

University of Szeged – Faculty of Arts
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In the attraction of Hungary

Francophone travellers in early modern Hungary

(1554–1608)

PhD Thesis

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Introduction: subject and structure of the thesis

When studying the French–Hungarian relations in the 16th and 17th centuries we realize that there are an outstanding number of sources available due to the technical achievements of the era, however, after the death of Péter Sahin-Tóth their systematic analysis did not continue and Hungarian historiography still lacks a monographic summary of the period. In our view this discontinued work, and its reservation for French circles has left a wide range of unexploited possibilities for Hungarian and French historiography as well.

The „history of relations”, as a framework offered limited space for our research. Therefore, we had to put the subject in a wider context than just searching for the „common points” in the history of two countries. Models applied to and applicable to the history of the 18th century and later ages did not help us understand the truths at the end of the 16th century. We had to admit that Henry IV’s age was influenced by the concept and reality of Christianity, if not in their actions, but in their ideas, representations and sensitivity by all means. On this basis, the world based on „national characteristics” could not have a significant impact yet.

The dissertation focuses on the end of 16th century, when we were able to link the majority of the trips from the Kingdom of France to Hungary to the anti-Turkish fights in the country. In this our reference point was the period of the Long Turkish War (1591–1606) but this did not prevent us from analysing sources that date back to the middle of the 16th century. We have found the significance of travel literature in the fact that it is able to show Hungary through a foreigner’s eye during the period under research, and provides various opinions on the local society from different points of view, although often in the captivity of historical stereotypes.

In the first part, in presenting the early French itineraries (1.1) our aim was not a thorough historical presentation of the genre, we just wanted to give an account of the emergence of guides in the second half of the 16th century, through which we could also highlight some French political and economic aspects. The pioneering format made by Charles Estienne appeared an excellent starting-point for introducing our subject. In the additional chapters of the first part (1.2, 1.3 and 1.4) we connected the noble and military noble way of life with the changes of geographical location in a society under the reign of Henry IV, which was experiencing peace after a civil war. Finally, we could not ignore the issues of logistics (1.5), and consider the most common routes and modes of travel from the Francophone areas to our country thus forming a sufficient basis for specific „case studies”.

The four additional parts of the dissertation (parts 2 to 5) cover the types of travellers discussed. We have followed a triple thematic division, and to be able to reach our objectives we have created the class system of correspondent – politician – military leader. The work of eyewitness reporter or local correspondent is characterized by two rather different events, and with a report on the coronation ceremony of Matthias II we took a little look outside the framework of the military events. Among the diplomats and politicians two people with completely opposite political and denominational stance, but both of them writing partly in Latin, are discussed. Eventually, the only actor in the military leader category – Philippe-Emmanuel de Lorraine, Duke of Mercœur – generated three separate parts discussing political issues and literary portraits, which provide a more complex evaluation of his personality in addition to his Hungarian activities. When in the fourth and fifth part we discussed the literary and historical works devoted to the Duke of Mercœur, our intention was not to list all of them, but to put an emphasis on the high number works about him. However, we did not create a category of merchant-traveller and scholar-traveller, because we could not connect these types of travellers to the anti-Turkish fights.

At the end of the dissertation two chapters are devoted to the translation and the close publication of primary sources used for our research. Among them the introduction preceding the Hungarian source collection of Jacques Bongars has a special place, which is published as well in original Latin language as in Hungarian translation. We did not only do so because it has been an important pillar of our research, but also because we wanted to connect these rarely cited sources and ideas with the research on the image of Hungary at the end of the 16th century. The other transliterations of primary sources contain such texts that are hardly accessible in Hungary, but whose knowledge is indispensable for the subject. The dynamically extended *Gallica* electronic database of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF)* has been helpful for us, thanks to which we have noticed a significant progress already during our research in the accessibility of fundamental texts for our research. The uploading of the manuscripts of Jacques Bongars, for example, located in *BnF* has been recently finished, and so has been the poem of Alphonse Rambervillers entitled *Les dévots élancements du poète chrestien* [Devout chagrins of a Christian poet] which consultation caused us a few problems, and was only readable on the spot, under special supervision.

