsonyi, *Magyar nemzetségek*, 224; and Engel, *Középkori Magyar Genealógia*. Borsa nem 1. Kopasz ága 1. tábla.

64 Attila Zsoldos, *A Borsa-tartomány igazgatásának kérdései* [The Administration of the Borsa Province] (forthcoming).

and the ban.<sup>65</sup> Fitting squarely into this arrangement was the general circumstance that the emergence of provinces based on oligarchical personal power affected the historical institution of the counties only in as much as it was the lord of the province who appointed his familiares as deputy ispáns of the individual counties. These persons, who sometimes bore the title of ispán (*comes*), were also, in some cases demonstrably, in others presumably, the castellans of the oligarch's castles in the province. This phenomenon can be observed in the territories under the control of Aba Amadé,<sup>66</sup> Máté Csák,<sup>67</sup> the Borsa family<sup>68</sup> and even László Kán.<sup>69</sup> Although the oligarchs exercised the authority of ispán as a matter of course, they bore the title of county ispán itself with conspicuous infrequency. And even if they did use the title in their charters, they named only one county at a time, apparently without any recognisable underlying logic.

As previously mentioned, the Treaty of Kassa, imposed upon the sons of Amadé Aba following their father's murder in 1311, prohibited them from forcing local nobles to appear in their courts.<sup>70</sup> Although there is no concrete evidence indicating that Amadé forced nobles living on his territory to appear in his courts, it is a fact that from the mid-1290s the head of the Aba kindred maintained in Vizsoly, one of the more important settlements of his province, a regularly functioning court,<sup>71</sup> where his deputy judges (*viceiudex*) bearing the title of court judge (*iudex curie*) sat in judgement.<sup>72</sup> The court judges of Máté

65 László Makkai, "Honfoglaló magyar nemzetségek Erdélyben" [Hungarian Kindreds in Transylvania at the Time of the Hungarian Conquest of the Carpathian Basin], *Századok* 78 (1944): 187–88; and Engel, "Honor, vár, ispánság," 902–04; Attila Zsoldos, "Egész Szlavónia bánja" [The Ban of Entire Slavonia] in *Tanulmányok a középkorról* [Studies on the Middle Ages], ed. Tibor Neumann (Budapest–Piliscsaba: Argumentum, 2001), 279–80.

66 1302: RDES, vol. I, 64–65; 1303: *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. I, 60–61; 1307: Zichy, vol. I, 114; RDES, vol. I, 234; and 1308: MES, vol. III, 66.

67 1305: MNL OL, DL, 61 203; 1307: *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. I, 122; *ibid.*, vol. I, 122–23; and 1318: CD, vol. VIII/2, 174.

68 1306: CD, vol. VIII/7, 367; 1308: Zichy, vol. I, 116–17; 1309: MNL OL, DL, 96 052; Zichy, vol. I, 122–23; 1310: *ibid.*, vol. I, 124–26; *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. I, 198; and cca. 1314–1317: MNL OL, DF, 278 728.

69 1312: MNL OL, DF 255 259; MNL OL, DL 30 598; and 1314: *A római szent birodalmi gróf széki Teleki család oklevéltára* [The Archives of the Holy Roman Imperial Counts of Teleki of Szék], 2 vols., ed. Samu Barabás (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1895) vol. I, 33.

70 1311: „nec compellemus eos [sc. nobiles] a modo astare nostro iudicio aut officialium nostrorum.” RDES, vol. I, 392.

71 See, for example: 1296: Zichy, vol. I, 121; cca. 1299–1300: *Az Árpád-kori nádorok és helyetteseik okleveleinek kritikai jegyzéke* [Critical Register of the Charters of the Árpád-era Palatines and Their Deputies], ed. Tibor Szócs (Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2012), 255; and 1300: *ibid.*, 257.

72 1304: MNL OL, DL, 83 158; 1305: MNL OL, DF, 269 488; and 1307: RDES, vol. I, 217, 221–22.



