

CHAPTERS FROM THE HISTORY OF ITALIAN-HUNGARIAN RELATIONS

Editor: Ilona Kristóf



Eger, 2023

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Cover illustration: detail of the Battle Gallery, Spezzano Castle, property of
the municipality of Fiorano Modenese, Modena, Italy

The Vestigia Research Group contributed to the identification of the fresco
depicting Esztergom Castle in Spezzano



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Table of Contents

Foreword.....	7
CHIARA MARIA CARPENTIERI The “Hungarian Affairs” in the Paduan Library of Gian Vincenzo Pinelli. (Particularly, the Hungarian Events of the Sixties of the 16th Century).....	11
PATRIZIA CREMONINI The Marriage of King Andrew II and Beatrice d’Este.....	47
BALÁZS ÁDÁM DEMJÉN “To My Gracious and Honourable Lord, Your Excellency.” An Italian Account of the 1543 Turkish Campaign in Hungary.....	63
GYÖRGY DOMOKOS The Plague and the Cheetah. Reports from Hungary by Ercole Pio, Ippolito I d’Este’s Agent, 1508–1510.....	67
DOROTTYA ANNA KRISTON Wine Trade, Medicine and Insolvency. The Letters of Agostino Benci, The Physician of Ippolito I d’Este (1488–1498)	81
ILONA KRISTÓF Travelling to Italy in the Summer of 1501. Lessons Learned from a Book of Accounts	107
PATRIK PASTRNAK Preparing a Bridal Train. Unpublished documents concerning Bianca Maria Sforza’s unrealized journey to Hungary	131
MÁRTON SZOVÁK The Hungarian News of Bernardino Zambotti’s Diary	149
Bibliography	171

Foreword

“Balsamum est istud?” (Is it balsam?), asked King Vladislaus II Jagiellon of Hungary and Bohemia in 1510 of Ercole Pio, who had been sent to Hungary by Cardinal Ippolito I d’Este upon receiving his master’s gifts. Pio then wrote a long letter reporting the royal audience to his master in Italy.¹ This single, arbitrarily selected moment highlights what Hungarian historical research can thank the Italian sources and their researchers: a wealth of additional knowledge about the events, characters and everyday life of the period, and in particular the recording of many ‘real-life’ moments that add colour to the grey facts that can be learned from Hungarian sources.

This is despite the fact that the Hungarian source material on the Middle Ages, and in particular on the period most frequently covered in the volume – the reigns of King Matthias I (1458–1490) and the two Jagiellon kings (1490–1526) – can hardly be described as poor, but it is one-sided and incomplete. The royal archives and the archives of the central offices were mostly destroyed after 1526, while the archives of ecclesiastical institutions, towns and noble families survived, especially in the areas spared by the Turkish wars. We have around three hundred thousand documents from the period up to 1526, traditionally considered the Middle Ages in Hungary, but these are mostly legal documents, or letters of command and court documents issued in the “centre”. Elemér Mályusz, a renowned historian of the 20th century, aptly put it that the large-scale destruction of documents also has a positive effect on historical research: by reviewing the documentary material, the researcher can learn about the history of an entire country, which in the Middle Ages was almost the size of Italy, while in countries with more fortunate sources, such as France, the same amount of work would only bring closer to the understanding of a smaller territory.² Even if this is true, we have to accept that the Hungarian source material, which is mediocre by European standards – but uniquely accessible online³ – is primarily suitable for research on government, institutions, associations and, of course, family and local history (traditionally an incontestable strength of Hungarian research), but is simply insufficient for many of the topics favoured

¹ For the letter quoted here, see the paper by György Domokos in this volume.

² Mályusz, “1526 előtti okleveleink forrásértéke,” 416.

³ The DL–DF database of Hungarian National Archives is available: <https://archives.hungaricana.hu/en/charters/> (Accessed 31 July 2023)

by modern historical research. Translating this to the example above: we know from the domestic sources that at the time of the event described by Ercole Pio the monarch was staying in Nagyszombat (today: Trnava, Slovakia), we know that his journey was made necessary by the plague that had reached the capital, we know what orders he sent to his subjects at that time, but we would never know without the Italian source, how a royal audience took place, who was responsible for it, and we would search in vain for a dialogue with a Hungarian king in our sources, just as we would never know that the Hungarian monarch was able to try the joys of hunting with cheetahs thanks to the Italian cardinal.