Methodological approach

The primary purpose of our dissertation was the comprehensive study of the Hungarian–French relations in the 16th and 17th century based on the works of travellers who visited Hungary. We tried to answer the question which events brought France and Hungary in contact, and based on this we divided the visitors to our country into three categories. During our research we focused mainly on Francophone travellers, but in some cases it was necessary to extend the perspective of our analysis to the representatives of the French territories a wider sense. In addition to our Francophone sources we also expanded the scope of the investigation with Latin-language works composed originally by Francophone travellers during this „transitional” historical period when the Latin language was allowed only for certain genres as opposed to the vulgar languages. The thematic units of the dissertation do not necessarily follow the chronological order because with this division, our primary goal was to arrange along one single line, and to present systemically the Francophone travellers who visited Hungary. The translations and published texts at the end of our work help the orientation in the analysis and, in addition, the appendix contains a simplified family tree of the Duke of Mercœur. The illustrations aesthetically colour the text of the dissertation.

During the analysis of the sources numerous methodological questions arose. From this point of view, defining the concept of *travel* was of basic importance because this way our categories of the motivations of travel were established. It was important to decide at beginning of our investigation who would be included to be the representatives of each group. In several cases the travellers carried out a certain mission, and in such cases it was necessary to fully identify the person and the intention of their employers. These investigations have turned our attention to geographical territories like Lorraine, Flanders, Burgundy, Picardy, whose legal *status quo* remained flexible due to their borderland location, even in the age when the idea of French unity gained much more emphasis, for example, in Charles Estienne’s guide, and even in Henry IV’s court ideology after the civil wars. Therefore, Lorraine, gradually only theoretically belonged to the Holy Roman Empire, and exactly from this *Pays de l’Entre-deux* position, was more influenced by the anti-Turkish fights in Hungary than the Kingdom of France was.

Jean de Malmidy, for example, during his long stay in Hungary between December 1564 and August 1565, interpreted the events of the north-eastern warfare in such a strongly protestant tone that we could not disregard to partly explore his employer’s political rapports. With this method our investigations have also come to very distant correlations from our original starting

point, but in most of these cases we succeeded in recapturing the originally selected „research ground”. We made an exception only in a single case, namely with Philippe-Emmanuel de Lorraine, Duke of Mercœur and Penthièvre (1558–1602), and it is proved by the considerable number of pages devoted to his activities. In the fourth part, the study was expanded with literary works, which – on the confines of historiography – put the person of the liberator of Székesfehérvár in 1601 in a wider perspective. However, we excluded the analysis of sources which would have deviated us too much from our main focus, such as the favourite subject of French research concentrating on the relationship between the Duke of Lorraine and King Philip II of Spain.

The results of the research

The systematisation and the analysis of the sources shed new light on many aspects of already known topics of analysis and drew the attention to questions which have been neglected earlier. The results made it clear that the system of the connections and representation of the great powers can be studied based on the descriptions of the several categories of French travellers.

The examinations of the reports on the history of north-eastern warfare in the Tokaj region, and the coronation ceremony of Matthias II has also revealed some new results. The writings of informants who appeared in Hungary in the era are not free from the influence of religious conflicts awakening in the middle of 16th century. In that age when everything was built bipolarity, either Catholic or Protestant, the correspondent could not write „objective” history. Their religious affiliation coloured the story, so that Maximilian II, the Holy Roman Emperor, who was tolerant to Protestantism, could become a positive actor in the eyes of two Protestant travellers coming from two anti-Habsburg countries. We could draw a similar conclusion about Jan Jesenius’s person, who described the coronation ceremony of Matthias II, Hungarian King in the hope that the future Holy Roman Emperor will extend the free practice of Protestantism. At the same time, Jean de Malmidy’s report, besides his interest in the anti-Turkish fights also explored a relationship in Hungary, which is present in the traditions of the renowned French Huguenot family, the Croÿs. For the real success of the genre of reports we managed to find specific data only in few cases, and in this we have seen evidence for the fact that the real information networks were only detected in the case of the upper diplomatic and noble circles.

The official documents remaining after the diplomats have shown the development of the administration institutions. In the age of Henry IV, an extensive diplomatic network had clearly

emerged, in which the king, definitively converted to the Catholic religion, preferred to see his former Protestant fellows. The *agent* with a widest range of activities meant a more indirect type of royal representation besides, on the one hand, the *ambassador* who played a role in the political life, and on the other hand, the administrators acting in the royal court, and they fulfilled temporarily or permanent missions in the name of the royal power. In the case of the correspondents, the reporters, and the diplomats who represented the royal power we considered it important to underline, beyond their writings, their much more hardly measurable effect, in which these people played a role. Namely, that people, related to their responsibilities, were at the same time inseparably Humanist scholars or upper class nobles who built personal relationships with the members of the local – and in our case Hungarian – aristocracy, and exercised a certain kind of cultural activity.