Csák,<sup>73</sup> János Kőszegi,<sup>74</sup> László Kán<sup>75</sup> and probably the castellan at Adorján of Kopasz Borsa performed similar functions.<sup>76</sup> Máté Csák,<sup>77</sup> the son of Henrik Kőszegi Jr., János,<sup>78</sup> and perhaps the others<sup>79</sup> entrusted the economic affairs of their provinces to their *magistri tavernicorum*, obviously imitating the established distribution of duties within the royal court.

The majority of the oligarchs attempted to bring the churches existing on the territory of their provinces under their control. The means of achieving this objective varied significantly. In case a bishopric became vacant in their zone of influence, they might exert pressure in order to fill it with a person who would most conveniently fit their expectations. It was thus that László Kán attempted to have his son appointed bishop of Transylvania, though he finally settled for his secondary candidate for the office.<sup>80</sup> The election of Iván Kőszegi's illegitimate son, Miklós, as bishop of Győr in 1308 could scarcely have been unrelated to the fact that the bishopric was located on Iván's territory,<sup>81</sup> whereas Henrik Jr., the younger brother of Iván, forced upon the bishopric of Pécs a follower of his own, who openly declared his dependence from the oligarch.<sup>82</sup> Máté Csák, on the other hand, was apparently not interested in such methods, preferring to exploit

73 1308: *Hazai okmánytár* [Collection of Domestic Charters], 8 vols., eds. Imre Nagy et al. (Győr–Budapest: n.p., 1865–1891) (hereafter HO), vol. VII, 337; 1309: *ibid.*, vol. VII, 339; and 1310: *ibid.*, vol. VII, 325.

74 1302: *Anjou-kori Oklevéltár*, vol. I, 24.

75 1308: Zichy, vol. I, 122.

76 Zsoldos, *A Borsa-tartomány igazgatásának kérdései*.

77 1309: CD, vol. VIII/1, 341; 1310: RDES, vol. I, 353; and MES, vol. II, 631, 632.

78 1310: MNL OL, DL, 86 913.

79 See Boglárka Weisz, “A szatmári kamara története a 14. század közepéig” [The History of the Szatmár Chamber until the Middle of the Fourteenth Century], in *Az ecsedi Báthoriak a XV–XVII. században* [The Báthoris of Ecsed in the Fifteenth to Seventeenth Centuries], eds. Sarolta Szabó and Norbert C. Tóth, (Nyírbátor: Báthori István Múzeum, 2012), 77–79.

80 *Acta legationis Gentilis, 1307–1312. Vatikáni magyar okirattár. Monumenta Vaticana historiam regni Hungariae illustrantia I/2* (Budapest: Franklin, 1885; Budapest: Magyar Egyháztörténeti Enciklopédia Munkaközössége, 2000) (Hereafter: Acta Gentilis), 154–77.

81 Ádám Vajk, “Mibe került ezen hűségi levél? Kőszegi Miklós győri püspöksége és az országos politika” [What Was the Cost of that Letter of Loyalty? Miklós Kőszegi as Bishop of Győr and National Politics], in *In labore fructus. Jubileumi tanulmányok Győregyházmegye történetéből* [In labore fructus. Anniversary Studies on the History of the Diocese of Győr], eds. Gábor Nemes and Ádám Vajk (Győr: Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár, 2011), 411–40.

82 *Acta Gentilis*, 126–53; see also Tamás Fedeles et al., eds. *A Pécsi Egyházmegye története I. A középkor évszázadai (1009–1543)* [History of the Diocese of Pécs I. The Centuries of the Middle Ages (1009–1543)], (Pécs: n.p., 2009), 90–91. (The relevant part is the work of László Koszta).

the economic potential of church property to strengthen his own power.<sup>83</sup> As for Amadé Aba and the Borsa family, they maintained friendly relations with the bishops of Eger and Várad respectively, while Kopasz Borsa even went as far as to provide merchants transporting goods to the latter prelate with an armed escort on at least one occasion.<sup>84</sup>