The search for Hungarian related sources in foreign archives – the so called *Hungarica* – experienced a considerable upturn in the recent one and a half decade. Apart from diplomatic correspondence, most of the Hungarian references are to be found in cases where foreigners lived in the Kingdom of Hungary for a longer period of time and their records were preserved in their home country. Although such sources may occur in the German territories too – think of Margrave George of Brandenburg-Ansbach, who, thanks to his Jagiellon relatives, possessed immense estates in Hungary –, most of the materials come predominantly from the rich archives of Italy. Especially because of the intensive daily correspondence between the two geographically distant regions was ensured by the residence of King Matthias' wife, Beatrice of Aragon, in Hungary (1476–1500), and the archbishopric Esztergom (1486–1497) and bishopric of Eger (1497–1520) of her nephew Ippolito I d'Este, together with the presence of Italians serving them at court in Esztergom and Eger.

In the decades following the Battle of Mohács against the Ottomans in 1526, besides the envoys, the soldiers and military engineers serving in the constant wars deepened the relationship between Hungary and Italy. The *Vestigia* Research Group founded in 2010 has played a major role in the creation of this volume, also has made an immeasurable contribution over the past decade and a half to the discovery, publication and even processing of this *Hungarica* material, which is mainly preserved in Modena, Milan and Mantua.⁴

The present volume is an integral part of the research group's previous works and volumes of studies. The studies present a particular moment in Italian–Hungarian relations between the 13th and 16th centuries, and what makes the volume particularly valuable is that all the authors have undertaken to work on primary sources or groups of sources, mostly unpublished, often ignored by previous research. If we want enroll the eight papers in this volume into thematic groups, three topics would represent the three different channels of com-

⁴ For the *Vestigia* Research Group, see e.g. Nuzzo, “Olasz–magyar diplomáciai kapcsolatok (1301–1550): Új források a Vestigia projekt keretében” and also <http://www.vestigia.hu> (Accessed 31 July 2023).

munication between the two regions: 1) *Marriage contracts and diplomatic relations*: Patrizia Cremonini presents the marriage of King Andrew II of Hungary and Beatrice d'Este, and, correcting the previous centuries-old editions, provides the text of the marriage contract of 1234 in accordance with modern requirements. Patrik Pastrnak publishes four previously unknown letters from 1489, that describe the means and the criteria upon which the journey to Hungary of Bianca Maria Sforza, the would-be consort of John Corvinus, the heir of the Hungarian throne, would have been organized, even if eventually this journey never took place. Finally, Márton Szovák analysed the Hungarian aspects of Bernardino Zambotti's chronicle of Ferrara, in which the issue of marriage is also given considerable emphasis, through the stay of Queen Beatrice's bridal trail in Ferrara in 1476, but the source also contains valuable informations on the Hungarian ambassadors and the Hungarian church dignitary Ippolito I d'Este. 2) *The activities and correspondence of Queen Beatrice and the courtiers of Ippolito I d'Este in Hungary*: Anna Dorottya Kriston presents us the daily life of Augustino Benci, a physician serving in Esztergom through his correspondence, while György Domokos presents the correspondence of the "graphomaniac" Ercole Pio, the governor of the bishopric of Eger. Ilona Kristóf publishes a short but interesting account book of a journey of one of Cardinal Ippolito's courtiers from Eger to Ferrara. 3) *Military events during the Turkish wars*: Ádám Demjén Balázs examines a report from 1543 on the Turkish campaign of that year, while Chiara Maria Carpentieri presents a useful repertory of the Hungarian aspects of Gian Vincenzo Pinelli's collection, including the adventurous fate of Pinelli's library.

This valuable volume now gives the non-Hungarian readers an insight into the work of the Vestigia Research Group, the importance of which is hard to overestimate. The greatest beneficiary of this project is, of course, the historical research on the medieval (and early modern) Kingdom of Hungary, but sometimes Hungarian sources and research can contribute to the better understanding the life and career of an Italian person. From a general historical point of view, the "cultural difference" between Italian and Hungarian customs, thinking and way of life at the time is extremely interesting, and can be seen not only in the planning of an embassy or wedding procession, but also in the letters of the Italians who came to Hungary, sometimes in the form of bitter complaints and homesickness.

Tibor Neumann
(Translated by Tamás Szűcs)