In this context, Jacques Bongars (1554–1612) was one of the indignantly forgotten key figures of the early French–Hungarian relations. His legacy and enormous oeuvre were important for us from two points of view. On the one hand, he was the missionary of the Protestant Europe vision of Henry, King of Navarre, the future Henry IV de Bourbon, and on the other hand, he was one of the most influential formulators of the 16th century image of Hungary. On his first commission, when he was an envoy to Constantinople in 1585, he wrote his objectively laconic travelogue describing the imperial-royal border defence system including the three key fortresses of the Viennese Imperial War Council [*Hofkriegsrat*], Győr, Komárom, and Szatmár. He painted a plastic picture on the new Hungarian border protection system defending the Christian Europe against the Turks, and provided numerical data regarding the military forces of the visited fortresses. It was during this trip that his interest awakened to the past of the Hungarians, which was in the centre of the curiosity in the whole of Europe because of the Ottoman danger, and later he devoted continuous attention to the tripartite state. The analysis of Bongars' travelogue showed the strength of imperial-royal border defence system and provided valuable contributions to the study of the administrative and economic history of the estates. The names of the visited people, the number of military units stationed in the countryside, and the list of geographic settlements form a very rich database, whose processing we could only partially undertake. In addition to his political mission, Bongars, a man of the late Renaissance, had scientific goals as well. He made a long detour in Christian territories, where he registered the natural phenomena he observed, but his travelogue also serves as a valuable collection for the study of Transylvanian epigraphy. Based on the experiences of his trip, fifteen years later, he published the copies of the inscriptions in the appendices of the

Rerum Hugaricarum scriptores varii [Various authors of the Hungarian history] (1600). This work and the available sources enabled us to link Bongars to the European information networks, as well as to Hungarian Humanist circles, and to draw a parallel between his source collection and Matthias Bel's work. We attributed such a great importance to this work that we saw in it the foundation stone of Hungarian historiography indicating the right direction for later generations.

We qualified the traditional French *alliance de revers* policy against the House of Habsburg with the Latin letters of a Flemish-affiliated diplomat in Habsburg service. We have shown the effect of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq (1522–1592) incontestably with two regular text parallels written forty years later. Through this round trip memoir we showed how the traveller, who only knew the stereotypes of his age, changed his tone, and while he was only an observer on his way there, how he placed himself into an opinion-forming and even an opinion-influencing position on his way back.

The analysis of writings related to the foreign political and dynastic aspirations of the Duke of Mercœur led us to a number of results. The studied sources made it clear that the diplomatic and political influence of the military nobility stratum increased in the 16th century, and as its consequence, at the end of the civil war period, the setting of their social status was a challenge. The case studies also highlighted the fact that representatives of this stratum often came from a geographically easily identifiable group, from the nobles of Lorraine. The court of Lorraine, especially during the time of Antoine, Duke of Lorraine, sought to play a mediating role in the European crusades, and as a consequence of that we often saw representatives of the Lorraine upper nobility in the Imperial Army.

The propagandists of Philippe-Emmanuel de Lorraine, Duke of Mercœur worked in the most extreme period of the French Catholic League, and the study of their writings revealed some new results. Through the work of Raoul Le Maistre, we showed that the genre of genealogy in 16th century was not completely consistent yet, rather, it was marked by distortion and bias rooted in the Middle Ages. He traced the family of Lorraine back to the Carolingian dynasty, justifying the legitimacy of the Duke of Mercœur's claim to the French throne. We showed that Pierre Biré, by similar intentions, linked a masterful pleading to his argument with reference to the three basic laws of the French monarchy, and that he „created” History instead of an authentic historiography. Finally, we connected the political ideal of the *contractual monarchy* appearing in Jacques Le Bossu's speeches to the political thoughts of Protestant authors twenty

years earlier. We argued that the attempt to reduce the royal power was opposed to the idea of absolutism emerging in the 16th century and prevailing under the reign of Louis XIV. In the strong political thoughts formulated at the end of the century we saw the symbols of a turning-point of the period when the contractual medieval model was gradually replaced by the modern state. We classified the propagandists of the League among the last great opponents to the central power emphasizing that the Fronde movement (1648–1653) will not be so clearly judged as a similar type of opposition.