The oligarchs often assumed the titles of traditional high-ranking officials within the Kingdom of Hungary: János Kőszegi, Máté Csák, Amadé Aba and Kopasz Borsa referred to themselves as palatine, Henrik Kőszegi Jr. as ban of Slavonia and László Kán as voevode of Transylvania in their charters. However, it was clear to contemporaries that the power of these oligarchs was much greater and of different quality than that of their predecessors, and accordingly often referred to them as “prince” (*fejedelem*).<sup>85</sup> That the oligarchs themselves had no doubts as to the extent of their authority is proved by the fact that they maintained diverse and multiple relations with foreign aristocrats, and even rulers, on the principle of equality. Máté Csák, for example, first sought for his son, also named Máté,<sup>86</sup> a bride from the ducal family of Austria,<sup>87</sup> before eventually opting for a noble Silesian wife.<sup>88</sup> László Kán betrothed his daughter to the son of King Stefan of Serbia despite the opposition of papal legate Gentilis.<sup>89</sup> The sons of Henrik Kőszegi Sr. fought a war against Duke Albert of Austria in 1288–1289,<sup>90</sup> while Máté Csák came into conflict with King John of Bohemia in the year 1315.<sup>91</sup>

The quality of relations among the oligarchs themselves was equally as heterogeneous in nature. Initially these relations entailed a significant degree of antagonism: serious confrontations took place between the sons of Henrik

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83 See two charters issued on the same day by János, bishop of Nyitra (Nitra, Slovakia) for extensive information regarding Máté Csák’s attempts to increase his power to the detriment of the prelate. March 3, 1318: CD, vol. VIII/2, 170–81, 181–83.

84 1310: Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (Vienna), Erdődy család levéltára [The Archives of the Erdődy Family], Urkunden 43.

85 1308: CD, vol. VIII/1, 251; Acta Gentilis, 205; 1312: *Hazai Oklevéltár 1234–1536* [National Charters], eds. Imre Nagy et al. (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1879), 185; *Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi XIV*, c. 188 (SRH, vol. I, 479).

86 1309: *A Pécz nemzetség apponyi ágának az Apponyi grófok családi levéltárában őrzött oklevelei, I. 1241–1526* [Charters from the Family Archives of the Apponyi Counts of the Apponyi Branch of the Pécz Kindred], ed. Ernő Kammerer (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1906), 43–44.

87 1318: CD, vol. VIII/2, 173.

88 Mór Wertner, “Csák Máté utódai” [The Descendants of Máté Csák], *Turul* 20 (1902): 104–12.

89 1309: *Acta Gentilis*, 371–73.

90 Engel, “Az ország újraegyesítése,” 105.

91 1278: CDCr, vol. VI, 240–42; 1280: *ibid.*, vol. VI, 362–63.

Kőszegi Sr. and the Babonić family during the second half of the 1270s, lasting until the two sides concluded an agreement clearly defining their spheres of interest.<sup>92</sup> Iván and Miklós Kőszegi probably came to a similar accord with Máté Csák, who had begun his career by waging a successful war precisely against the Kőszegi brothers in the service of King Andrew III.<sup>93</sup> The lack of evidence that the Borsas attempted to regain their power in Transylvania from László Kán is also conspicuous. However, examples of cooperation also emerge over time: the Kőszegis and the Borsas fought in alliance against Ladislaus IV in 1287,<sup>94</sup> while evidence suggests that the latter family cooperated with Amadé Aba to defeat a rival family in the northern Trans-Tisza region.<sup>95</sup> Máté Csák carried such cooperation to the greatest degree, dispatching significant military forces to assist the sons of Amadé Aba in their rebellion against King Charles I.<sup>96</sup>

The battle in which the armies of Máté Csák and those of the Amadé brothers fought alongside one another took place on the outskirts of the village of Rozgony (Rozhanovce, Slovakia) on June 15, 1312. As the fourteenth-century chronicler reported, “... a combat of such ferocity ensued as had not occurred in Hungary since the time of the Mongol invasion.”<sup>97</sup> Strife between King Charles I and the oligarchs was nearly incessant between 1311 and 1323. Sources indicate that several battles of similar intensity to that which took place near Rozgony were fought in the kingdom during the decade, while even professional historians must work hard to compile a comprehensive list of the total number of castle sieges that occurred during this period. The decision of the aforementioned chronicler to make reference only to the Battle of Rozgony in his account of the conflict between Charles I and the oligarchs has exercised a profound influence on the modern understanding of this struggle, generating the impression that the royal victory at Rozgony decided its outcome in the king’s favor.

In truth, the best part of the struggle was still ahead. King Charles I was not devoid of experience, as by then the confrontation had been going on for decades with varying intensity. The initial attempts of the future oligarchs to build

92 Ibid.

93 Kristó, *Csák Máté tartományúri hatalma*, 35.

94 1287: *Oklevelek Hontvármegyei magán-levéltárából*, 30.

95 Attila Zsoldos, “IV. László és a Kállaiak ősei” [Ladislaus IV and the Ancestors of the Kállais] in *A nyíregyházi Jósza András Múzeum Évkönyve* [Yearbook of the András Jósza Museum in Nyíregyháza], vol. 42 (Nyíregyháza: Jósza András Múzeum, 2000), 77–87.

96 Engel, “Az ország újraegyesítése,” 102.

97 *Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi XIV.* c. 196 (SRH, vol. I, 488) “prelium durissimum est commissum, quale a tempore Tartarorum in Hungaria non contigit celebrari.”

bases of personal power in the kingdom had begun, as previously mentioned, during the reign of King Béla IV, who, along with his successor, Stephen V, proved able to thwart this challenge to their authority. However, the accession of Ladislaus IV to the throne at the age of ten in the year 1272 provided favorable opportunities for “the disruptors [...] of the order of the kingdom” (*status regni [...] disturbatores*), “the treacherous [...] trouble makers and fomenters of discord” (*infidelis [...] tanquam zyaniarum et guerrarum suscitator*) and “the deceitful tyrants” (*dolosus tyrannus*).<sup>98</sup> Much of the early years of the child king’s reign was spent with fighting between various groups within the aristocracy for the major baronial offices. Consequently, these changed hands no less than eleven times between 1272 and 1277. The Hungarian churches suffered significant hardship during these years of anarchy, it was therefore no coincidence that high-ranking clergymen led those interest groups which wanted to put an end to the disorder within the kingdom. Ladislaus IV was declared of age “at a general assembly” (*in generali congregatione*)<sup>99</sup> in 1277,<sup>100</sup> and made to swear an oath to subdue the “disturbers of the peace” (*pacis turbatores*). King Ladislaus directed the previously mentioned defeat of the Geregye family soon thereafter.

The “general assembly” and the military campaign against the Geregyes constituted two aspects of the strategy aimed at reasserting royal authority over the oligarchs. The latter strategy—responding to force through force—was an established procedure in the Middle Ages and therefore does not require any special explanation. Radical response of this type offered the prospect of quick results, but required a degree of power that Hungarian royal authority sorely lacked during these years. Nevertheless, Ladislaus IV attempted repeatedly with stubborn consistency to bring the oligarchs to their knees, generally to no avail.

Hungarian prelates thought to have found a more effective means with which to curb the ambitions of the aristocrats who monopolized the baronial offices and abused the advantages which these offered. It was the introduction of the political system most commonly known as the “regime of estates” (*Hung. rendiség*). Although certain facets of this system clearly served to restrict royal

98 1317: *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. I, 427, 446; 1323: Zichy, vol. I, 219; see Enikő Csukovits, “Le serpent tortueux” et les satellites du Satan: l’image de l’ennemi dans les narratives des chartes de donation des rois Anjou en Hongrie,” in *La Diplomatie des États Angevins aux XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles. Actes du colloque international de Szeged, Visegrád, Budapest 13–16 septembre 2007*, eds. Zoltán Kordé and István Petrovics, (Rome–Szeged: Univ. degli studi di Szeged, JATEPress, Accad. d’Ungheria in Roma, 2010), 339–48.

99 1277: *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, 7 vols., ed. Franz Zimmermann et al. (Hermannstadt–Cologne–Vienna–Bucharest: n.p., 1892–1991), vol. I, 131.