The Duke's other literary portraits showed, besides Mercœur's personal traits, that despite his internal political difficulties, the Duke of Mercœur was on an inescapable path in his political engagement, and it was very probable that after the death of his stepsister, Louise of Lorraine, the aim to raise his family also influenced the Duke's policy. He made an alliance with King Philip II of Spain knowing all that, and accordingly we interpreted the alliance of the Duke of Mercœur and Philip not only as a decision made in his domestic interests, but also as an escape. We evaluated that the intent to keep a favourable relationship with the court of Henry IV had an influence on Mercœur's role in the Imperial Army, since after his final subjugation to the king he could not stay in the French court. Henry IV tried to close the case (for example, responding to the protest of the Turkish Sultan, France's historic ally) mentioning that the departure of Mercœur could be explained by the unique dependant status of Lorraine. At the same time, we saw the Duke's departure to Hungary bot has a religious and a political (and even financial) decision, partly motivated by leaving the Kingdom of France, partly by the ideology of crusade. Compared to his former governorship in Brittany we could present a radically different picture about Mercœur's lieutenant general position in Hungary by analysing Husson's and especially Nicolas de Montreux's works. We showed that the Duke's character drawn in these works precisely reflected what he had missed during his period in Brittany. The leader who was apparently too cautious in the previous difficult situations carried out successful operations in the Imperial Army. First of all, we found that Mercœur's military operations in Hungary were the peak of his military career. Furthermore, we are equally aware that during his earlier negative judgment he received as many press coverage, as during his service in the Imperial Army. Between Lorraine, Brittany and Hungary a vague image was formed around Mercœur and we saw this intermediate state as an important source of myth making.

In our research we devoted the largest space to the Duke of Mercœur, because we have seen the principal and the most direct manifestation of French–Hungarian relations in the Turkish fights of the second half of the 16th century. Concerning the idea of Crusades, we confronted

two adverse historical interpretations. One of them that of Alphonse Dupront approached the theory of Christian-Muslim conflict in the long run through the myth of the Crusades. On the other hand, we have shown that the research results of Péter Sahin-Tóth and Géraud Poumarède increasingly perceived in this myth only the „disembodied rhetoric” which was applied by politicians in their own interests.

Our results not only fit into Péter Sahin-Tóth’s research, but also justify the longstanding opinion in historiography, that Hungary *itself* was not a destination for French travellers. At the same time, while the earlier literature lay the emphasis on the number of Francophone travellers in the attraction of Hungary, we did not attempt such an estimate. So in this and in the travel categories created for our dissertation we have gone off the Péter Sahin-Tóth’s beaten track, but the „common intersection” with him, notably the Duke of Mercœur, opened up new perspectives for us. In the archives of the Château de Chantilly, which preserves the legacy of the Duke we identified so far completely unexamined manuscripts which were only partially discussed in our dissertation, their full exploration may be possible only after further research.

We can also evaluate as a success that we have had the opportunity to exploit our special situation, and look at the narrow slice of French research which, due to their own involvement, can be linked to the Hungarian territory. This way we found Alain Cullière’s nearly 1,000-page work¹ and we continued, as expected, the French research influencing exchange of ideas about the Duke of Mercœur’s role in Hungary. We also consider as a result the partial publication of some hardly accessible, although indispensable sources for the study French–Hungarian relations in the 16th century, such as Husson’s report of the period on the anti-Turkish fights in Hungary. We also took possession of a full copy of this work, which gives us incentives for our text publication plans.

We demonstrated the French presence in Central and Eastern Europe and Hungary in the second half of the 16th century and at the beginning of the 17th century through the theme of the anti-Turkish fights. Our explored sources – partly thoroughly treated, partly requiring further research – have proven this very well, and they disproved the so-called „Hungarian solitude” topos. A further development of our dissertation, along our unexplored topics, opens new perspectives for the study of the early French–Hungarian relations.

¹ Alain Cullière: *Les écrivains et le pouvoir en Lorraine au XVI^e siècle*. [The authors and the power in Lorraine in the 16th century] (Coll. Bibliothèque littéraire de la Renaissance, Vol. 41). Paris, Ed. H. Champion, 1999.

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