100 1277: HO, vol. VII, 165.

authority, it was established primarily in order to create the political conditions necessary to bring the realm's oligarchs under the control of the king. This transformation of state governance affected the most powerful political decision-making institutions in the kingdom. Representatives of the nobility received appointment to the royal council, which was responsible for making operative decisions, in addition to the prelates and barons who had previously constituted this body to the exclusion of others. Congregations of a governmental or judicial nature had already been held previously; these, however, were basically sessions of the royal council, to the discussions of which some of the magnates without formal office were occasionally also invited. Under the new system, nobles could take part in the council meetings, either personally or by proxy, and participate actively in the decision-making process. Following the death of Ladislaus IV in 1290, high-ranking Church officials expected Andrew III, whom they had helped to the throne,<sup>101</sup> to maintain these policies even though it had become clear that they were not effective in terms of imposing royal authority upon the oligarchs. In 1298, Andrew III concluded regular treaties with five barons, a clear indication that the king was already looking for a new method of dealing with the oligarchs. These pacts defined the mutual rights and obligations of both sides and as such were decidedly contractual in nature, thus representing an unprecedented element in relations between the king and his subordinates, no matter how strong the latter were.

These treaties clearly reflect the political conception of King Andrew III: to cooperate with those among the magnates who are inclined to do so. Among the five barons who concluded treaties with the king, Amadé Aba was an oligarch, while the others aspired to attain this status. This alliance between the king and the barons was therefore based not on solid foundations of principle, but on a temporary convergence of interests. King Andrew needed to exploit every opportunity to increase his power and manifestly regarded the potential military assistance of the loyal barons to be of greater significance than even the most elevated of principles.<sup>102</sup> The king's enemies did not fail to respond to the new royal policy: Hungarian chronicles indicate that in 1299 a group of powerful landowners asked Pope Boniface VIII to provide the realm with a new king in

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101 József Gerics, *A korai rendiség Európában és Magyarországon* [The Early Regime of Estates in Europe and Hungary] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1987).

102 For an appraisal of these treaties, see Gerics, *Korai rendiség*, 308–09; and Jenő Szűcs, *Az utolsó Árpádok* [The Last Árpáds] (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 1993), 337–41.

place of Andrew III.<sup>103</sup> In the court of Naples, which did not recognize the royal accession of King Andrew III, the decision was taken in the spring of 1300 to send Prince Charles, the thirteen-year-old son of Charles Martel of Anjou, to the Kingdom of Hungary in order to press his claim to the throne. However, by the time Charles disembarked on the Adriatic coast of Dalmatia in August 1300, the political situation in the kingdom had undergone a profound change.

The essence of this transformation is revealed in a letter dated September 18 from Petrus de Bonzano, whom King Andrew III had sent to the Papal Court presumably with the aim of obtaining there the appointment of Antal, Bishop of Csanád, as Archbishop of Esztergom.<sup>104</sup> In the letter to Venetian nobles, the diplomat wrote that, while he was still staying in Hungary, “the sons of Henrik” (that is, the Kőszegi brothers, Iván, Miklós and Henrik Jr.) had come to the king and made a general agreement with him, while Máté Csák and many other barons who had previously rebelled against Andrew III had submitted to royal authority.<sup>105</sup>

Thus it is possible to know what happened, but not why it happened. One can exclude the possibility that Andrew III compelled the most formidable oligarchs to recognize his supremacy by force of arms: not only would a military campaign of the magnitude required to achieve this objective have left its mark in contemporary sources, but it also had become clear over the previous years that the king’s armies were not capable of defeating those of Máté Csák and the Kőszegi family. One must therefore postulate that the king struck an agreement with his powerful adversaries, offering them conditions that they deemed more valuable than anything they could have hoped to receive from the Angevins.

One can surmise with a great degree of certainty the nature of the proposal that King Andrew III made to Iván Kőszegi and Máté Csák in the summer of 1300: in exchange for their loyalty, he would recognize their lordship over lands under their actual control and grant them the title of palatine. One may also presume that Henrik Kőszegi Jr. became ban of Slavonia and László Kán voevode of Transylvania in the same way. At the same time, Andrew III accorded the same privileges to four members of his inner circle—Roland Rátót, Apor Péc, Amadé Aba and István Ákos. Although the king’s strategy may appear novel, it did not, in fact, represent a significant departure from the established system of governance. The status of a loyal palatine possessing authority over a stipulated

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103 SRH, vol. I, 477.

104 1300: ÁÚO, vol. V, 261, 262, 263–64.

105 1300: ÁÚO, vol. V, 260–61.

territory was in practice not significantly different from that of a subservient voevode of Transylvania or ban of Slavonia. The example of László Kán, who, while governing Transylvania, never once came into conflict with Andrew III, may have convinced the king that such a system could be effective, even in the case of lords with oligarchic ambitions. This was, therefore, the response of Andrew III to the political crisis caused by the arrival of the Angevin pretender to the Kingdom of Hungary.

All this explains not only why several people held the title of palatine simultaneously in the first decade of the fourteenth century—those privileged by Andrew III were joined as seventh by Kopasz Borsa, appointed as palatine by Charles I —,<sup>106</sup> but also why the oligarchs opposed Charles I so vehemently even in the most hopeless situations: they were defending what they believed to be theirs, and that from a foreign king.

During the first decade and a half of his reign, Charles I tried, as had done Andrew III before, to compel the oligarchs to cooperate with him, going as far as to recognize the palatinal titles granted by his predecessor. In 1314, however, Charles abandoned this policy of compromise,<sup>107</sup> and set his mind on suppressing the oligarchical provinces in a war which was to draw on for a decade, sometimes simultaneously in several regions of the country. The Angevin ruler conquered the northern part of the Borsa-controlled territory at the end of 1314, and forced the sons of the deceased László Kán to make peace with the crown at the beginning of 1315. He then abolished the authority of János Kőszegi, the son of Henrik Kőszegi Jr., over the southern portion of Transdanubia in 1316, reestablishing royal control over a part of Slavonia in that year as well. In 1317, the king completed his conquest of the Borsa province, suppressed that of András Kőszegi, the grandson of Iván, in the northwestern section of Transdanubia, and put down the second rebellion of the Amadé sons as well. In 1318, fighting erupted again in Transylvania, where the Borsas, already ousted from their province, rose together with their allies in rebellion against royal authority. András Kőszegi launched a new attack against Charles I in 1319, though not even the help of Austrian knights could save him from defeat. Rebellion broke out again in Transylvania during the years 1320–1321. In the meantime, Charles had gradually reduced the territory under the control of Máté Csák as a result of military victories gained in 1314,

106 Zsoldos, “III. András hat nádora.”

107 Engel, “Az orszóg újragyészítése,” 104–08.

1317 and 1320, eliminating his province altogether following the oligarch's death in the spring of 1321.<sup>108</sup>

Several circumstances enabled King Charles I to achieve the objective of abolishing the power of the oligarchs that had eluded his predecessors from the dynasty of Árpád. The most significant of these factors was probably that, with the exception of Máté Csák prior to the Battle of Rozgony, the oligarchs did not attempt to join forces in alliance against the king.<sup>109</sup> The reason for this lack of cooperation among the oligarchs may have been the fact that their provinces had reached the limits of their expanding potential by the second decade of the fourteenth century. From this time on, the oligarchs could only have increased their territories by encroaching on each other's spheres of interest, something they wanted to avoid. Consequently, nor were they in a position to offer anything in exchange for help.

The foreign political options of the oligarchs had also been profoundly modified. During the reign of Ladislaus IV, they could support the claim of Andrew to the throne of the Kingdom of Hungary, as the Kőszegis did on at least two occasions,<sup>110</sup> while they could play the Angevin card against Andrew after he had become king, a means which again it was the Kőszegis who used most consciously.<sup>111</sup> By the beginning of the fourteenth century, only the Borsas considered the use of foreign powers to promote their political objectives, contriving to support the claim of a Russian prince to the throne of Hungary against Charles I.<sup>112</sup> However, this idea apparently never advanced beyond the planning stages. Charles, for his part, concluded an alliance with Duke Rudolf of Austria as early as 1304,<sup>113</sup> renewing it with Rudolf's successor, Frederick,<sup>114</sup> and also established friendly relations with John of Luxemburg, crowned in 1311 as King of Bohemia.<sup>115</sup> Thus the oligarchs could expect support neither from one another, nor from potential

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108 Ibid. See also Gyula Kristó, "I. Károly király harcai a tartományurak ellen (1310–1323)" [The Struggles of Charles I against the Oligarchs (1310–1323)], *Századok* 137 (2003): 297–347.

109 See Engel, "Az ország újraegyesítése," 108.

110 1278: CDCr, vol. VI, 244, 245–46; 1286: *ibid.*, vol. VI, 555–57; and 1287: UB, vol. II, 204.

111 1292: MDEA, vol. I, 81; and UB, vol. II, 268.

112 1317: *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. I, 412; 1321: CD, vol. VIII/2, 293; see Engel, "Az ország újraegyesítése," 114.

113 1304: CD, vol. VIII/1, 158–59; *ibid.*, vol. 160–61.

114 1314: *ibid.*, vol. VIII/7, 108.

115 1312: *Acta Aragonensia. Quellen zur deutschen, italienischen, französischen, spanischen zur Kirchen- und Kulturgeschichte aus der diplomatischen Korrespondenz Jaymes II.* (1291–1327), vol. 2, ed. Heinrich Finke (Berlin–Leipzig: Dr Walther Rotschild, 1908), vol. I, 322–25.



allies abroad. In the event of attack from royal forces, they were compelled to rely solely on the strength of their own armies.

However, this strength was fading. As long as the star of the oligarchs was on the rise, their power exerted very great attraction over the nobility living on their territories. But this attraction decreased remarkably over time: even the most powerful oligarch, Máté Csák, had to confront a rebellion of local nobles in 1316.<sup>116</sup> Other members of the nobility preferred emigration from the oligarchical provinces to outright revolt, and such emigres swelled as a matter of fact the ranks of Charles's armed supporters.<sup>117</sup> There is much evidence to suggest that King Charles was aware of the possibilities thus offered: the king's defeat of the Borsas was, in fact, due in great part to his success in winning over many of the leading Borsa familiares already before the armed conflict started.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, in the reconquest of Southern Transdanubia, controlled by Henrik Jr and then by his sons, a key role was played by the switching of some of the Kőszegi familiares to the king's side.<sup>119</sup> This phenomenon can be shown to have been common among the familiares of other oligarchs as well.<sup>120</sup> That the tide had turned is proved by the fact that some two decades before, in 1296–1297, it was still the opposite case when the castellan of King Andrew III helped Máté Csák gain control of a royal castle in Trencsén.<sup>121</sup>

The decision of any familiaris to transfer his loyalty from an oligarch to the king was obviously conditioned by several considerations, most of which are impossible to discern today. Two conjectures can safely be risked in this respect, however. First, the military successes that Charles I began to achieve in 1312 made it obvious to all nobles that there was an alternative power to serve in case one wanted to quit his lord; it is in this, but only this, that the decisive importance of the battle of Rozgony resided. Second, loyalty tied the familiares to their original lord and not to their sons, and it was the latter with whom

116 1316: Béla Karácsonyi and Gyula Kristó, eds., *Oklevelek a Csák-territórium történetéhez* [Documents on the History of the Csák Territory] (Szeged: Hungária, 1971), 15, 16, 17, 17–18, 18, 19.

117 See: 1319: *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. I, 520–23; and 1329: *ibid.*, vol. II, 403–04.

118 The future palatine of King Charles I, Dózsa Debreceni, was among those who changed sides. Zsoldos, “Debrecen mint igazgatási központ,” 50–51; for another example, see 1325: MNL OL, DL, 1045.

119 Engel, “Az ország újraegyesítése,” 113.

120 1321: CD, vol. VIII/2, 296–97; 1324: *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. II, 124–26; 1325: HO, vol. I, 137–43, etc.

121 Kristó, *Csák Máté tartományúri hatalma*, 36.

Charles came into conflict for the most part.<sup>122</sup> A conspicuous example is that of the leading familiares of the late Amadé Aba, roughly half of whom already fought at Charles I's side at Rozgony, whereas many of those who had remained faithful to Aba's sons transferred their allegiance to the king after the battle, thereby further accelerating the decline of the *familia* that had begun with the death of Amadé.<sup>123</sup>

The ambition of Charles I to win the allegiance of the familiares of the oligarchs was the result of a learning process. Charles initially followed the example of the last two Árpád kings, Ladislaus IV and Andrew III, who had attempted to reach accord with the oligarchs if they saw no other means of curbing their power. Cardinal Gentilis, who had been sent by pope Clement V to Hungary in 1307, negotiated personally with Máté Csák in order to convince him to recognize Charles I as his legitimate ruler.<sup>124</sup> The result of the effort was identical to that following similar such episodes at the time of Ladislaus IV and Andrew III: the oligarch appeared willing to cooperate with the king for a certain period of time before again electing to pursue a course of open conflict with royal authority.<sup>125</sup> Charles I drew the appropriate conclusion from this, when, contrary to his Árpád predecessors, he sought thereafter to gain the support of the familiares of the oligarchs rather than that of the oligarchs themselves. This strategy proved to be effective and contributed significantly to the final success of the Angevin king.

Finally, the impact of personal abilities on the outcome of events cannot be ignored. Poor decisions on the part of King Ladislaus IV gradually turned his potential supporters against him. The close relations Ladislaus IV maintained with the Cumans living in the Kingdom of Hungary produced particularly strong aversion among many of his subjects. The open affinity that Ladislaus displayed toward the Cumans—his mother was a Cuman princess—was considered to be so subversive that Pope Nicholas IV launched an investigation following the king's death to find out if at all he had died as a Christian.<sup>126</sup> Andrew III was

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122 Amadé Aba died before 8 Sept, 1311, Henrik Kőszegi Jr before 5 May, 1310, Iván Kőszegi on 5 April, 1308, László Kán sometime before 12 August, 1315. See Zsoldos, *Archontológia*, 282, 308, 315; Kristó, "I. Károly király harcai," 320.

123 Zsoldos, „Kassa túszai,” 361–62.

124 1308: *Acta Gentilis*, 112–15.

125 1311: *Acta Gentilis*, 384–91.

126 1290: *Vetera monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia maximam partem nondum edita ex tabulariis Vaticanis deprompta, collecta ac serie chronologica disposita*, 2 vols., ed. Augustinus Theiner (Rome: Romae Typis Vaticanis, 1859–1860), vol. I, 369. For more information regarding the reign of King Ladislaus, Szűcs, *Az utolsó Árpádok*, 279–321.

a much more judicious king than Ladislaus IV. The mere fact that he managed to sustain his reign for ten years within a foreign environment and, for many years, without foreign allies, bears witness to his prudence. However, Andrew's political *oeuvre* remained incomplete because of his unexpected death. In comparison to Andrew III, Charles I enjoyed the significant advantage of having grown into adulthood in Hungary, allowing him to become familiar with local conditions. The resolution of Charles I not to resort to military support from the Cumans, who according to a 1301 memorandum supported his rule (*dicitur, quod Cumani sunt cum eo*),<sup>127</sup> in his fight against the oligarchs provides evidence of this familiarity.<sup>128</sup> Charles was obviously aware of the political consequences that such military assistance from the Cumans against the oligarchs would have entailed. The Angevin king's political acumen is also proved by the ability with which he chose confidentials who then would remain faithful to him for several decades.<sup>129</sup>

The decision that King Charles I made in 1314 to abolish the power of the oligarchs by force rather than make further attempts to come to agreement with them was directed not at the elimination of the provinces, some of which he had established himself. Instead, it signified a return to the Árpád-era model of governing the kingdom according to which the right to exercise power belonged exclusively to the king and to those with whom he voluntarily decided to share it.

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127 1301: *Acta Aragonensia*, vol. I, 112.

128 In typical fashion, a previously unknown Cuman named Aydud fought on the side of the Borsas against the king. See 1329: *Anjou-kori Okmánytár*, vol. II, 404.

129 Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen*, 143–45.

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